

**The Wisdom in Proverbs:  
An Integrated Reading  
of the Book**

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## SUMMARY

### *The Wisdom in Proverbs: An Integrated Reading of the Book*

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This study illuminates the overall structure of the book of Proverbs by identifying an overlooked formal feature of Ancient Near Eastern Instructional literature. I survey Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) Instruction and show, where there is extant material available, that each Instruction displays a three part form: introduction, instruction, and epilogue. I argue that the traditional divisions of the Book of Proverbs correspond to the three part structure of Instruction. By drawing attention to Proverbs' structural similarity with ANE Instruction an "integrated" reading of the Book of Proverbs may be facilitated.

The formal similarity of ANE Instruction does not presage similarity of content, and I argue that the content of Proverbs' introduction reflects biblical traditions about wisdom. The recollection of biblical themes by Proverbs' introduction demonstrates Proverbs' integration with biblical literature. Though Proverbs displays the form of Instruction and recalls biblical traditions about divine wisdom, it does not entirely affirm these traditions. By embodying wisdom in the Figure of Wisdom (Woman Wisdom), Proverbs says something new. Proverbs' characterization of Woman Wisdom as a liminal character is suggestive with respect to her audience. In examining the second part of Instruction, the instruction, I accent instruction which harmonizes with Proverbs' characterization of Woman Wisdom found in the introduction.

Finally, I explain how the last two chapters of Proverbs, 30 and 31, are formally epilogue, the final part of ANE Instruction's three part form. I show how these epilogues to Proverbs look back to themes of the introduction and respond to the instruction of the second part. I then present an integrated reading of the Book of Proverbs based on the formal and conceptual features I have identified.

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## Abbreviations:

AB	Anchor Bible
AE	Erman, Adolf <i>The Ancient Egyptians: A Sourcebook of Their Writings</i> , (tr. Aylward M. Blackman; New York: Harper & Row, 1966)
AEL	Lichtheim, Miriam <i>Ancient Egyptian Literature</i> , (3 Vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973)
ANE	Ancient Near Eastern cultures outside Israel.
ANET	Pritchard, James B. ed., <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (3rd edn.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973)
BWL	Lambert, W. G., <i>Babylonian Wisdom Literature</i> (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960)
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
DOTT	<i>Documents from Old Testament Times</i> , ed. D.W. Thomas (New York: Harper&Row, 1961)
EW	Evil Woman (following Yee, 1989)
FOTL	The Forms of the Old Testament Literature
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTsup	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> , Supplement Series
<i>Interp</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Instruction	<u>I</u> nstruction, when used in this study will be inclusive of all extant material found in ANE Instructional literature; typically introductory material, instruction, and concluding material.
instruction	When <u>i</u> nstruction is used in this study, it will refer to the middle part of the tripartite structure of ANE Instruction. Thus <u>i</u> nstruction is subsumed in <u>I</u> nstruction, and consequently <u>i</u> nstruction is not representative of <u>I</u> nstruction. As this study will illustrate, there has been much confusion over this distinction.

OT	Old Testament.
OTL	Old Testament Library
RSV	Revised Standard Version. This is the Bible translation used unless otherwise noted.
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vestes Testamentum</i>
wisdom tradition	This term refers to the tradition of wisdom defined in this study in chapter two, section two. A short list of this tradition is found in Proverbs 8:1-30.
WW	Woman Wisdom (Camp, 1985, is followed here concerning the name given Dame Wisdom, Lady Wisdom, or the Figure of Wisdom)

## Introduction

Proverbs resists any attempt at an integrated reading of the book, the most formidable problem is the transition between Proverbs 1-9 and 10 and following. At this juncture the form switches from poetic passages to short sayings, and the content changes from wisdom apologetic to aphorisms. In addition, there are seeming independent titles for smaller sections of Proverbs found throughout the book. In light of these disparate forms, themes, and attributions, the book of Proverbs lends itself to the dissection with which it is usually handled. However, I question whether it makes sense to assume that the final form of Proverbs presents collections of "proverbs" without some sort of inner coherence to the book. This study will attempt to read Proverbs as a unity and will suggest there are formal and conceptual factors which integrate the various parts of Proverbs into a whole.

Since the work of Erman (1924), which showed dependence of Proverbs 22:17-24:22 on the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope, many agree that Proverbs (especially the sentence literature of chs. 10ff.) shows "a general parallelism of thought" with Egyptian and Babylonian Instruction. The composition, intent, setting, and understanding of instruction as found in Proverbs and ANE texts is similar. However, little attention has been paid to their specific structural resemblances. In the first chapter of this study I will examine ANE Instructional literature and argue that these texts display a common three part-form: introduction, instruction, epilogue. In the introduction to Instruction, the reader is acquainted with the instructor; and sometimes apology is given for instruction. The instruction, the second part of Instruction, usually contains collections of sayings or proverbs (which may or may not exhibit some organizational scheme). In the epilogue, reflection is made on the instruction which was offered, and further apology is made. This three part overall structure of Instruction has been mostly ignored in previous studies. My survey of ANE Instruction will show, where there is

extant material available, that some vestige of this form remains. In fact, the only feature which unites this literature as Instruction is its structural similarity (rather than the content of that structure).

In the second part of chapter one I will argue that the Book of Proverbs conforms to this three part form of ANE Instructional literature, and show in particular, that Proverbs 1-9 exhibits features in common with ANE Instructional introduction. By drawing attention to Proverbs' structural similarity with ANE Instruction an "integrated" reading of the Book of Proverbs is facilitated.

While the genre of Proverbs 1-9 has been explained on a formal level with comparisons to ANE Instruction, these comparisons shed no light on its thematic content. In the second chapter I will argue that the content of Proverbs introduction reflects biblical traditions about wisdom; the choice of Solomon and Woman Wisdom as its instructors plainly recalls these themes. I will present some biblical traditions which influenced Proverbs' choice of instructors, and argue how Proverbs 1-9 recalls those traditions.

In the third chapter I emphasize that even though the introduction to Proverbs acknowledges ANE traditions of form and biblical wisdom traditions, it does not accept those traditions uncritically. The traditional ANE Instructional form of a father instructing his son is challenged by Solomon when he tells his son to search out Woman Wisdom for instruction. The traditional location in biblical tradition of divine wisdom in the cosmos is in heaven with God. Proverbs challenges this location of divine wisdom by repeatedly asserting that Wisdom is on earth actively soliciting humanity. The final part of the chapter will elaborate how the characterization of Woman Wisdom affects our understanding of divine wisdom, thus influencing our reading of the instruction in Proverbs 10-29.

The fourth chapter will examine instruction which resonates with the characterization given Woman Wisdom in Proverbs' introduction. I will argue that there is a correlation between the social position of Wisdom and her intended audience. I will present instruction which is critical of urban social institutions, addressing people who have been alienated by urban society. This challenges



simple assertions that Proverbs was used to instruct politicians of Solomon's or any other's court.

The final chapter will argue that Proverbs 30 and 31 share the form of other epilogues to ANE Instruction. As epilogues, both provide surprisingly negative evaluations of instruction's ability to inculcate wisdom. Agur responds to instruction by disputing wisdom's existence on earth. Lemuel responds to instruction by ignoring it. Nevertheless, Proverbs does not end on that note--Prov. 31:10-31 reaffirms that wisdom is on earth doing good work in creation. The Competent Wife presents Proverbs' final statement on divine wisdom's presence in creation.

## Chapter 1

### **Formal Similarities Between the Structure of ANE Instruction Literature and Proverbs**

#### **Part One: The Form of Ancient Near Eastern Instruction**

In the survey of ANE Instruction which follows, I argue that the normal expectation for the overall structure of ANE Instruction is a three-part form: introduction, instruction, and epilogue, which is held together by a narrative framework. In the introduction, the instructor is identified and apologetic is offered as to why instruction is worthwhile, and a scene is set for the giving of instruction. The instruction itself can be specific to the setting described in the introduction, or general in nature (not specific to the setting of the introduction). The epilogue reflects back on the goodness and efficacy of the instruction, commending its worth and occasionally returning to the setting and characters of the introduction.

The general character of Egyptian “Instructional form” identified by biblical scholars seems to vary widely with little attention given to its overall three-part form.<sup>1</sup> A survey of representative studies concerned with identifying the form of Instruction will follow. These studies focus on the formal structure of Egyptian Instruction at two levels: those concerned with the formal composition of Instruction on levels broader than the sentence, and those which focus on the sentence level. Even those studies which examine broad structure overlook the three-part form, the overall structure of ANE Instruction.

Whybray states that the overall form of Egyptian Instruction has six distinctive characteristics.<sup>2</sup> The formal criteria he finds are: the introductory formula “My son,” the injunction to “hear,” and the pronominal suffix “my.” Of the six criteria Whybray reviews, only these three are formal (see note 2). Whybray does not present a systematic examination of Egyptian instruction to support his criteria--as do the studies of McKane and Bauer-Kayatz--but speaks broadly about the “father-son” address, injunctions “to hear,” and the personal authority of the

instructor.

The studies of Scott and Murphy also address the question of the “Instructional form” of Egyptian Instruction. Material which exhibits instructional form Scott calls “Discourse” (a discourse of instruction). Scott speaks in general terms about his identification of Discourse material based on common structure.<sup>3</sup> He does not call attention to any specific form, such as the formulaic opening, “My son.” Like Whybray, he cites no Egyptian Instruction to illuminate his analysis of the material.<sup>4</sup>

While citing the failure of Whybray, Scott, and Lang<sup>5</sup> to agree about the boundaries of instructional material, Murphy nevertheless offers his own criteria for discerning “Instructions.”<sup>6</sup> He bases his distinctions on the features found by these other studies, and on the “alphabetizing concerns” highlighted by Skehan.<sup>7</sup>

The studies of McKane and Bauer-Kayatz examine the Egyptian material more closely before attributing a certain form to Egyptian Instruction literature. McKane examines ANE Instruction in great detail, focusing on the sentence level.<sup>8</sup> His concern is primarily to show a formal-grammatical<sup>9</sup> difference between the “Instructional genre” (marked by the imperative) and the “wisdom sentence” (marked by the indicative). McKane takes the imperative as demonstrative of “instruction” and sorts the material accordingly.<sup>10</sup>

For McKane the “form of instruction” in ANE Instruction was the imperative sentence. Since his concern with ANE Instruction was on the composition of sentences, McKane consequently overlooked many passages of ANE Instruction.<sup>11</sup> By his own admission, ANE Instruction contains both indicative and imperative materials (see notes above). Why he considers one set of materials as the “real” instructional form, and the other only as “wisdom sentence,” is not clear. His decision is possibly based on his theory of the development of wisdom from the indicative to the imperative, in which the imperative is the latest development of wisdom. His decision could also be based on his understanding of the setting and the importance of the wisdom school, which used the imperative form to instruct. McKane never addresses how Egyptian Instruction itself suggests a division between

the imperative and the indicative.

The focus of Bauer-Kayatz is broader than McKane's sentence-level focus. Bauer-Kayatz, however, also uses only selections of Egyptian Instruction to illustrate her points about Instructional micro-form. She does not comment on the over-all structure of the Instruction.<sup>12</sup>

Crenshaw surveys ANE Wisdom Literature (of which ANE Instruction is a part) and concludes that they share formal characteristics at the sentence level: "formally, wisdom consists of proverbial sentence or instruction, debate, intellectual reflection . . ."<sup>13</sup> Crenshaw's oversight of any overall structure of this material is most apparent in his examination of Egyptian Instruction (1981: 212-235). In his examination he focuses exclusively on the "proverbs" found in Egyptian Instruction calling little attention to non-proverbial material also present in Instruction.<sup>14</sup>

The question arises: Which of the above studies of the structure of ANE Instruction is best able to deal with the texts normally called Instruction? Our brief survey of these studies has shown how much of the material found in the books of Instruction is overlooked. The unacknowledged understanding of these studies of ANE Instructional form, is that only selected passages from the books of Instruction are really "Instruction."<sup>15</sup> These past studies have not clarified Instructional form at all, precisely because they have overlooked material contained in the books normally called "Instructions."

In evaluating biblical scholars' use of Egyptian material, Lichtheim makes many perceptive observations. She notes that scholars have failed to incorporate the existence of Demotic Egyptian Instruction, or if they have, they deny (usually by ignoring it) that it has a role in determining the form of Egyptian instruction.<sup>16</sup> Pre-Demotic instruction (the instruction most often cited by biblical scholars) while composed of the "micro-form 'saying'" does not present sayings as independent units; these sayings are parts of larger compositional units.<sup>17</sup> Demotic instruction, meanwhile, is composed of individual sayings.<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, while the label "Spruchliteratur" can apply to Demotic instruction, it does not apply to pre-Demotic Instructions (the majority of surviving

instruction), for the reasons outlined above. That is, the compositional units of pre-Demotic Instruction are “integrated speeches of varying length” (1983: 7). These “speeches” contain related sequences of sayings just as a paragraph is composed of related sentences. Lichtheim’s point is that pre-Demotic Instruction should not be identified as “Spruchliteratur” any more than a paragraph should be identified as sentence literature.<sup>19</sup>

Lichtheim also challenges the assumption on the part of biblical scholars that single independent sayings (“proverbs” or “statements”) either chronologically preceded the imperative (McKane’s instructional form) or display “common” or “less developed” composition.<sup>20</sup> She notes that in the development of Egyptian Instruction, the parlance of the indicative construction is later than that of the imperative.<sup>21</sup>

Lichtheim has observed that while Egyptian Instructions (both pre-Demotic and Demotic) present collections of maxims and teachings on moral living, these maxims are part of a composition (Instruction).<sup>22</sup> The “stylistic device by which maxims were strung together and shaped into a more or less unified work was the narrative frame: a father instructs his son.”<sup>23</sup> This “narrative frame” begins simply in the earliest surviving Instruction, *Hardjedef*, as a one-line introduction to the instruction, but can expand to the lengthy prologue and epilogue that frame the instruction found in the Instruction *Ptahhotep*.<sup>24</sup>

The existence of this narrative frame, has not received sufficient comment by Lichtheim or others. This chapter will examine Lichtheim’s claim that the narrative frame is a stylistic device found in all Egyptian Instruction (Pre-Demotic, Demotic, and I will add Babylonian, and Hebraic Instruction). There is a problem, however, with examining the narrative framework suggested by Lichtheim since many Instructions are incomplete, with much of their text missing (especially material at the beginning and end, which is important in evaluating Lichtheim’s claim). Yet as we shall see, in every case where there is extant material, part of this narrative frame does indeed exist. (It should become clear that while ANE Instruction shares the form of the narrative framework, they do not need to share sentence-level

grammatical form.)

### **A. Egyptian Instruction**

Egyptian Instruction literature ranges from that of *Hardjedef*, *Kagemni*, and *Ptahhotep* in the Old Kingdom down to the Instruction of *Ankhsheshonqy* and *Papyrus Insinger* of the Late Kingdom. The Egyptian Instruction literature covered in this section is presented in the chronological order proposed by Lichtheim.<sup>25</sup>

Because these instructions are found on school writing tablets, the assumption is that some of these “father-son” instructions were used in schools. The translation of much of this material has been difficult, because the surviving copies of the Instruction are school-child copies containing many spelling and grammatical errors (as well as suffering from general illegibility). Nevertheless, these annoying facts confirm that these texts were used in formal education.<sup>26</sup>

While many of these Instructions survive only through school copies, it does not follow that the Instruction was composed exclusively for a school setting.<sup>27</sup> This is most obvious in the Instructions of *Amenemhet*, *Merikare*, and *ANY* which contain instruction arising out of their personal experiences, suggesting their composition for a specific audience: their respective sons.

This chapter will highlight the narrative framework suggested by Lichtheim, focusing on the usually ignored introduction and epilogue. In my examination of the ANE Instruction which follows, we will see that past claims about the form of ANE Instruction fall short of describing extant ANE Instruction (they have ignored too much text). I will show, where extant material allows, that the introductory and concluding material frames the instruction by sharing apologetic,<sup>28</sup> characters, setting, or themes and sets the instruction within a narrative framework. The ANE Instructions will be analyzed to understand (1) the relationship between the introductions and epilogues, (2) the integration of the narrative framework to the instruction, (3) the apology made for instruction by the introduction and epilogue, and (4) claims made for the origin and authority of the instruction. While the

importance of these issues may not be apparent, they will be relevant to my study of Proverbs which, I will argue, shares the three-part form of ANE Instruction identified by Lichtheim.

## **The Instruction of Prince Hardjedef<sup>29</sup>**

### *Introduction*

Beginning of the Instruction made by the Hereditary Prince, Count, King's Son, Hardjedef, for his son, his nursling, whose name is Au-ib-re. He says . . . (AEL, I, p. 58).

Thus begins the earliest surviving Instruction. The introduction presents a brief third person description of a father, Prince Hardjedef, who gives instruction to his son, Au-ib-re. All that is mentioned about Hardjedef is his royal lineage. The final “he says” is the transition between the introduction and instruction. In *Hardjedef* we find the narrative-frame in an early stage of development (which expands in later Instruction).

### *Instruction*

Once introduced, Prince Hardjedef offers instruction about marriage and preparations for death. This instruction on marriage could suggest that the son is below marriageable age. However, without more of the instruction, this possibility must remain open and no comments will be appropriate about the integration of the instruction with the narrative framework.

The end of this Instruction is not extant so no comment can be made on the existence of an epilogue.

## **The Instruction Addressed to Kagemni<sup>30</sup>**

### *Epilogue*

Only the epilogue of this instruction remains; the beginning of the Instruction is lost. It is only from the ending that any information concerning the narrative framework can be gathered:

The vizier had his children summoned, after he had understood the ways of men, their character having become clear to him. Then he said to them: “All that is written in this book, heed it as I said it. Do not go beyond what has been set down.” Then they

placed themselves on their bellies, they recited it as it was written. It seemed good to them beyond anything in the whole land. They stood and sat accordingly.

Then the majesty of King Huni died; the majesty of King Snefru was raised up as a beneficent king in this whole land. Then Kagemni was made mayor of the city and vizier (2.3ff, AEL, I, p. 60).

McKane compares this epilogue to that of *Ptahhotep*, suggesting that rather than offering historical facts, the epilogue employs the literary convention of using the names of historical personages.<sup>31</sup> Leaving aside this historical question, the instructor is then King Huni, an old king setting down his reflections on life for the younger generation. The addressees of these instructions, as identified in the epilogue, are a group of children, one of whom, as Erman suggested, is Kagemni. The setting is in the royal household. Erman's reconstruction of a possible introduction seems a reasonable one: "The old King Huni commanded his vizier to put his life's experiences in writing for the benefit of his children, among whom was included the future vizier Kagemni."<sup>32</sup>

The vizier (the one responsible for instruction) is described as one who had acquired understanding throughout his life. The chronology presented in this narrative-framework is that the instructor first gained understanding of human character and *then* presented his instruction. Only after the vizier had "understood the ways of men" and "their character [had] become clear to him" does he instruct. The understanding the instructor acquires concerns people and does not refer to his professional office; nor is it professional knowledge (e.g. of politics, farming, husbandry, foreign policy, etc.). King Huni's authority to instruct results from his having gained understanding of "the ways of men."

When King Huni reflects on the instruction he has given his children, he stresses its importance by saying, "do not go beyond what has been set down." The narrator reports that the children acknowledge the authority of the instruction by presenting their immediate act of recitation (" . . . they recited it as it was . . . ") and their evaluation of the instruction as good beyond "anything in the whole land," implying their passive acceptance of it. The vizier could have challenged his children to observe the world and see if his words were true, to test experience against his words,<sup>33</sup> but this is not the case. The vizier had acquired his knowledge



from personal observation and reflection but expects his children to acquire this from studying his recorded words.<sup>34</sup> Whether or not this indicates that the “written” Instruction is gaining authority is not clear.

### *Instruction*

The extant instruction addresses the issues of table manners and the evil of gluttony. There are no instructions which relate to the professional conduct of the office of vizier. The instruction is appropriate for children of the court but hardly specific to them.

### **The Instruction of Ptahhotep<sup>35</sup>**

This Instruction refers to a pharaoh and a vizier of the Old Kingdom period (ca. 2300-2150 B.C.E.) and belongs, in its presumed first edition, to this period.<sup>36</sup> This instruction was edited in the time of the Middle Kingdom, as its variants demonstrate.<sup>37</sup>

The instruction of *Ptahhotep* consists of thirty-seven “chapter headings” which Lichtheim calls maxims.<sup>38</sup> The lines that follow these headings explicate and expand the opening “maxim” of each chapter. This instruction is bracketed by an introduction of approximately 40 lines and a lengthy epilogue (approx. 145 lines).

### *Introduction*

The opening few lines of the introduction identify Ptahhotep as the instructor of the instruction and are similar to the introduction to *Hardjedef*. The introduction of this Instruction goes further, however, in that it portrays a scene in which the “act” of instruction is authorized by the king. Ptahhotep’s lengthy integrated poetic speech to the king consists of two stanzas.<sup>39</sup> In the first stanza, Ptahhotep reminds the king that he, Ptahhotep, is now an old man.

O king, my lord!  
Age is here, old age arrived . . . (1.2).

He continues by describing the hardships of old age in the remainder of the stanza.

The second stanza begins with Ptahhotep requesting from the king permission to instruct his son or successor (“a staff of old age”<sup>40</sup>). The possible

translation of “successor” suggests a political setting of succession.<sup>41</sup>

May this servant be ordered to make a staff of old age,  
So as to tell him the words of those who heard,  
The ways of the ancestors,  
Who have listened to the gods.  
May such be done for you,  
So that strife may be banned from the people,  
And the two shores may serve you!  
Said the majesty of this god:  
Instruct him then in the sayings of the past,  
May he become a model for the children of the great,  
May obedience [hearing] enter him,  
And the devotion of him who speaks to him,  
No one is born wise (1.29-42).

In the previous Instruction, “understanding” was a prerequisite of King Huni’s instruction of Kagemni. Understanding is not ascribed to Ptahhotep in the introduction, nor is it seemingly required. Instead, Ptahhotep’s authority for his act of instruction is his age and an order from the king. Ptahhotep does not wish to give instruction on the basis of his own insights, but wishes to instruct according to an authorized tradition:

So as to tell him [the instructed] the words of those who heard,  
The ways of the ancestors,  
Who have listened to the gods (1.30f.).

This language indicates a view of the traditional nature of instruction and of Ptahhotep’s role as mouthpiece for that tradition. Ptahhotep’s instruction is based on collected literature, oral or written. The reference to collected literature of instruction is acknowledged by the king in the order he gives.<sup>42</sup> The king commands Ptahhotep,

Instruct him then in the sayings of the past,  
May he become a model for the children of the great,  
May obedience enter him,  
and devotion of him who speaks to him,  
No one is born wise” (1.37-42, AEL, I, p. 63).

The paragraph that follows this second stanza switches back to prose and describes Ptahhotep, his office, and his family. This description does not attribute any special wisdom or political acumen to Ptahhotep and it ends with the phrase, “He spoke to his son,” which directly precedes the instruction.<sup>43</sup> The setting for this last prose paragraph does not seem to be in the audience of the king; it is a private setting of instruction between Ptahhotep and his “son” (who is not mentioned as being

present earlier). Whether the introductory narrative is suggesting a change of setting from the royal court to the home is not clear; it could be only that Ptahhotep has left the presence of Pharaoh to instruct.

### *Instruction*

The thirty-seven headings and their expansions which make up the instruction jump from topic to topic in no apparent order. The implied recipient of many of these chapters does not always seem to be Ptahhotep's son or successor.

It is also noteworthy that of the thirty-seven maxims with which Ptahhotep instructs his son, the future vizier, not one has any bearing on the vizierate--a strange situation if the work were the genuine legacy of a vizier who is introducing his son to the highest office of the land (AEL, I, p. 7).

There has been no effort to tailor the contents of the instruction to match the situation envisioned in the introduction. While Lichtheim says that, "in fact, the maxims embody the pragmatic wisdom of the upper-class Egyptian, and formulate a code of behaviour befitting the gentleman of the Old Kingdom" (AEL, I, p. 7), the instruction does not support this claim.<sup>44</sup> The addressee envisioned here does not wield great power.<sup>45</sup>

In other chapters advice is given to a farmer (ch. 9), a poor man (chs. 10 and 30), one from among the people (ch. 14, as distinguished from a courtesan who is addressed in the immediately preceding chapter), etc. The social standing of the recipient of such advice does not match the social standing of Ptahhotep's successor and must also qualify whatever Lichtheim means by "upper-class." While there are chapters which address "a magistrate of standing" (ch. 28), "a man of worth" (chs. 12, 24), "a man who leads" (chs. 16, 17), not all do. This would suggest that the instruction is of traditional nature, in other words, a collection of teachings applicable to all levels of society and not edited specifically to match the social setting of the narrative framework.

### *Epilogue*

The epilogue to *Ptahhotep*, while lengthy, is repetitive and presents a few reflections on the instruction.<sup>46</sup> The first sentence of the epilogue offers a good summary.

If you listen to my sayings,  
All your affairs will go forward;  
In their truth resides their value,  
Their memory goes on in the speech of men,  
Because of the worth of their precepts;  
If every word is carried on,  
They will not perish in this land (cf. 15.5ff.).

Again, as in *Hardjedef*, the stress falls on the words of instruction themselves, as distinct from gaining insight from “understanding the ways of men.”<sup>47</sup> The “sayings” or “instructions” are ascribed a traditional origin. They are wise and correct because they have been passed down. Ptahhotep himself says there is nothing innovative in his instruction. Rather, all of it has withstood the test of time. In this respect, the epilogue corresponds with the views of the introduction.

Lichtheim presents the epilogue in eleven stanzas. “Listening” and “hearing” are the topics of five consecutive stanzas. This thematic material picks up the stress found in the introduction where the wise words of past generations are to be passed on. Not only will the hearing of wise words bring wisdom and long life to the listener, but hearing will also continue the tradition of older generations instructing the younger generation.<sup>48</sup>

The final stanza of the epilogue returns to the setting of the final prose paragraph of the introduction:

As you succeed me, sound in your body,  
The king content with all that was done,  
May you obtain (many) years of life! (cf. 19.6f; AEL, I, p. 76)

Ptahhotep gives his successor his charge as dictated by the king.

## **The Instruction Addressed to Merikare<sup>49</sup>**

### *Introduction*

With this Instruction, very little of the introduction remains, so Wilson reproduces the introduction as,

“[The beginning of the instruction which the King of Upper and Lower Egypt . . . made] for his son, King Merikare, . . .” (ANET, pp. 414-415).<sup>50</sup>

The king who offers the instruction is not named in the extant text though Lichtheim restores it to Khety.<sup>51</sup> There are not many observations to make on the fragmentary

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remains of the introduction. At most, it can be said that the introduction consists of third person narration about members of a royal dynasty. In this last respect, the rank of the characters is the highest so far encountered: a Pharaoh instructing his son.

### *Instruction*

The instruction concerns the royal office and the observations resulting from the king's gathered experiences. The instruction resembles *Ptahhotep* in its self-conscious adherence to the wisdom of past generations and its stress on the strength of words.<sup>52</sup> However, it is also strikingly different in the individualized nature of the appeal. Not only do extended passages of first person narration exist, but there are also references to specific historical events.<sup>53</sup>

In *Merikare*, the specific personal examples in the instruction integrate the setting of the instruction with the narrative framework in a manner not previously encountered.<sup>54</sup> These "I" instructions do not claim to be the wisdom of the ages, but the observations of a king on his own life (see above note). The personal nature of this instruction, the use of the personal pronoun within sections of the instruction recounting specific history, implies that this Instruction was composed for a specific setting (whether or not such implication has any historical reality).

### *Epilogue*

The last two stanzas of the Instruction are *Merikare's* epilogue.<sup>55</sup> The first stanza is a poem praising the "creator-god."<sup>56</sup> This poem celebrates the nurturing aspects of god the creator, of god's care for his creatures, and for the divine office of Pharaoh. Humanity is not created to serve the gods; rather, creation and the gods serve the needs of humanity.<sup>57</sup> Where there is a chance to attribute instruction to a god, such as the one praised here, this is not taken.<sup>58</sup>

Immediately following this hymn the instructor says:

Do not neglect my speech, which lays down all laws of kingship, which instructs you,  
that you may rule the land . . .

*Merikare* presents the opportunity to tie instruction to the divine realm, but does not; instruction is purely human in origin, and the literature of instruction is

the sole guide to human conduct.

The return from the lengthy introduction and epilogue of *Ptahhotep* to the simple narrative framework in *Merikare* shows the great freedom the writers took with the formal constraint of the narrative framework while nevertheless compelled to work, however cursorily, within the traditional framework.

## **The Instruction of King Amenemhet I for His Son Sesostris I<sup>59</sup>**

### *Introduction*

This instruction, like *Merikare*, claims to be the instruction of a pharaoh to his son: Amenemhet I to his son Sesostris I. The first few lines of the Instruction are:

Beginning of the Instruction made by the majesty of King Sesostris, son of Re, Amenemhet, the Justified, as he spoke in a revelation of truth, to his son the All-Lord. He said . . . (AEL, I, p. 136).<sup>60</sup>

This is similar to *Hardjedef* and to the first few lines of the introduction to *Ptahhotep*. As in *Ptahhotep*, these brief lines do not lead immediately to the instructions. In the following introductory material Amenemhet I addresses Sesostris in poetic revelation and recounts his misjudgment of character which leads to the success of an assassination plot against him. Are we to understand the poetic passage from 1.2 to 1.11, as introduction or instruction? The first few lines of this poetic speech are:

Risen as god, hear what I tell you,  
That you may rule the land, govern the shores,  
Increase well-being!  
Beware of subjects who are nobodies,  
Of whose plotting one is not aware (1.2ff.).

In the rest of this stanza Amenemhet tells his son the justification for his wariness of people: they plotted against him. Following this stanza, at 1.12ff. (which Lichtheim presents as prose), Amenemhet explains the details and the results of the plot against him, a successful assassination attempt. I understand this speech (1.2-11) to be introductory material because its main purpose is to create a narrative context in which Amenemhet's instruction will be given.<sup>61</sup> In this respect it is similar to the two introductory poetic speeches of *Ptahhotep*.

In the last paragraph before the instruction, Amenemhet speaks from the dead and says that although he was taken from the living, “before the courtiers had heard I would hand over to you; before I had sat with you so as to advise you,” he must not let his death compromise his obligation to instruct.<sup>62</sup> The transition to the instruction occurs at the end of the next sentence (there is also a change of form: 2.7ff.). There is no transitional phrase here like “He said to his son;” it is by the change in form (from prose to poetry), the switch in themes from life in the court to life in the world, and most importantly the introduction setting up the reason the instruction is given (Amenemhet speaks from the dead to warn his son of courtly intrigue), which mark the beginning of instruction.

### *Instruction*

Where *Merikare* used a few first person passages to instruct, *Amenemhet I* instructs systemically through specific historical examples from his life as king.<sup>63</sup> This instruction is different in style from other instruction in that Amenemhet presents his life as an example of good ruling to his son. Amenemhet recounts his exploits and recalls the justice he exercised in his kingdom. The personal nature of the extant instruction integrates the instruction into the setting presented by the introduction.

### *Epilogue*

The epilogue begins when the king stops talking about his exploits and addresses his son again:

Sesostris my son!  
As my feet depart, you are in my heart,  
My eyes behold you . . .  
I have made the past and arranged the future,  
I gave you the contents of my heart (3.8ff.; AEL, I, p. 138).

Thus Amenemhet’s mission to instruct his son closes. He has recounted his most significant miscalculations of character and his successes in his life as a ruler. He passes on the kingship saying he has done all that he can to prepare Sesostris.

## **Instruction of ANY<sup>64</sup>**

This text consists of only small fragments and is infamous for the difficulty it poses to editors and translators. *ANY* contains two distinguishing features not found in the instruction to date. The first is that the Instruction of *ANY* “comes from the sphere of the middle class and is meant for the average man” (AEL, II, p. 135). That is, the introduction presents the instruction as being from a scribe and not a member of the royal family. The second novel feature is the epilogue with its dialogue.

### *Introduction*

Much of the beginning of this Instruction is lost, but an introductory sentence is preserved.

Beginning of the educational instruction made by the scribe Any of the Palace of Queen Neferari (AEL, II, p. 136).

Whether the instruction did indeed commence after this line cannot be determined with any certainty. *Hardjedef* has a similar brief introduction before the instruction. However, while the opening lines of *Ptahhotep* and *Amenemhet* are also similar, lengthy introductory material follows. No assertions can therefore be made about the extent of the introduction to *ANY*.

Any identifies himself not as a pharaoh or a vizier, but as a minor official: a scribe. The opening lines of page three (which are the first lines of the instruction extant and the next available text beyond the opening lines) contain advice about marriage to his son who is presumably approaching marriageable age. In the epilogue, the son is identified as *Khonshotep*, also a scribe. The setting of the introduction is outside the royal court.

### *Instruction*

The pharaoh’s instruction (in *Merikare*, *Amenemhet*, and possibly *Kagemni*) concerned the intricacies of the royal world, which the son would soon discover; the vizier’s instruction (*Ptahhotep*) is only casually concerned with political behaviour of the courtly world, focusing mostly on the world at large. Our possible expectation that the instruction of a scribe to a son who is also a scribe (which would concern



the scribal world) is not met here. The instruction of Any concerns everyday life, and “there is nothing specifically aristocratic about the values which are taught” (AEL, II, p. 135), and we add, nothing specifically scribal either. One section is devoted to instruction about the behaviour of a scribe, but this is only one of many sections; it takes its place among sections concerning self-sufficiency, respect for age and rank (of a general, rather than political character), correct behaviour in the face of threats, the importance of speech, cultic behaviour, and the honour due to one’s mother.<sup>65</sup>

The instruction so far is unique in its depiction of religious duty. God, for Any, is not the distant dispassionate god of fate and fortune found elsewhere, or even Merikare’s distant protector; rather,

God is angry if [god] is neglected . . .  
Song, dance, incense are his foods,  
Receiving prostrations is his wealth;  
The god does it to magnify his name,  
But man it is who is inebriated . . . (3.4ff.; AEL, II, p. 136).

Offer to your god,  
Beware of offending him.  
Do not question his images,  
Do not accost him when he appears.  
Do not jostle him in order to carry him . . .  
Let your eye watch out for his wrath,  
And kiss the frond in his name (7.13ff.; AEL, II, p. 141).

Any’s religious instruction involves piety towards a god more personal than has so far been presented, and correct worship is explained in much greater detail than in other Instruction. Any’s instruction to Khonshotep about the care needed when carrying religious articles is so personal it is as if Any is referring to an actual event in the recent past, when Khonshotep had actually dropped an image of god.

In another section, Any instructs his son to support and honour his mother who has taken such good care of him when he was younger.

Double the food your mother gave you,  
Support her as she supported you;  
She had a heavy load in you,  
But she did not abandon you (7.17ff.; AEL, II, p. 141).

A reader of this section is encountering very personal instruction here. Any recalls Khonshotep’s birth and asks him to consider how his mother nurtured him; Any asks

if the care the mother provided does not entitle her to be cared for. Any is not delivering instruction that must be passively adhered to, but rather he is entering into an instructional dialogue, almost as if he were inviting Khonshotep's response to and evaluation of the instruction.

These two sections about the behaviour towards god and one's mother personalize the instruction in a way we have not yet encountered. Any is not using his own observations in order to instruct his son; rather, he is asking the son to observe his own life and be instructed by it. For the first time, instruction is presented not as fiat; the instructed is asked to evaluate the instruction to ascertain its truth. Given this attitude to the educational process, it is natural that the author chooses to close this instruction with the son's response and a short dialogue between father and son.

### *Epilogue*

The epilogue contains five poetic stanzas: Khonshotep's first reply to his father, Any's response, Khonshotep's second response, Any's reply, and a closing section where both offer their last words.<sup>66</sup>

Khonshotep first responds by asking for leniency from his father in his expectation that Khonshotep learn the instruction; the instructions presented are "too numerous" and difficult:

The scribe Khonshotep answered his father, the scribe Any:  
I wish I were like (you),  
As learned as you!  
Then I would carry out your teachings . . .  
The son he understands little  
When he recited the words in the books.  
But when your words please the heart,  
The heart tends to accept them with joy.  
Don't make your virtues too numerous,  
That one may raise one's thoughts to you;  
A boy does not follow the moral instructions,  
Though the writings are on his tongue! (9.14ff.; AEL, II, p. 144).

Any counters by saying:

There's nothing [superfluous in] our words,  
Which you say you wished were reduced.

Any continues by reminding his son that even animals and foreigners can be taught, and they can learn words; therefore, at least imitate them.<sup>67</sup> Any is not

asking for much, just that Khonshotep consider what he has said.

Their next exchange and their concluding remarks reiterate the previous arguments. Khonshotep says that he lacks the maturity necessary for instruction, while Any responds that anyone can be taught if they are willing.

The innovations in Any's Instruction are its origin from the lips of a commoner, its discussion of personal behaviour towards one's mother and god (as distinguished from the personal instruction respecting professional behaviour found in *Merikare* and *Amenemhet*), and an epilogue where the addressee responds to the instruction that has been offered.

The personal nature of the instruction relates well to Khonshotep's response in the epilogue (both being quite personal in tone).<sup>68</sup> The narrative framework (of which only the epilogue is extant) and the instruction are well integrated. The epilogue and instruction of *ANY* have the same micro-form: integrated sequences of sentences; in fact, the stanza in the epilogue that presents Any's first response to Khonshotep (cf. 9.18ff) is the longest speech in all of the Instruction.

### **Instruction of Amenemope<sup>69</sup>**

Because of Erman's work, this much-discussed text is seen as lying behind most of Proverbs 22:17-24:22.<sup>70</sup> Whether this connection amounts only to "a general parallelism of thought" (Wilson, ANET, p. 421) or involves a literary dependency will not be my concern; rather I will examine the overall structure of *Amenemope*. Because of the importance of *Amenemope* to Proverbs studies, and because the task at hand is to gain insights into Proverbs through examination of the specific formal categories of introduction and epilogue found in ANE Instruction, the introduction to *Amenemope* will be quoted in full. I am including the first chapter of the instruction as introduction because this chapter speaks about instruction--instructional apologetic--and does not deliver instruction.<sup>71</sup>

#### *Introduction*

Amenemope's instruction nominally addresses his son. Amenemope speaks as a scribe rather than as a father, and his instruction does not have the parental

tone of *ANY*, *Merikare*, or *Amenemhet*. The instruction which Amenemope offers is his own; if listened to, it has the ability to give life.<sup>72</sup> After the introduction, the remaining instruction is divided into thirty chapters, each containing a dominant theme. The introduction to the instruction is as follows:

**Prologue**

- 1.1 Beginning of the teaching for life,  
The instructions for well-being,  
Every rule for relations with elders,  
For conduct toward magistrates;  
5 Knowing how to answer one who speaks,  
To reply to one who sends a message,  
So as to direct him on the paths of life,  
To make him prosper upon the earth;  
To let his heart enter its shrine,  
10 Steering clear of evil;  
To save him from the mouth of strangers,  
To let (him) be praised in the mouth of people.  
Made by the overseer of fields, experienced in his office,  
The offspring of a scribe of Egypt,  
15 The overseer of grains who controls the measure,  
Who sets the harvest-dues for his lord,  
Who registers the islands of new land,  
In the great name of his majesty,  
Who records the markers on the borders of fields,  
2.1 Who acts for the king in his listing of taxes,  
Who makes the land-register of Egypt;  
The scribe who determines the offerings for all the gods.  
Who gives land-leases to the people,  
5 The overseer of grains, [provider of] foods,  
Who supplies the granary with grains;  
The truly silent in this of Ta-wer,  
The justified in Ipu,  
Who owns a tomb on the west of Senu,  
10 Who has a chapel at Abydos,  
Amenemope, the son of Kanakht,  
The justified in Ta-wer.  
<For> his son, the youngest of his children,  
The smallest of his family,  
15 The devotee of Min-Kamutef,  
The water-pourer of Wennofer,  
Who places Horus on his father's throne,  
Who guards him in his noble shrine,  
...
- 3.1 The guardian of the mother of god,  
Inspector of the black cattle of the terrace of Min,  
Who protects Min in his shrine:  
Hor-em-maakher is his true name,  
5 The child of a nobleman of Ipu,  
The son of the sistrum-player of Shu and Tefnut,  
And chief songstress of Horus, Tawosre.

**Chapter 1**

He says . . .

- 10 Give your ears, hear the sayings,  
Give your heart to understand them;

It profits to put them in your heart,  
Woe to him who neglects them!  
Let them rest in the casket of your belly,  
May they be bolted in your heart;  
15 When there rises a whirlwind of words,  
They'll be a mooring post for your tongue.  
If you make your life with these in your heart,  
You will find it a success;  
4.1 You will find my words a storehouse for life,  
Your being will prosper upon earth (AEL, II, pp. 148-149).

In the opening lines of the Instruction, Amenemope claims to offer a comprehensive instruction. These first lines assert that instruction can provide life, wealth, and honour. The introduction presents the words of Amenemope, even though the formal identification of Amenemope as speaker does not occur until well into the introduction (2.11-13). Where one might expect to find the tradition of instruction noted, such as “this is the instruction Amenemope heard from his father,” or “these are the words of the wise,” no such announcement is made in *Amenemope*. Rather, the instruction, as presented by the introduction, is Amenemope’s own creation: “You will find my words a storehouse for life . . .” (4.1). The passage 2.13-3.5 describes the addressee of the instruction: Amenemope’s youngest son.

The *prologue*, as Lichtheim presents it, is one long integrated poetic introduction to the instruction (1.1-3.7, approx. 45 lines). As a poetic stanza, it formally resembles the poetic chapters of instruction, though it exceeds them in length.<sup>73</sup> While introductory and instructional material are sometimes formally undistinguishable, distinctions can in all cases be made according to purpose and content. This long introductory stanza, as well as the first chapter, identifies Amenemope and provides apology for instruction; thus differing from instruction. The introduction to *Amenemope*, does not set any scene for the instruction as did the lengthy introduction to *Ptahhotep*.

### *Instruction*

The instruction of *Amenemope* is organized formally into thematic chapters.<sup>74</sup> Although both Any and Amenemope are scribes of modest standing,<sup>75</sup> Amenemope’s instruction shows extreme concern for right behaviour of the scribe,

whereas *ANY*'s instruction does not.<sup>76</sup> The instruction Amenemope gives to his son suggests Amenemope was a scribe of low standing. This I infer from the concern of much instruction with behaviour in the presence of a superior,<sup>77</sup> and with the instruction stressing contentment with one's social standing.<sup>78</sup>

### *Epilogue*

The last chapter (30), reflects back on the instruction as a complete work and sings its praises.

27.6      Look to these thirty chapters,  
            They inform, they educate;  
            They are the foremost of all books,  
10         They make the ignorant wise.  
            If they are read to the ignorant,  
            He is cleansed through them.  
            Be filled with them, put them in your heart,  
            And become a man who expounds them,  
15         One who expounds as a teacher.  
            The scribe who is skilled in his office,  
            He is found worthy to be a courtier.

The first line of the epilogue presents a transition from the instruction just prior, by reflecting back on it. Since the epilogue and introduction are formally similar to the instruction being integrated poetic stanzas, I understand their reflection on instruction to differentiate this material from instruction.

Line 9 stresses the authority and honour ascribed to these chapters of Amenemope's instruction (not incidentally, Instruction in general). In 27.11-12, it is said that if this instruction is read to the ignorant, they will be *cleansed*. Great power is also associated with the words of Amenemope's instruction.

In this Instruction which shows no formal difference between Instructions three parts, the transition between instruction and "framework" is nevertheless clearly marked by the transition from apology to instruction.

### **Papyrus Lansing<sup>79</sup>**

This Instruction, as well as *The Satire on the Trades*, addresses the life of a scribal student.<sup>80</sup> In both Instructions, the addressee is exhorted to excel in his future career of scribe. However, even though the content of these instructions concerns the world of teacher-pupil relations, the scribal profession, and school

behaviour, the narrative framework is personal rather than formal.

This Instruction is divided into eleven sections covering many issues of school life: the teacher-pupil relation, the office of scribe, the diligence required for the scribes to succeed in their schooling, etc. Lichtheim notes “that the papyrus is written with verse-points and paragraph signs” (AEL, II, p. 168) which differs in form at the sentence level from the other Pre-Demotic Instructions covered to this point.<sup>81</sup> However, its overall structure is similar to other Instructions since we find a narrative introduction and epilogue, both of which set the scene for the delivery and reception of the instruction.

### *Introduction*

[Beginning of the instruction in letter-writing made by the royal scribe and chief overseer of the cattle of Amen-Re, King of gods, Nebmare-nakht] for his apprentice, the scribe Wenemdiamun (AEL, II, p. 169).

This introduction is the first section (of eleven) and is not in the “father to son” form of earlier instruction. The address is from a teacher to pupil (Nebmare-nakht to Wenemdiamun). The setting is also different from other Instructions being set in formal education.

The next three sections which follow this introduction are a continuation of introductory material (since they comment on instruction and the pupil’s willingness to learn rather than offer “instruction” *per se*).<sup>82</sup> A prominent feature of these sections is the personal rapport between the instructor and Wenemdiamun. Throughout these three sections the language remains in the first person with Nebmare-nakht castigating Wenemdiamun for his lack of commitment to learning.<sup>83</sup> In the second section Nebmare-nakht urges Wenemdiamun to be attentive to his words (“Act according to my words . . . You will find it useful . . . You will be advanced by your superiors,” 1.4ff., AEL, II, p. 168). The personal tone of Nebmare-nakht towards Wenemdiamun and the focus on the problems associated with giving instruction suggest that this material belongs to the narrative frame of the Instruction and not to the instruction proper. The personal dialogue between Nebmare-nakht and Wenemdiamun concludes at the end of the fourth section, where the instruction proper begins.

### *Instruction*

The first line of section five:

See for yourself with your own eye.  
The occupations lie before you (4.2ff.).

focuses on the world at large and no longer addresses the hardship a teacher has with his student. The names of Nebmare-nakht and Wenemdiamun do not occur in this material and the language has lost the personal tone of the introductory sections. Sections five through eight describe the superior occupation of a scribe over and against other possible options (potter, cobbler, merchant, peasant, soldier, etc.). Wenemdiamun is asked to observe life beyond the school and recognize the high status accorded the scribe. These instructional passages are general in character and while they specifically concern the life of a scribe, they do not recall the personal history of either Wenemdiamun or Nebmare-nakht (as we know them from the narrative framework). The instruction is similar to the instruction found in *The Satire on the Trades*.

### *Epilogue*

Section nine begins with Wenemdiamun singing the praises of Nebmare-nakht, who by his diligent discipline has had some effect on him:

I grew into a youth at your side. You beat my back; your teaching entered my ear. I am like a pawing horse. Sleep does not enter my heart by day; nor is it upon me at night. (For I say): I will serve my lord just as a slave serves his master (cf. 11.1ff., AEL, II, p. 172).

Sections nine and following have returned to the setting and themes of the introduction and left the world at large (of the instruction to continue the narrative framework). The time has advanced, the instruction has been given, and the unlearning and the easily distracted Wenemdiamun of the introduction has responded to the discipline of Nebmare-nakht as the latter hoped. In the following sections, Wenemdiamun continues to sing Nebmare-nakht's praises. The response of the addressee to the instruction and instructor found here is reminiscent of the epilogue to *ANY*.



## Stela of Sehetep-ib-Re<sup>84</sup>

Sehetep-ib-Re's Instruction to his children is found on the verso of a funerary monument which he erected for himself at Abydos. The Instruction is found between an autobiographical account of Sehetep-ib-Re's life and what Lichtheim calls an "appeal to the living."<sup>85</sup> The autobiographical account which precedes this instruction (on the verso), could also be considered part of the introduction, as it serves a role similar to other introductions.<sup>86</sup> In this passage Sehetep-ib-Re gives an account of his life that does not highlight his performance in office or even court intrigue while he was in office (as do *Amenemhet* and *Ankhsheshonqy*); rather, and probably in keeping with its setting on his funerary monument, Sehetep-ib-re recounts his correct behaviour *vis-à-vis* priests and gods.

The stela contains a mixture of many different literary forms of which this Instruction is one.

### *Introduction*

Beginning of the Instruction which he made for his children:  
I say a great thing, I let you hear,  
I let you know counsel everlasting,  
Right conduct of life, passing the lifetime in peace (ll. 8f., AEL, I, p. 128).

This introduction, while brief like *Hardjedef*, does not identify the instructor as do all other extant introductions. Hence my suggestion that the autobiographical account serves this role.

### *Instruction*

The instruction is delivered in the first person to Sehetep-ib-Re's children (cf. *Kagemni's* similar address). It focuses exclusively on counsel leading to proper respect of the pharaoh, King Nimaatre, and on religious observation.<sup>87</sup> If the children follow this instruction and honour the pharaoh, they will live long, prosperous lives.

### *Epilogue*

The closing of this Instruction further emphasizes that attentiveness shown to the pharaoh's instruction will bring the children riches.

Do this, then you will prosper,  
It serves you forever!

## **The Satire of the Trades<sup>88</sup>**

This Instruction is similar to *Papyrus Lansing* in both its subject matter and its mangled transmission in school copies. It stresses the preeminent situation of a scribe in comparison with other occupations (approximately eighteen are presented in the instruction). While *Lansing* presented similar comparisons, *The Satire of the Trades* presents “unrelievedly negative descriptions of the laboring professions . . . through unflattering comparisons and through exaggerations that rise to outright fabrications.”<sup>89</sup> This tirade against other professions is presented, by the narrative framework, as occurring between a father and son in a boat on their way to install the son in scribal school. This narrative framework shows *Satire of the Trades* to be a part of ANE Instructional texts.<sup>90</sup>

### *Introduction*

The Instruction begins:

Beginning of the Instruction made by the man of Sile, whose name is ‘Dua-khety’, for his son, called Pepi, as he journeyed south to the residence, to place him in the school for scribes, among the sons of magistrates, with the elite of the residence. He said to him . . . (AEL, I, p. 185).

This follows the “Father-son” pattern. Dua-khety is not identified as a scribe, and from the amount of advice he offers Pepi on his behaviour in front of magistrates and other officials, I assume he was “apparently a person of low standing.”<sup>91</sup> The setting is a momentous one for the son. He has left his family and is setting out for school some distance from home. Pepi’s father accompanies him on his journey and it is Dua-khety’s last chance to pass on any guidance he has for Pepi before starting his career and his own life. After this outdoor setting for the instruction is presented (the only outside setting), Dua-khety begins to instruct.

### *Instruction*

Dua-khety begins by telling his son the horrors of manual labour:

I have seen many beatings--  
Set your heart on books!  
I watched those seized for labour--  
There’s nothing better than books!  
It’s like a boat on water (4.2ff., AEL, I, p. 185).

The instruction continues with an examination of the fate of other occupations by satirical commentary on the trades of pottery, fishing, shoe making, brick laying, etc. All these trades fall miserably short of a scribe's life. The setting for these professional satires is the world at large, everyday life in the city.

### *Epilogue*

At approximately 9.4 the Instruction changes setting and returns again to the boat with Dua-khety and Pepi on their journey to school.

Lo, what I do in journeying to the residence,  
Lo, I do it for love of you.  
The day in school will profit you  
Its works are for ever . . . (9.4ff., AEL, I, p. 190)

After this shift in the scene, Dua-khety returns to instruction. However, the instruction he offers now concerns Pepi's behaviour at school.<sup>92</sup> Dua-khety ends his words with Pepi noting that they are sufficient to guide him in his future life.

Lo, I have set you on god's path, . . .  
Praise god for your father and mother,  
Who set you on the path of life!  
This is what I put before you,  
Your children and their children (cf. 11.2ff., AEL, I, p. 191).

The last sentence emphasizes Dua-khety's stress on the traditional aspect of his instruction; his words are words which will continue to guide through the generations.

### **The Instruction of Ankhsheshonqy<sup>93</sup>**

This Instruction and papyrus Insinger were both written in Demotic during the Graeco-Roman period, the last period of Egyptian Instruction.<sup>94</sup> The most notable feature of their sentence-level form is that each sentence occupies a single line on the page in what Lichtheim calls "monostichic composition." Pre-Demotic instruction, for the most part, was composed of groups of related sentences (especially *Ptahhotep* and *Amenemope*); here in *Ankhsheshonqy* each sentence of instruction is "grammatically and logically complete and self-contained" (variously called "proverbs," "maxims," and "wisdom sayings;" Lichtheim, 1983: 1-12). One characteristic of Demotic instruction is "the treatment of a theme by linking several

independent sentences in a chain formed by repetition of the first word and similarity of sentence structure; and abrupt changes in theme” (Lichtheim, 1983: 4). Since the interconnected sentences had been abandoned by Demotic instruction (and also their ability to develop themes), McKane regarded much of *Ankhsheshonqy* as proverbial and not truly instructional literature since it is composed primarily of statements.<sup>95</sup> McKane explains that the many proverbs in *Ankhsheshonqy* suggest that the origin of the work was the common folk whose form of instruction was the folk proverb.<sup>96</sup>

In the first section of this chapter I noted how Lichtheim distances herself from these and similar evaluations of Demotic instruction. She argues that the innovations of Demotic instruction can be explained without ascribing to it a *common*, less developed origin. First, Demotic literature, as a whole, preferred prose to poetic forms of expression, and the form of Demotic prose is monostichic.<sup>97</sup> Second, the form of Demotic instruction does not derive from earlier instruction, but is “newly invented” (1983: 7-12). Third, this new form was developed to integrate non-Egyptian sources.<sup>98</sup> *Ankhsheshonqy* does not represent a more “common” tradition as has been suggested, and should be evaluated alongside the other Instruction.

The Instruction of *Ankhsheshonqy* consists of both a long narrative introduction and a body of instruction composed of single sentences. It is by their respective content that the introduction and instruction of *Ankhsheshonqy* are distinguished. The introduction presents the story of how the instruction came to be given and the instruction presents unrelated sayings.

### *Introduction*

The narrative introduction of *Ankhsheshonqy* is quite lengthy and will be briefly summarized here. Though the beginning of the story is fragmentary, enough can be pieced together to identify the two protagonists, Ankhsheshonqy and Harsiese, as boyhood friends. Harsiese has so excelled at medical studies that the chief physician to Pharaoh sends for him to test his knowledge. The result of this test was that “[the chief physician realized] that he was a wise [man]” (1.9; 1983: 66).

Harsiese's presence is requested before Pharaoh, who is also curious about the extent of Harsiese's knowledge. Pharaoh asks him many questions and he answers all. When the chief physician dies, Harsiese, not surprisingly, is installed in his place.

Ankhsheshonqy, a priest of Re at Heliopolis, feels troubled about something; remembering that he has heard his boyhood friend was made chief physician, he leaves his home to travel to Memphis. Harsiese invites Ankhsheshonqy to stay. During Ankhsheshonqy's visit, some courtiers plot against the pharaoh. They seek out Harsiese for advice. He, in turn, confides in Ankhsheshonqy, who is shocked that his friend, after all that he has received at the hand of the pharaoh, would become party to such a plot. This dialogue between the two friends is overheard by one of Pharaoh's guards, who repeats the conversation to Pharaoh. Pharaoh summons first Harsiese, and then Ankhsheshonqy, to discuss the matter. The pharaoh burns Harsiese for his treason, and gaols Ankhsheshonqy for not coming to him directly upon having heard the plot.

After Ankhsheshonqy has been imprisoned for a while, there occurs a day of pardon. All the other prisoners in jail are released except Ankhsheshonqy. Ankhsheshonqy realizes that he cannot look forward to release and he asks his servant/guard:

Let this favor be done to me through you. Let there be brought to me a palette and a papyrus roll, because I have a boy <whom> I have not yet been able to instruct. I shall write an Instruction for him and have it taken to him in Heliopolis to instruct him thereby (4.10ff.; Lichtheim, 1983: 69).

The guard replies that he must seek Pharaoh's permission first before he can allow Ankhsheshonqy to instruct his son. Pharaoh does give Ankhsheshonqy his permission:

Pharaoh commanded, saying: 'let a palette be taken to him . . .' This is the Instruction which the divine father Ankhsheshonqy son of Tjainufi, whose mother was 'Sitnebu', wrote for his son on the shards of the jars that were brought in to him containing mixed wine . . . He said . . . (4.14ff.; Lichtheim, 1983: 69).

This last paragraph is reminiscent of lines in other introductions to Instructions because of its identification of the instructor, its offering of a brief family tree, its description of setting, and its conclusion with the phrase, "he said."<sup>99</sup> Instruction

does not directly follow this paragraph; instead, there is an excursus in which Ankhsheshonqy complains to the god Pre of his mistreatment.<sup>100</sup> At the end of these comments there is again an introductory paragraph:

Here follow the words that Ankhsheshonqy son of Tjainufi wrote on the shards of the jars that were brought in to him . . . so as to give them as an Instruction to his son, and which were reported before Pharaoh and his great men daily. . . . He wrote on the shards of the jars the matters that he could teach his son, (as) written (5.14ff.; Lichtheim, 1983: 70-71).

Here the instruction itself begins.

This introductory narrative is different from all the introductions covered so far because of its extreme length and the story it narrates. The delivery of the instruction is set in Pharaoh's gaol. The instruction is not spoken but written and passed on to Ankhsheshonqy's son as such. These instructions "were reported before Pharaoh and his great men daily," but for what purpose? To be censored, edited, or to enlighten those present?

Lichtheim suggests this introduction shows familiarity with the introduction to *Ahikar* (also known as *Story of Ahikar*; Lichtheim sees parallels between their instruction as well). In both introductions the instructor is wrongly imprisoned.<sup>101</sup> Both introductions show the limits of wisdom (the "shady side of wisdom," to borrow Mendenhall's phrase).<sup>102</sup> The difference between these introductions is that whereas the man of great wisdom in *Ahikar* is also the man who instructs, the one presented as having great wisdom in *Ankhsheshonqy* is Harsiese; yet it is Ankhsheshonqy who gives instruction. Although examples of Harsiese's great wisdom are given at the start of the introduction, and although Harsiese's actions drive most of the plot of the introduction, the introduction presents Ankhsheshonqy as an unwilling pawn caught by fate. He hardly seems to be a "wise man," and hardly one appropriate to instruct. Thus it seems unclear why Ankhsheshonqy, an "unwilling pawn" caught up in intrigue, is presented as giving the instruction.

### *Instruction*

After the narrative introduction discussed above, one would expect some sort of integration between the introduction and instruction along the lines of *Amenemhet*, for example. Ankhsheshonqy should--we expect--give his son a stern

warning to be wary of the intrigues of the extremely clever, or since Ankhsheshonqy had erred in not letting his king know as soon as he had heard of the plot, one would expect that he would instruct his son not to err in a similar way. Even if Ankhsheshonqy felt no remorse for his failure to report to the pharaoh and thought that his incarceration was a symptom of Pre's anger with the land rather than a result of his own negligent activity, he might still warn his son to be wary of those in power and to keep a close cynical gaze on them because they hold all lives in their hands. Yet there is no instruction warning about the dark side of wisdom characterized by Harsiese, no extended instruction addressing the performance of the priestly office, no warnings against the pride of physicians nor against Pharaoh's fickle administration of justice, and no discussion of Ankhsheshonqy's status as prisoner. There is nothing in the instruction to tie it to the introduction as given. There are, in short, no clues as to why Ankhsheshonqy is presented in the introduction as the instructor of this instruction.

What this instruction has in common with other instruction is its discussion of the importance of speech, the control of the tongue, advice for reserved behaviour in the company of superiors, and its lack of reference to the divine (a surprising omission for the instruction of a priest).

Though the son is addressed in the introduction, the wide-ranging concerns of the instruction with all matters of life presuppose a larger audience.<sup>103</sup> This lack of focus on a certain son or type of son, along with the lack of connection between the instruction to the plight of Ankhsheshonqy, points out the literary convention of the narrative framework.

### *Epilogue*

This Instruction ends without any developed epilogue. It closes with the simple words 28.11:

(It is) written.

### **Papyrus Insinger<sup>104</sup>**

The introduction and first eight pages to this Instruction are incomplete

though the extant instruction is lengthy. The text of the instruction with its lack of courtly concern and its one-line sentences has a formal similarity with *Ankhsheshonqy* (see comments on *Ankhsheshonqy* above); however, it is highly organized, where as *Ankhsheshonqy* is not.<sup>105</sup> Lichtheim summarizes the prologue as “consisting of the self-presentation of the author who, speaking in the first person, exhorts his audience to heed his instructions” but does not present a translation of this material. The epilogue is brief:

The end of the instruction. May his ba be young for all eternity:  
Phebhor son of Djedherpaan, whose ba will serve Osiris-Sokar,  
the great god, the lord of Abyos. May his ba and his body be young for all eternity  
(25.13-15, 1983: 234).

Since the introduction is incomplete and the ending brief, all that is known of the narrative framework (if one existed?) is gained from digressions from the instruction itself. For example:

The teaching not to weary on instructing your son.  
A statue of stone is the foolish son whom his father has not instructed.  
It is a son's good and blessed portion to receive instruction and to ask (8.21-23).

It would appear that in *Insinger* the social role of a father instructing his son is at least acknowledged. Whether or not the prologue set the scene for instruction is an open question.

## **B. Babylonian-Assyrian Instruction**

The Babylonian-Assyrian materials that correspond to the form of Egyptian Instruction are few.<sup>106</sup> These instructions also share with Egyptian instruction many general concerns: marital behaviour, table manners, control of speech, and reverence for god.

There are other texts that could be included here, e.g. *Counsels of a Pessimist*, *Advice to a Prince* and some of the proverb collections.<sup>107</sup> All differ stylistically from Instruction and hence do not display the form of Instruction as we have so far come to understand it.



## Ahikar<sup>108</sup>

### Introduction

The beginning of this piece (the first thirty lines) is incomplete.<sup>109</sup> The introduction to the instruction that remains is lengthy (sometimes called the *Story of Ahikar*).<sup>110</sup> This first-person narrative introduction recounts the story of a wise man Ahikar. Ahikar grows old in his office and is without an heir. He adopts his sister's son, Nadin, and instructs him in order to fill his post as some kind of governmental adviser. Nadin succeeds Ahikar but repays Ahikar's kindness with false accusations, to the extent that Ahikar's life is in danger. By the end of the introduction, justice comes to all.<sup>111</sup>

Throughout the story, Ahikar is many times called a wise man and his qualifications well equip him to instruct.<sup>112</sup> Here, for the first time, the introduction presents a man who, more than any of the other instructors surveyed, would provide valuable instruction.<sup>113</sup> His credentials are impeccable. Yet these expectations of successful instruction are dashed by their effect on Nadin. Ahikar, a man of great wisdom, instructs his adopted son to succeed him in an office of authority and influence (a turn of events Nadin could hardly have expected). The reader is encouraged to expect this to be a story of successful instruction because this is a wise man instructing a "son." Unexpectedly, Ahikar's instruction fails dismally and after Ahikar's instruction Nadin threatens Ahikar's life. The instructed does not defy the instruction with his words, as in *ANY*, but attacks the instructor bodily.

This is hardly the kind of apologetic expected in an introduction to instruction. In *Ahikar*, the most worthy instructor fails most gravely. This parallels *Anksheshonqy's* presentation of Harsiese, a man of renowned wisdom who engenders great expectations, yet utterly fails in his life. The message suggested in these two Instructions must be that in great wisdom there is often great failure. The introduction to *Ahikar* has more in common with that of the Egyptian *Anksheshonqy* than with any other.<sup>114</sup>

Since the transition between the introductory story and the instruction is lost, nothing can be said concerning the integration between the two as far as who is

being addressed. We are informed in the introduction that Nadin has been instructed, and we are told what the result of that instruction has been. But it is questionable that Nadin be instructed again after the failure of Ahikar's instruction has been reported. Neither does it seem plausible that the instruction which failed to instruct Nadin is presented. The instruction could be addressed to a new successor (Nadin having been replaced); if so, one is not named. Given the failure of Ahikar's first instruction, it is puzzling to present him instructing again.

### *Instruction*

The instruction is general; it covers correct behaviour, the importance of words, friendship, and a correct attitude towards god. The instruction is put in the mouth of Ahikar and is his observations on life, and acquires its authority from the association of Ahikar with the instruction. There is no instruction directed towards the particular setting described in the introduction. From what is available of the instruction, we can infer that there are no themes that make the use of that introduction necessary. There is not a great degree of integration between the narrative framework and the instruction.

The end of the Instruction is missing so no comment can be made concerning the existence of an epilogue.

### **The Instruction of Shuruppak<sup>115</sup>**

Shuruppak, a figure similar to Noah, survived the great flood. In this text he passes on instructions for his son. The beginning of the first few lines of the instruction is all that remains and is similar to the short introduction of *Hardjedef*. This introduction presents a brief narrative framework. The few lines of instruction available speak to agrarian concerns, which is not surprising in the narrative context, since life must start anew. The instruction that Shuruppak passes on seems to be represented as his own creation.

The introduction is:

Shuruppak [son of Uburtutu gave instructions]  
To Utnapushtu [his son he gave instructions, saying],  
'My son, [I will give you instructions, take my instructions].'<sup>116</sup>

## **Counsels of Wisdom<sup>117</sup>**

The beginning and end of this piece are not extant; no introduction or epilogue is available. The instructor is never named and the addressee is addressed only once with the “My son” phrase in the instruction (l. 81; BWL, p. 103).

Lambert finds in the extant Instruction ten sections delimited by changes in metre and theme (BWL, p. 96). All the themes are common to ANE Instruction. Only one section of the instruction leaves the everyday social interactions of the other sections and may recall a lost narrative setting. It opens with the phrase, “My son.” The instruction of this section addresses the son’s future behaviour in the office of king (cp. *Merikare* and *Amenemhet*). “The advice given in the section beginning ‘My son’ can have had relevance for very few people, unlike the rest of the *Counsels*, which had a general application,” concerning as it does professional life in the royal court (ll. 81ff.; BWL, p. 96). While this section is suggestive of a narrative framework, it is slim evidence.

### *A Summary of the Form of ANE Instruction*

Lichtheim’s claim that the “stylistic device by which maxims were strung together and shaped into a more or less unified work was the narrative frame: a father instructs his son” (AEL, I, p. 5) is well supported by the extant material. The chart below summarizes the information available concerning the narrative framework of the texts I have considered: the existence and length of an introduction and epilogue, the extent of the integration between the instruction and the narrative frame, and the type of instruction offered (personal, professional or both).

<u>Instruction:</u>	<u>Introduction:</u>	<u>Epilogue:</u>	<u>Integration:</u>	<u>Nature of Instruction:</u>
<i>Hardjedef</i>	Yes, minimal	N/A	Minor <sup>118</sup>	Personal
<i>Kagemni</i>	N/A	Yes	Minor <sup>119</sup>	Personal <sup>120</sup>
<i>Ptahhotep</i>	Yes, lengthy	Yes, lengthy	Minor <sup>121</sup>	Personal/Professional <sup>122</sup>
<i>Merikare</i>	N/A,	Yes, lengthy	Major <sup>123</sup>	Professional
<i>Amenemhet</i>	Yes, lengthy	Yes, minimal	Major <sup>124</sup>	Professional
<i>ANY</i>	Yes, minimal	Yes, lengthy	Major <sup>125</sup>	Personal/Professional <sup>126</sup>
<i>Amenemope</i>	Yes, lengthy	Yes, lengthy	Minor <sup>127</sup>	Personal/Professional
<i>Papyrus Lansing</i>	Yes, minimal	Yes, lengthy	Major <sup>128</sup>	Professional
<i>Sehetep-ib-re</i>	Yes, minimal	Yes, minimal	Minor	Personal/Professional
<i>The Satire of the Trades</i>	Yes, minimal	No	Major <sup>129</sup>	Professional
<i>Ankhsheshonqy</i>	Yes, lengthy	Yes, minimal	None <sup>130</sup>	Personal/Professional
<i>Papyrus Insinger</i>	N/A	Yes, minimal	Minor	Personal/Professional
<i>Ahikar</i>	Yes, lengthy	N/A	Minor	Personal
<i>Shuruppak</i>	Yes	N/A	Major <sup>131</sup>	Agrarian <sup>132</sup>
<i>Counsels</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	Personal <sup>133</sup>

What conclusions can be made about the narrative framework of ANE Instruction? First, in every Instruction with an extant introduction, the instructor is identified by his family and office (attributes which seem to be unessential for the job of instruction).<sup>134</sup> Second, the scene for the delivery of the instruction is set. The introduction to *Hardjedef* presents these features common to introductions in the simplest manner:

Beginning of the Instruction made by the Hereditary Prince, Count, King's Son, Hardjedef, for his son, his nursling, whose name is Au-ib-re. He says . . . (AEL, I, p. 58).

In most, but not all cases, the scene set for the giving of instruction is a father instructing his son. Apart from these two basic aspects of the introduction, there is great variety.

The social position of the instructor for the Instructions is one such variation. They can be pharaohs (*Merikare* and *Amenemhet*), viziers (*Kagemni* and *Ptahhotep*), minor officials, scribes (*ANY*, *Amenemope*, and *Satire of the Trades*), a teacher (*Lansing*), a priest (*Ankhsheshonqy*), or a renowned wise man (*Ahikar*); in all cases the instructor's office exceeds that of the "son." While the majority of these instructors are understood as instructing their sons, not all do. In *Lansing*, Nebmare-nakht instructs his apprentice (student) Wenemdiamun. *Ahikar* instructs his sister's son Nadin. In *Kagemni* and *Ptahhotep*, it is unclear whether the instructed are their respective sons or political successors.

## 1. The Form of ANE Instruction

The story told in the narrative framework (when the introduction is more than a few lines), which explains the occasion of instruction, is different for each Instruction. In *Ptahhotep*, we meet Ptahhotep as an old man concerned with passing on his office to the next generation. He approaches Pharaoh and requests permission to instruct, gains that permission, and sets about delivering instruction. In *Satire of the Trades*, we meet Dua-khety instructing his son Pepi as they both sail towards Pepi's scribal school. In *Amenemhet*, Amenemhet must instruct his son from the dead since he was taken prematurely from the living by a successful assassination attempt by his place guards (he instructs his son from wisdom gained in hindsight). In *Ankhsheshonqy*, Ankhsheshonq becomes caught up in a plot against Pharaoh and ends up in Pharaoh's gaol. Ankhsheshonq realizes after a day of pardon comes and goes that he will not be free to instruct his son in person so he writes out his instruction on pieces of clay to be passed on to his son. In *Ahikar*, Ahikar instructs his sister's son only to have the boy turn on him and imprison him. The setting of each story is not limited to the royal court but occurs in various locations: a boat sailing on a river, a scribal school, Pharaoh's gaol, or at home. All of these Instructions present vivid scenes in which instruction is given with no common elements of plot shared.

The language of these introductions is a mixture of first and second person. In a few introductions, *Ptahhotep*, and *Amenemhet*, for example, it is mostly first-person dialogue. Ptahhotep converses with Pharaoh about his old age and his successor, and Amenemhet tells his son about the trails of his reign. Interestingly, dialogue makes up a large part of the narrative framework (cf. the epilogue to *ANY*).

Is there a transitional phrase found in the Instructions which marks the end of the introduction and the start of the instruction? Words similar to "He said" or "He said to his son" occur at the transition from the introduction to the instruction in *Hardjedef*, *Ptahhotep*, and *Satire of the Trades*. However, in three other Instructions, phrases similar to these occur but are not transitions to the instruction. In *Amenemhet*, the phrase "He said" occurs (1.1) but it does not lead directly to the

instruction, instead to a poetic section in which Amenemhet emphasizes to his son how important the instruction is that he will give. After this poetic section there is a brief prose section where the king narrates his own assassination, and finally, after this prose section, the instruction starts (2.7ff.).<sup>135</sup> In *Amenemope*, chapter one begins with “He said,” but instruction does not start in the chapter; instead, instructional apologetic occurs. Instruction does begin in chapter two; however, this transition is not indicated by any phrase at the end of chapter one, but by the change in setting and focus (see the following discussion). *Ankhsheshonqy* has the words “He said” (4.19), but these are not the words before the instruction; those words are, “He wrote on the shards of the jars the matters that he could teach his son, (as) written” (5.19). The instruction begins after a brief introduction sentence in *ANY* and *Sehetep-ib-re*. There is no common phrase which marks the end of the introductory material and the start of the instruction.

The best indication that the introduction is over and the instruction has started is a change in setting or focus from the scene of the giving of the instruction to instruction about the world at large. The introduction identifies the instructor, provides the setting for the act of instruction, and presents the instructor talking about the instruction’s worth; whereas, the instruction looks at the world to draw its lessons forth. For example, even in an instruction such as *Amenemhet*, which uses first person discourse throughout the Instruction, the first lines of the instruction,

Had woman ever marshaled troops?  
Are rebels nurtured in the palace?  
Does one release water that destroys the soil  
And deprives people of their crops? (1.7ff.; AEL, I, p. 137)

direct the focus to the world at large, leaving behind the setting of palace intrigue found in the last part of the introduction. The introduction to *Lansing*, like *Amenemhet*, has many changes of theme; nevertheless, throughout the introduction the focus remains on Nebmare-nakht’s frustrations as the teacher of Wenemdiamun. The instruction starts when Nebmare-nakht asks Wenemdiamun to look at the world at large:

See for yourself with your own eye. The occupations lie before you.  
The washerman’s day is going up, going down (4.11ff., AEL, II, p. 169).

In *Amenemope*, it appears that the instruction would start after the prologue with chapter one. As I observed above, chapter one is instructional apologetic with a self-reflective focus, the instruction begins in chapter two. Here are the last sentence of chapter one and the first sentence of chapter two:

If you make your life with these in your heart,  
You will find it a success;  
You will find my words a storehouse for life,  
Your being will prosper upon the earth.

Beware of robbing a wretch,  
Of attacking a cripple;  
Don't stretch out your hand to touch an old man,  
Nor 'open your mouth' to an elder (3.17ff.; AEL, II, pp. 149-150).

The change in focus, from the words of instruction to the world at large, is clear. Though Lichtheim makes the observation that it is the narrative framework that transforms the "maxims" into Instruction, she does not call sufficient attention to the transitional point between the narrative framework and the maxims (to be fair, her interest is to present the literature itself, rather than an extended examination of its form).

While this examination of ANE Instruction was interested in drawing attention to the narrative framework of Instruction rather than instruction itself, a few comments about the instruction can be made. Most of the instructions address people from all areas of life who are not limited to a social class or occupation of the addressee described in the introduction.<sup>136</sup> In only four of the Instructions is the instruction exclusive to an occupation: the instruction is directed to a future pharaoh in *Amenemhet* and *Merikare*, and is scribal in *Lansing* and *Satire of the Trades*.

These four Instructions also show a high degree of integration between the instruction and the narrative framework. In *Merikare* and *Amenemhet*, the instruction recalls specific life events of the pharaoh that reinforce the setting of their respective narrative frameworks. The specific scribal instruction of *Lansing* and *Satire of the Trades* integrates well into each respective narrative setting but is not dependent on it. In these scribal instructions, there is no personal instruction specifically addressed to Wenemdiamun or Pepi (as the pharaoh's instruction is addressed to their specific sons). In fact, the instruction of these two scribal

Instructions could be switched with no ill effect.

The epilogues of Instruction all reflect back on the instruction and sing its praises and in that manner are differentiated from instruction. The epilogues of *Kagemni*, *Ptahhotep*, *Merikare*, *ANY*, and *Amenemope* stress the importance of following the letter of the instruction presented and the continuance of the tradition of the “sayings” or “writings.” These epilogues refer to the instruction as the “sayings of the past” and the “words of the ancestors” and to the instruction itself as if it were a well-known written text.<sup>137</sup> The instruction is not self-reflective in the same way as the epilogues (and introductions) are with reference to the traditional nature of instruction.

The relation of epilogues to introductions, on the other hand, is different. While some epilogues do not recall the characters or settings of the introduction with personal names, others do. To illustrate, the final stanza of the epilogue to *Ptahhotep* clearly reflects the setting of the introduction. The apologetic of *Amenemope*'s epilogue is reminiscent of the apology of the introduction. The epilogues to *Kagemni* and *ANY* present a setting and the names of those persons involved with the instruction (whether or not they recall the setting and characters of the introduction cannot be known as their extant introductions are minimal or fragmentary).

Having surveyed the expression given each of the three parts of Instructional form I wish to address the integration of these three parts. The distinguishing feature of Egyptian Instruction, identified by Lichtheim, is not the presence of these three parts as much as it is the relation between these parts. The “stylistic device by which maxims were strung together and shaped into a more or less unified word was the narrative frame: a father instructs his son” (AEL, I, p. 5). The instruction is transformed into Instruction by being placed within a narrative frame. The presence of this frame surrounding the instruction raises narratological questions. (I define “narratological questions” in this context to be questions which can only be answered by further narrative development.) The progression within each Instruction, from introduction to instruction, raises narratological questions such as,



How will the son respond to the instruction?, and, Will the instructor witness a receptive audience for their instruction? The instruction itself cannot answer these questions because it is not a part of the framing narrative. Answers to these questions are suspended until the Instruction returns to the narrative frame in the epilogue. Finding examples of Instructional epilogues which answer narratological questions aroused by the introduction and instruction is fraught with the same problems which plague any question of form put to ANE Instruction in damaged or missing text. Nevertheless, I present Instructions below which contain epilogues that answer narratological questions.

Parade examples of Instructions which possess epilogues answering narratological questions are: *Amenemhet*, *Lansing*, *ANY*, and *Kagemni*. In *Amenemhet*, Amenemhet returns from the dead to warn his son of the palace intrigue which resulted in his assassination. The narrative puts the reader in a state of anxiety; the father has been killed by court intrigue before he could instruct or warn his son, Will Amenemhet have returned to offer his instruction in time to save his son from the fate which befell him? This question is held in suspension throughout the instruction, answered only in the epilogue when Amenemhet says to his son,

As my feet depart [back to the land of the dead], you are in my heart . . .  
I have made the past and arranged the future,  
I gave you the contents of my heart.  
You wear the white crown of a god's son . . .  
Kingship is again what it was in the past! (3.8ff.; AEL, I, p. 138)

Amenemhet has returned in time and there will be no repeat of the past. His son's kingdom will relive past glory. Amenemhet walks into the sunset knowing his advice has found a receptive ear.

In the introduction to *Lansing*, Nebmare-nakht recites a litany of Wenemdiamum's failings as a student. Though Wenemdiamum is in training to be a scribe, the reader is told that he spends his time outside hunting and playing instead of receiving instruction. With such an introduction to Wenemdiamum, the reader is skeptical of Wenemdiamum ever becoming a scribe. The narrative suggests these questions, Will Wenemdiamum ever prove receptive of instruction?, and, Will the

instructor, Nebmare-nakht, ever get the respect he deserves? These questions are unanswered by the instruction, but in the epilogue the reader's skepticism of Wenemdiamum is silenced. When Wenemdiamum responds to Nebmare-nakht saying,

I grew into a youth at your side. You beat my back; your teaching entered my ear. I am like a pawing horse. Sleep does not enter my heart by day; nor is it upon me at night. (For I say:) I will serve my lord just as a slave serves his master (cf. 11.1ff., AEL, II, p. 172),

we note a transformation of Wenemdiamum. Where the introduction presented an immature Wenemdiamum, the epilogue presents a mature student singing his instructor praises. Nebmare-nakht's instruction finally strikes its mark and Wenemdiamum gives him the honour he deserves.

Though the beginning of *ANY* is incomplete and the introduction which remains is brief, the personal rapport between Any and his son, gathered from the instruction fills out the narrative frame suggested by the introduction. When Any instructs his son not to jostle the divine idol, to make sure he returns the respect his mother deserves because of her tough pregnancy and early childhood with him, he recalls specific childhood incidents (which his son might rather forget). This conjures up in the reader's mind a father very involved in his son's life. This raises the question, How will Any's son respond to Any's instruction which recalls so many unfavorable childhood incidents? In *ANY*'s lengthy epilogue this question is answered as Any and his son dispute the value of Any's instruction.

In *Kagemni* the narrator answers questions the reader may have about the reception of instruction by commenting on those receiving instruction saying,

Then they placed themselves on their bellies, they recited it as it was written. It seemed good to them beyond anything in the whole land. They stood and sat accordingly (2.3ff., AEL, I, p. 60).

This certainly answers any question of the reception of this instruction by those instructed.

The illusion of the instruction event created by the narrative framework is most readily seen in Instructions when the son responds verbally to the act of instruction (as in *ANY* and *Lansing*), or when the narrator comments on their

response (*Kagemni*). These Instructions remind us that the narrative framework lies behind the instruction whether or not we acknowledge that it does. The instruction only survives within the context of the framing narrative. This observation raises the question of how one would determine the ethos or world-view of Instruction.

If we remember the sections of material from Egyptian Instruction which were presented as representative of Instruction in previous studies (see the survey at the beginning of this chapter) and compare these selections to the wealth of material actually available in Instructions, we see how little support previous generalizations have. We now turn to consider some of these past generalizations made about ANE Instruction, that fail to find support when Instruction, inclusive of its three parts, are evaluated.

It has been claimed that Egyptian education was limited to the instruction of a specific or a privileged class. For example, Whybray holds that “most of the Egyptian discourses state specifically that their teaching is offered only to the scribal class” (1965: 52 n. 1). This argument could perhaps be made from archaeological data--the texts that survive on school tablets--but it cannot be argued from the “literary” data themselves. The literary data suggest that the original setting for many of the texts described in the narrative framework was not scribal<sup>138</sup> and as much as half of the instruction is purely personal with little or no professional stress. In the instructions that do have a professional stress, the instructions are usually mixed with personal advice that is applicable to many different roles in society and it would be wrong to assert that the instructions present a limited class ethic.<sup>139</sup> While some of the addressees have formal titles (such as the instruction addressed to king Merikare in *Merikare*, and that addressed to the All-Lord in *Amenemhet*), not all do. The variety of addressees and the spectrum of people to whom much of the instruction applies argue against the idea that there is only one class that is envisaged as addressees of Instruction. The scribal class, for instance, is specifically addressed by only three Instructions.

Nevertheless, some hold that the message, values, and world-view expressed

by the literature have a specific political orientation. McKane expresses this belief strongly in his assessment of the message of ANE Instruction thus:

We are not to expect that we shall find a self-effacing or self-abnegating morality which urges that it is better to be obscure and unpraised than to win reputation and exercise power; that it is a higher virtue to perform menial tasks for other men than to be at the centre of affairs and exercise great influence over their lives. Belief in the virtue of such humility finds no place in a composition [Instruction literature] whose function is precisely to give authoritative advice to aspiring statesmen on how they can achieve maximum effectiveness and best exercise power (1970: 62-63).<sup>140</sup>

As I noted in the first part of this chapter, many studies of ANE Instruction literature, including that of McKane, have failed to consider large sections of the Instructions themselves. Since large sections of ANE Instruction have been overlooked, observations made by these studies about the “world-view” of ANE Instruction are questionable.

Another conclusion, made about Egyptian Instruction in particular, is that it is concerned with communicating that an established *order* operates in the world.

Lichtheim puts it this way:

Working in the frame of a hierarchic society, the thinkers of the Old Kingdom envisaged the order of human society as the mirror image of the order that governed the universe. As the son-god through his never failing daily circuit ruled the world, so the divine king guaranteed the human order. Within this framework, pragmatic thought working upon experience, and religious feeling and speculation combined to form convictions that were formulated as brief teachings or maxims (AEL, I, p.5).

Lichtheim makes no distinction between Instruction and instruction here, nevertheless she has articulated what many claim is the ethos of Egyptian Instruction. However, Lichtheim has argued in a more sophisticated manner than most. The usual argument about the belief in order is argued from proverbs or maxims themselves. Lichtheim has shown how this assumption about the maxims receives emphasis from the narrative surround, and in so doing offers an explanation of why the maxim or proverb collections (instruction) survive as Instructions. However, two points can be raised against Lichtheim’s suggestion. First, not all Instruction is composed by kings or high officials. How does the instruction of Any, Amenemope, Pepi, or especially Ankhsheshonqy, guarantee human order? Second, if we reflect back on the introductions to *Amenemhet* and *Ankhsheshonqy* in particular, we notice that what is surprising about their

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introductory story is the extraordinary lack of order (if we are to believe Lichtheim's claim). That Amenemhet is killed by his own palace guard is surely an example of extreme disorder (as Lichtheim says, it was the king that guaranteed human order). But the violation of order in Amenemhet's life goes without comment, a surprising fact if Instructions' purpose is to assure their readers that order is possible if instruction is followed. It could be argued that Amenemhet gives his instruction to his son so that disorder will not continue in the kingdom (reestablishing order). But this does little to explain how disorder happened in the first place. Granted, the threat of disorder is presumed throughout--if one does not follow the instruction--however nowhere does Amenemhet attribute the disorder of his tenure to his failure to incorporate instruction. The disorder in the life of Ankhsheshonqy is also as clear as is the lack of comment on it. In fact, Ankhsheshonqy decries the disorder in his life by blaming the god Pre, with no mention of the role of Instruction. It may still be said of Ankhsheshonqy's instruction that it assumes an underlying order, but can the same be said of the *Instruction Ankhsheshonqy*? The narrative frames of *Amenemhet* and *Ankhsheshonqy* present disorder in the lives of their respective instructors without comment.

Any assertion about the themes and concerns of ANE Instruction must keep these points in mind: first, the setting for the delivery of the instruction presented in the narrative framework (in all but a few cases domestic) differs from the Instructions' subsequent use in organized education; second, the three-part structure (and the great variety of expression given the three-part structure) cautions against a generalization capturing the world-view of ANE Instruction. Because these points will be relevant to our study of Proverbs, I will now examine them in detail and discuss their relevance to an understanding of the "world-view" of ANE Instruction.

Keeping the first point in mind, we must not confuse the formal setting suggested from archaeological data with the domestic setting suggested by the literary data.<sup>141</sup> From the literary data we see that the act of instruction was a private event between a father and his son.<sup>142</sup> In *Ptahhotep*, we find reference to this private setting as a tradition: "He will speak likewise to his children,/Renewing

the teaching of his father;” and again: “How good is he whom his father taught” (cf. 7.11f.; AEL, I, pp. 75, 76). (Notice, it is never suggested that an institution is responsible for instruction.) A specific private domestic setting is seen in *ANY* with its instruction touching on household behaviour (towards the family shrine and Khonshotep’s mother). A private setting is also implied in *Amenemhet*; this setting presents Amenemhet speaking in revelation to his son concerning the problems he will immediately face on inheriting the kingdom. In *Ankhsheshonqy*, we read that Ankhsheshonqy writes down instruction on clay shards to be taken to his son because he cannot instruct in person. The literary data indicate that the tradition of instruction is carried on in private encounters between a father and son. The father may be presenting traditional wisdom in the instruction (which is as it appears), but a tradition *per se*, does not present instruction.

In reference to the second point, we might ask if one part of Instructional structure can be said to represent the ethos of Instruction more than another.<sup>143</sup> The instruction itself appears to have the “meat” of Instruction literature: it is where the “teaching” is located. However, the Instruction literature which survives in classroom copies shows that all three parts were copied by students. The narrative framework was a literary and pedagogical way to present the material. In the setting of formal education, all the parts of the Instruction were important. Also, it is only by virtue of this structure that this literature survives as Instruction.

It is also germane to note that only in the narrative framework is the setting for the instruction event presented, and it is only in this material that we learn that instruction was not always willingly accepted by the instructed. In *ANY*’s epilogue, we read of the refusal of Any’s son to accept instruction. In the introduction to *Lansing*, we read Wenemdiamun’s resistance to instruction (giving in only to physical punishment). In focusing exclusively on the instruction part of Instruction, we fail to notice Instruction’s acknowledgement of the resistance which many had towards it. Consequently, this critique of instruction is easy to overlook when the narrative framework is ignored.<sup>144</sup>

The structural similarity of ANE Instruction which has previously claimed

the attention of scholars has been that between their instructions. But is the similarity between maxims or proverbs really all that significant?<sup>145</sup> For example, does pointing out the many similar instructions in *Amenemope* and Proverbs give a good indication of their similarity as compositions? In fact, this comparison of Proverbs and *Amenemope* requires us to forget that each Instruction is a composition. In contrast to this, the structural similarity of ANE Instruction as identified in this study (its three-part form) did not result in similarity of content. Each introduction, though it covers the same basic ground (in other words, identifies the instructor and the addressee), displays a great variety of expression which is seen clearly in the longer introductions. Some of the instruction is highly organized under headings in chapters (e.g. *Ptahhotep* and *Amenemope*) and some is not; some instruction presents personal observations (*Merikare*, *Amenemhet*, and *ANY*) and some is generic. The epilogues may present dialogue or apologetic. We conclude that the similarity shared by Instruction is in form not content. Also, if any one part of the structure of the Instruction is to provide insight into the world of Instruction, it must be the narrative framework since it is only in this material that self-reflection about instruction is found. The use of “instruction” to label the middle part of Instructional structure is unfortunate and misleading since this part of Instructional structure rarely contains any self-reflection. What, then, really is the “a general parallelism of thought or structure”<sup>146</sup> between ANE Instruction and the Book of Proverbs?

## **Part Two: The Form of Proverbs**

Since the work of Erman, significant points of contact between Israel’s wisdom literature and Egyptian instruction have been convincingly established.<sup>147</sup> While some studies have shown that Proverbs and Egyptian literature contain many of the same teachings and maxims, others have focused on the form of Egyptian Instruction. The latter studies have attempted to understand “Instructional form” in order to help identify materials in the Old Testament which show the influence of Egyptian Instruction. These studies have dealt primarily with the presence of

“Instruction” in Proverbs 1-9. As I will show, there is no collection of verses found in Prov. 1-9 which display the three-part Instructional form.

A parallel problem, based on the mistaken understanding of what constitutes an Egyptian Instruction, is found in the treatment of the book of Proverbs as a whole. Commentary on Proverbs presents that book as an edition of collections of proverbs (which are indicated by the titles at Prov. 1:1; 10:1; 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1).<sup>148</sup> Proverbs is not seen as a composition of one cloth, but as beads on a string. I ask why these titles are given enough formal significance to indicate seemingly **independent** compositions. The justification for placing significance on these titles is the same as was offered for the isolation of Instructions in Proverbs 1-9 (that they have one of the formal phrases “He said,” “These are the words of,” etc. which are thought indicative of the formal structure of an Egyptian Instruction) and as I have argued, these criterion are not sufficient to explain Instructional form.

Camp notes the lack of clarity used concerning the “form of Instruction,” and she points out the confusion this leads to when attempts are made to identify “Instruction” in Proverbs. She says,

We must return to the issue raised by the formal analyses of Whybray, McKane, and Bauer-Kayatz. All of these authors note the degrees of looseness in adherence to the instruction form in Prov. 1-9 and all of them attempt to offer an explanation for that looseness, based on their respective models of interpretation (McKane’s and Whybray’s being ‘progressive theological development’ and Bauer-Kayatz’s being ‘Egyptian background’). None, however, gives any consideration to the question of what the importance of the alteration in the form might be to the discussion of the form itself. What does it mean, in terms of literary form itself. What does it mean in terms of literary form and context of use, when an instruction is no longer quite an instruction?<sup>149</sup>

As has been noted in the first part of this chapter, the common understanding of form has not taken into account the narrative framework that is part of the structure of ANE Instruction. Biblical scholars have also failed to notice that even the transition from the pre-Demotic to the Demotic style of writing (which entailed a formal structural change in the use of language at the sentence-level) did not alter the overall structure of Egyptian Instruction. By overlooking aspects of ANE Instructional form and focusing on the “instruction” part of Instruction the contrast between the instructional and non-instructional material of Proverbs has



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been heightened (especially within Prov. 1-9). This is because by implicitly suggesting that Proverbs' instructional texts have ANE parallels, the remaining non-instructional material appears to have no such parallels. This could further imply that Proverbs' non-instructional material is outside the Instruction genre and a unique feature of Proverbs. However, as I argue below, all of the material found in the Book of Proverbs shares some aspect of ANE Instructional form.

Now that we have seen that the structure of ANE Instruction is its three-part form, I wish to examine whether these three parts apply to the three parts into which Proverbs has been customarily divided by scholarship (roughly the three parts of 1-9, 10-29 or 30, and 31).<sup>150</sup> If this is indeed the case, our observations on the relationship between the parts of ANE Instruction are then suggestive for Proverbs.<sup>151</sup>

I will argue in the remainder of this chapter that Proverbs does have an introduction which corresponds to the ANE Instructional "introduction." (The correspondence of Proverbs' instruction to ANE Instructional "instruction" and the correspondence of Proverbs epilogue to ANE Instructional "epilogue" are covered in chapters 4 and 5 of this study, though they will receive some comment in this chapter).

### *Comparing the Introduction of Proverbs and ANE Instructional Introductions*

The first matter which needs to be addressed is the extent of the introduction to Proverbs' instruction. On a formal level, the transition point between the introduction and the instruction of ANE Instruction, as we observed above, is not reliably based on the occurrence of special phrases (such as "He said to his son" or "My son"). As I pointed out, such phrases occur throughout many ANE Instructional introductions and do not indicate the beginning of the instruction. The best indication of the transition between the introduction and the instruction is a change in focus: from talking about instruction or the setting of instruction to the world at large. With respect to Proverbs, I hold that the transition between the introduction and instruction occurs at the end of Proverbs 9 and at the beginning of

Proverbs 10. Here the reader leaves the father's comparison of the invitations of the two women, to the world at large. Consider the last verses of Proverbs 9 and the first verses of Proverbs 10:

“Stolen water is sweet,  
and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.”  
[Says the Strange Woman. Solomon continues:]  
But he does not know that the dead are there,  
that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

A wise son makes a glad father,  
but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother.  
Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit,  
but righteousness delivers from death (Prov. 9:17-10:2).

It is at this point that the collection of proverbs (maxims) begins. Solomon leaves his presentation of the incarnation of wisdom and folly in the two women (his primary topic in chs. 7-9) and turns to look at the workings of everyday life. In Prov. 10:1 and following the behaviour found in the world at large is presented in order to instruct.

This change in focus or setting is not the only way in which the material of the introduction is differentiated from the material of the instruction. The introductory material also shows greater coherence than the individual maxims, or groups of maxims which compose the instruction.<sup>152</sup> The transition between Proverbs' introduction and instruction is indicated in a manner similar to other ANE Instructions.

My assertion that Prov. 1-9 is similar to other ANE introductions to Instruction calls into question the idea that Prov. 1-9 itself exhibits ANE Instructional form. It is to this question that we now turn. Since this study defines the form of ANE Instruction to be its three-part structure, material which is said to show influence of ANE Instruction must also display this three-part form. (If there are passages in Prov. 1-9 which show formal similarity to ANE Instruction, then these passages must have introductions, instruction, and epilogues.<sup>153</sup>) As we examine the material of Prov. 1-9 closer, we will see that there is no material within 1-9 which shows similarity to the instruction (or epilogue) of ANE Instruction.

The studies which have found “Instructional” material in Prov. 1-9 have

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placed too much emphasis on the formal significance of phrases like “My son.” We have seen that these phrases can occur more than once in introductions to Instruction, and are not a reliable indication of the beginning of instruction (cf. discussion above, pp. 39ff.). Since there exists Egyptian Instruction where the transition between introduction and instruction is not marked by any transitional phrase (only a change in focus), and since the occurrence of transitional phrases is not a reliable indication of instruction, the importance placed on these phrases as indication of instruction must be questioned. The “discovery” of Discourses or what is being called “Instruction” in Prov. 1-9 is questionable in as much as this material is identified by the presence of these special phrases.<sup>154</sup>

Apart from the formal dissimilarity (lack of narrative framework) between Prov. 1-9 and ANE Instruction, there is also little similarity between this material and the maxims of instruction. In fact, very little of the material of Prov. 1-9 could be called instruction. It consists primarily of instructional apologetic, observations of evil men and women, warnings against turning away from instruction, etc. (see further discussion of this below).

Having discounted the occurrence of material having formal similarity with ANE Instruction occurring within Prov. 1-9, I now ask: What are some expectations we would have for the introduction to Proverbs if it was to show similarity to ANE Instructional introductions? The variety of form and content for these long introductions shows great freedom in the expression of ANE Instructional introduction. However, there are minimum requirements: it must identify the instructor, his family, office, and addressee. Proverbs 1:1, “The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel,” fulfills the minimum requirements common to ANE introduction.<sup>155</sup> We are told that the name of the instructor responsible for the proverbs is Solomon.<sup>156</sup> We are told of his family--he is “son of David”--and we are told of his office--he is “king of Israel.”<sup>157</sup> Both statements locate the Instruction within the Hebrew tradition. The addressees are identified as “men” in 1:2, and in 1:8 we find the more familiar address to “my son.” Other superscriptions found throughout Proverbs do not diminish the importance of these opening

lines.<sup>158</sup>

Following immediately after the superscription, Prov. 1:2-6 expresses the importance and goal of the book:

**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--  
the wise man also may hear and increase in learning,  
and the man of understanding acquire skill,  
to understand a proverb and a figure,  
the words of the wise and their riddles (Prov. 1:2-6).<sup>159</sup>**

The instruction which Solomon is to present will fulfil all these claims. In 1:4, the simple and the young stand to gain from Solomon's instruction, and in 1:5, the wise and understanding can learn from Solomon's instruction; the implication in both passages is that all people will increase in wisdom as a result of Solomon's instruction.<sup>160</sup> These claims that all stand to benefit from Solomon's instruction do not conflict with the private instruction event between a father and son which, as I have said, was common to the introduction. As we will shortly see, Solomon turns to address his son and not the world at large. The son had better sit up and pay attention when this father speaks.

Yet, in Proverbs, it is not Solomon himself who is solely responsible for instruction. In 1:8 Solomon says,

**Hear, my son, your father's instruction  
and reject not your mother's teaching (Prov. 1:8).**

Solomon introduces the son's mother as a source of instruction. Further, Solomon in 1:20 introduces Wisdom herself as an instructor. In total, there are seven passages in Proverbs 1-9 (and a possible eighth) where the instructors of wisdom are named.<sup>161</sup> In 1:8 and 6:20, both mother and father are the source of instruction.<sup>162</sup> The father (who is understood as Solomon) is again mentioned in 4:1 as offering his son the instruction with which his father had taught him (4:4).<sup>163</sup> In two further references, 1:20-21 and 8:4, Solomon presents the words of Woman Wisdom herself who is doing the instructing.<sup>164</sup> However, we are to understand that her words are being given to the son by Solomon (while the son is encouraged to seek her out,

within the introduction he never has direct contact with her).

In all of the Instructions covered to this point, the instructors have been male. However, where the instructors are identified in the seven passages from Proverbs outside the superscription, the instructors are exclusively male only twice (and only in the passage of chapter 4). Of the remaining references, there are both male and female instructors,<sup>165</sup> and in three, Woman Wisdom is instructor (but as noted above, Solomon speaks through her). There are six places where a section begins with the phrase, “my son,” but since the instructor is not identified at these places, the instructor could be Solomon, the son’s mother, or Solomon speaking for Woman Wisdom. The words offered by these various instructors are: advice to put instruction first, warnings to stay away from those who draw one away from instruction, and exhortations to listen and otherwise be attentive to instruction. These words do not constitute instruction proper; rather, they are apologetic, recommending instruction.

The setting envisaged in the introduction for the teaching process changes along with the instructor. When both father and mother are mentioned, the setting could be in any home:

Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction, do not reject your mother’s teaching (Prov. 1:8).

Keep your father’s principle, my son, do not spurn your mother’s teaching (Prov. 6:20).

The short passages that follow these opening lines show no evidence of a special location (e.g. that of the royal court, marketplace, or city gate) other than a home. These passages offer apologetic about the importance of instruction, such as could be offered by any parents in Israel regardless of socio-economic status.

Similarly, the words about instruction introduced by fathers in Prov. 4, do not require a specific setting:

Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction; pay attention, and learn what clear perception is. (Prov. 4:1).

This is what he [my father] used to teach me, ‘Let your heart treasure what I have to say, keep my principles and you shall live’ (Prov. 4:1).

There is no reason to suggest a setting which differs from the domestic setting of the parents.

The setting for Woman Wisdom's instruction is, in contrast, stated specifically: 1:20-21 identifies the public streets, the city gate, and the public square as Woman Wisdom's place of instruction. 8:2-3 speaks of Woman Wisdom's place of instruction as being outside the city. Though outside the city walls, she still instructs in heavily travelled and popular spots, such as at crossroads (8:2), and at the approaches to the city gates (8:3). Whether inside the city or outside, she addresses her audience in public places. In 9:1-6, it is true, she deviates from this public setting by inviting people into her house for a meal; nonetheless, in spite of leaving the public arena, her invitation goes out in public to all who can hear because her invitation is recited by her maidservants from the high points of the city.

The settings found in the ANE Instruction are either the home, gaol, or school; nowhere is a public setting for instruction suggested. The setting of Solomon's instruction is similar: a private talk with his son. However, when Solomon presents Woman Wisdom as an instructor, he tells his son that her instruction takes place in public. Granted, Solomon is describing the public nature of Woman Wisdom's instruction in the private setting with his son; nevertheless, he is telling the son that the instruction he should seek after is not found in the private instructional event between father and son, but out on the street.

So far we have seen that Prov. 1-9 has these things in common with ANE instructions: 1) Prov. 1:1 identifies the instructor of Proverbs in a manner similar to other introductions; and the setting of the instruction is between a father and his son.<sup>166</sup> 2) Much of the introductory material is instructional apologetic, and 3) the end of the introduction and the start of the instruction are marked by a change in focus.

One difference between Prov. 1-9 and other introductions is that the instructor of Proverbs presents another instructor to his son as a better instructor: Woman Wisdom. Since she is being presented by Solomon, the Wisdom poems are still formally the words of Solomon and, in this respect, are part of Solomon's narrative introducing instruction. Therefore, Prov. 1-9's formal similarity to ANE introductions is not in question because only one instructor offers instruction. Still,

the words and setting Solomon describes as Woman Wisdom's, challenge the very tradition of ANE Instruction which he represents. Solomon presents Woman Wisdom as the instructor the son should really seek out, implying that the private instruction between a father and son is of limited worth. Solomon presents Woman Wisdom's name, family, and office in Prov. 8 (almost legitimizing Woman Wisdom as an instructor with credentials expected by readers familiar to ANE Instruction). Solomon is challenging the ANE tradition of father-to-son instruction common to all ANE Instruction by telling his son to seek out a woman who is not remotely related to him. On the surface, these challenges to the tradition of ANE Instruction are diminished because they are presented as the words of Solomon who, as a male king speaking to his son about instruction, ties Prov. 1-9 to the tradition of ANE Instruction. Nevertheless, Woman Wisdom adds something unique to the ANE Instructional tradition. (The challenge to the tradition of ANE Instruction Solomon brings by exhorting his son to seek Woman Wisdom out is covered in more detail in chapter 3.)

We now turn to examine the material of Prov. 1-9 more systematically, paying particular attention to my claim that there is no "instruction" present but only instructional apologetic. The introduction to Proverbs (1-9) does not consist of two types of material, passages which express "Instructional" form and those passages which do not exhibit this form. I will argue that all the material of Prov. 1-9 is comparable to the introductions of ANE Instruction, in that it talks about instruction, rather than presenting instruction proper.

In Prov. 1:8-19, Solomon begins by comparing instruction to garlands and pendants (v. 9). He then describes the lot of those who reject instruction and fall in with sinners (vv. 10-19).<sup>167</sup> Solomon tells his son that those who associate with sinners and abandon instruction end in death (v. 19). In the rest of the chapter (vv. 20-33), Solomon describes to his son Woman Wisdom, and quotes her words as she addresses people who have refused to heed instruction (vv. 23-25, 28-32). These reported words of Woman Wisdom's are similar to those Solomon has spoken directly; the end of those who turn from instruction is death.<sup>168</sup> This is instructional

apologetic.

Proverbs 2 begins with the conditional statements of vv. 1-4. If the son will treasure the injunctions of the instructor, keep his ears attuned to wisdom, and set his mind on understanding, etc., then (v. 5) the son will discover knowledge of God. Vv. 6-7a explain this condition by asserting that the Lord gives wisdom, knowledge, discernment, and judgment.<sup>169</sup> Solomon is claiming that by giving attention to instruction, one is hearing the instruction of God. Solomon also says that those who are attuned to instruction will be protected by God. God is the shield of “those who walk in integrity” (v. 7b), and the force guarding their path (v. 8).<sup>170</sup>

The focus changes in v. 10, from God to wisdom, that is, from God’s protection to wisdom’s protection (seemingly a change in name only):

For wisdom will come into your heart,  
and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul;  
discretion will watch over you;  
understanding will guard you;  
delivering you from the way of evil,  
... (vv. 10-12a)

Where does the wisdom of v. 10 come from? V. 6 has already said that “the Lord gives Wisdom.” This wisdom, given by the Lord, provides protection from the wicked (v. 12), from dishonest and evil people (vv. 13-14), from crooked and devious men (v. 15), and from the foreign woman (vv. 16-19). These verses teach about wisdom itself, suggesting that the protection offered by wisdom is similar to the protection offered by God.<sup>171</sup>

Prov. 3:1-12 is comprised of couplets regarding one’s relationship with God, and is religious rather than instructional. The son is reminded to be devout: to keep God first in thought and in deed and to always give God his first fruits. God will bless the son’s devotion with abundance. Prov. 3:13-20 describes the benefits people gain in finding wisdom.

Prov. 3:21-35 focuses, as did Prov. 2, on the protective aspect of wisdom. This section begins with the protection provided by wisdom and switches to the protection provided by the Lord (v. 26). Solomon’s descriptions of the protection of God and of wisdom are nearly interchangeable (Wisdom provides life [v. 22], and



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protects from fear [v. 24] and panic [v. 25]). Vv. 27-31 contain a list of ethical prohibitions which, with respect to vv. 31-35, suggests that a person who exhibits unethical behaviour is abominable to the Lord and under the Lord's curse. Since God controls access to wisdom, to be outside God's favor is to be without wisdom. Solomon says positively that if the son keeps wisdom in sight he will gain protection from evil, but if the son does what is displeasing to God, the Lord's curse is upon him (v. 33), and he will not gain wisdom.

In Prov. 4:1-9 Solomon is presenting instruction which he had received as a child. Repeatedly Solomon stresses that what he learned about wisdom (Prov. 4:5b-9) was that if he sought wisdom first and sought wisdom more than wealth (cf. Prov. 3:13-15; 4:4-9), then wealth, honour, and long life would follow (Prov. 3:16, 18; 4:8-9).<sup>172</sup>

In Prov. 4:10-19, Solomon presents to his son the choice between holding on to instruction which will make his life easy:

Keep hold of instruction, do not let go;  
guard her for she is your life (Prov. 4:13),

or turning away from instruction towards the wicked and sure destruction:

The way of the wicked is like deep darkness;  
they do not know over what they stumble (Prov. 4:20).

Solomon presents the choices between instruction that leads to life (v. 13), and the way of the wicked. This discourse offers an apologetic for holding on to instruction that brings life.

Prov. 4:20-26 equates instruction with life, pointing to instruction yet to come and emphasizing the power in words and correct speech.

Prov. 5 begins with Solomon's call for his son's attentiveness to his instruction. This attentiveness will protect him from the "loose woman" described in vv. 3ff. If the son will listen to instruction and knowledge he will have no cause for regret in later life (vv. 12-14). Vv. 15-20 concern the gain to be had from fidelity towards one's wife and the danger of turning away from her. The plight of the wicked is described in vv. 21-23. Prov. 5 ends as it starts, stating that to turn aside from instruction leads to loss of life.

In Prov. 6:1-5, Solomon admonishes his son to fulfil all the obligations he has already committed himself to. The son must be able to give instruction his full attention. Solomon goes on and criticizes his son for being lazy (6:6-11), describes the life of the evil (6:12-15), and tells his son about behaviour that is displeasing to the Lord (6:16-19). These are all words of advice the son must follow to make himself ready for instruction.

Prov. 6:20-35 begins by listing the advantages acquired by one who binds himself to wisdom. Instruction will provide guidance, protection--from the Evil Woman (v.24), company (v. 22), and life (v. 23). The remainder of this chapter gives instruction on the evils of illicit sexual encounters (vv. 25-35). These verses offer an apologetic for wisdom. Solomon is telling his son that the son's relationship with wisdom will protect him from this destructive woman.

Prov. 7:1-27, begins "Keep my instructions if you would find life" (v. 2). V. 5 recounts the protection offered by wisdom based on a new relationship with wisdom suggested in v. 4, "Say to Wisdom, 'You are my sister'." Solomon is advising his son to approach wisdom with the fervor with which one approaches a wife.<sup>173</sup> The next section of this chapter, vv. 6-23, presents the encounter of a "cult" prostitute and a young man (not clinging to wisdom). The prostitute convinces him to come home with her to a cultic meal and a night of love-making. The youth goes with her not realizing the result of this encounter. Solomon ends the story by saying that the prostitute leads to death (vv. 17-24). Prov. 7 is implying that if the son seeks after wisdom as a wife, he will not be diverted into the arms of the loose woman with its disastrous consequences.

In the final two chapters of the introduction, Solomon introduces Woman Wisdom to the son. In Prov. 8:1-21, Solomon quotes the words Woman Wisdom speaks at the crossroads and at the approaches to the city gate. He describes how she is the source of wealth and honour, as well as the counsel which kings and princes have (8:14-15). In Prov. 8:22ff., presents Wisdom's history, her association with God (family ties?), and her office almost in the "style" in which Solomon is presented in Prov. 1:1. In the last chapter of the introduction, Wisdom has prepared

a feast to which all are invited.<sup>174</sup>

Solomon in the first half of the introduction (chs. 1-4) talks about wisdom and instruction as abstract concepts. In the last half of the introduction, wisdom and instruction have become enfolded in Woman Wisdom. The exhortations of putting wisdom foremost (e.g. Prov. 2:10-12) becomes exhortations to hold on to wisdom as if she were a wife (e.g. Prov. 4:13). In the first half of the introduction, wisdom offers protection against sinners and evil (Prov. 1:10-19 and 2:11-12), whereas Woman Wisdom offers protection against the “evil” woman found mostly in the second half of the chapter.<sup>175</sup>

The minimum expectations we have about introductions to ANE Instruction have been met in Prov. 1:1. The instructor of Proverbs, Solomon, is identified. Solomon begins his introduction to instruction by reminiscing about his own personal experience of wisdom. He knows that riches, honour, and long life are the benefits of placing wisdom first. Gradually these fond memories of what he learned about wisdom give way and he turns to presenting the serious bond with wisdom he wishes his son to enter into. We have also noted that the content of Proverbs introduction is instructional apologetic. The son is told that by placing wisdom first, wealth, honour, and long life will follow. It was shown that the apologetic for wisdom of the first chapters of the introduction is attributed to the concrete figure of Woman Wisdom in the last chapters. Woman Wisdom, as her name suggests, becomes the incarnation of wisdom. Solomon presents Woman Wisdom to his son as his true desire. If the son seeks after Wisdom as a lover, he will gain protection from evil, riches, honour, and life. Solomon begins by offering instruction and wisdom in the abstract, and ends by presenting these concepts incarnated in a woman he calls Wisdom.

In comparison to the other ANE introductions, the innovations of Proverbs are: the instructor recommending another source for instruction, the outside or public setting as the preferred place for this instruction, the suggestion that a woman may be the best instructor, and that marriage is a good analogy to the depth of

relationship the son should have with this instructor. Can these innovations be explained by assuming that Proverbs' introduction is addressing a specific context? Is there a conceptual tradition presented outside of Proverbs that explains the introduction to instruction which Proverbs presents? We now turn to an examination of a biblical tradition that Proverbs seems to address.

## ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Examples of some summaries of the forms of wisdom literature which fail to mention either Instruction or instruction (the significance of the case of the first letter to be expounded on in this chapter, see also Table of Abbreviations) are: Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), Table 28: Genres in Wisdom Literature, p. 565; James Crenshaw, "Prolegomenon" in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (ed. James L. Crenshaw, New York: KTAV, 1976), pp. 1-60; cf. pp. 13-16 (Crenshaw does identify a form called instruction [p. 15], however this is a type of proverb [after McKane] and is not a different form *per se.*); Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), Chapter Three: The Forms in Which Knowledge is Expressed, pp. 24-50; R.B.Y. Scott, "The Study of Wisdom Literature" *Interp* 24 [1970], pp. 20-45, p. 29; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (trs. Peter R. Ackroyd, New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 81-87.

<sup>2</sup> Whybray cites six criteria used in the identification of the Ten Discourses (his term for material of the "Instructional genre" found in Prov. 1-9). They are:

- i. They all begin with the word 'my son[s]'
- ii. They all command the pupil to 'hear', 'receive', 'not forget', etc., the instruction which follows. (The conditional form of 2:1ff. had the same force as the imperative of the others.)
- iii. They all assert the personal authority of the teacher.  
(Note the frequency of the pronominal suffix "my".)
- iv. They all assert or imply the great value and utility of the teacher's words. This is expressed in various ways: their observance confers a long and happy life (3:2, 22; 4:10, 22; 7:2); they are a guide through the difficulties of life (3:2, 23f.; 6:22); they beautify the person who observes them (1:9; 3:22); they are identified with understanding, sound wisdom, discretion, etc.; they are to be kept on the heart as a treasure, etc. (2:22; 4:21; 6:21; 7:3).
- v. There is no reference whatever to any authority beyond that of the teacher himself.
- vi. In distinction from many other passages in Prov. 1-9, the word 'wisdom', which only occurs twice (4:11; 5:1), means ordinary human wisdom, and is not a word of any special significance. The teacher calls it 'my wisdom' (5:1) and equates it with 'understanding' (*tebuna*, 5:1) and 'virtue' (*yoser*, 4:11). No claim to divine inspiration is made, nor is wisdom in any way personified (here Whybray refers to pp. 40ff. for his reasons). (R. N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9.45* [London: SCM, 1965], pp. 34-35.)

<sup>3</sup> Scott uses the following criteria to isolate the discourse material:

[Discourses] have a common structure--the summons to attention, a statement of motive, an exhortation to embrace wisdom and/or to avoid folly, and a prediction of the consequences of doing one or the other. The note of moral admonition is stern and consistent, and the wisdom urged upon the hearers is ethical obedience rather than intellectual development.

The knowledge that matters (for Scott, the content of the discourse material), is knowledge of the way to live well, springing from deep and genuine religious feelings (R.B.Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*. [AB 18; New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965], pp. 15-16).

See also his discussion of the "discourse" in *The Way of Wisdom in the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 57-58.

<sup>4</sup> In another book Scott does cite Egyptian Instruction; nevertheless he does not identify the formal elements of introduction or instruction found in Instruction (though he does cite introductory material found in *Ptahhotep, Amenemope, Ankhsheshonqy, and Satire of the Trades*, see R.B.Y. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom: In the Old Testament* [New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1971], pp. 26-33). After his brief survey of these and other instructions the only formal element Scott identifies is the "father-to-son" form.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Lang, *Die weisheitliche Lehrrede: eine Untersuchung von Sprüche 1-7* (Stuttgarter Bibel-Studien 54; Stuttgart: KBW, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> Roland Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther*

(FTOL vol. 13; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Murphy does not define specifically the distinctive characteristics of the form of Egyptian Instruction, though he must have something in mind. He seems to be in general agreement with Whybray and Scott concerning ANE Instructions' distinctive features. However, in his comments on isolating material which shows influence of Egyptian Instruction he says, "at the present time it seems safe to say that the author of Proverbs 1-9 wrote instructional poems that share in the Egyptian tradition, but are marked by alphabetizing considerations" (Murphy, 1981: 52, emp. mine). Note that the "alphabetizing concerns" (pointed out by Skehan) is a "new" criterion of the Instructional form. Murphy makes no comment on whether or not "alphabetizing concerns" are found in Egyptian Instruction or is unique to Hebraic Instruction, and if unique to Hebraic Instruction how it shares in the "Egyptian tradition" (neither Murphy or Skehan demonstrate that "alphabetizing concerns" are a feature of ANE Instruction).

<sup>8</sup> He analyzes the form of: *Ptahhotep*, *Kagemni*, *Merikare*, *Amenemhet I*, *Satire of the Trades*, *Papyrus Lansing*, *ANY*, *Amenemope*, *Ankhsheshonqy*, *The Counsels of Wisdom*, and *Ahikar*. William McKane, *Proverbs* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> Murphy distinguishes McKane's study as "more grammatical than form-critical" (Murphy, 1981: 51). McKane was concerned with the sentence-unit of Instructional Literature. This focus allows him to make his primary distinction between the "wisdom sentence" and "Instructional genre" (McKane, 1970: vii, 3, 262f.).

<sup>10</sup> McKane, 1970: vii, 3, 262f. In his comments concerning the Instructions of *Ankhsheshonqy* and *Ahikar*, he says, ". . . the case of *Ahikar* is similar to that of *Ankhsheshonqy*, in that only a small part of the material consists of instructions conveyed in the imperative or jussive" (McKane's measure of "instruction," 1970: 156); McKane also divides the Instructions of *Ahikar* and *Ankhsheshonqy* into instructional and non-instructional material based his grammatical considerations (cf. pp. 119-124, 139ff.). McKane does not comment on the ramifications of the existence of this "non-instruction" within ANE "Instructional" texts.

<sup>11</sup> For example, he comments: "the main element of the form [of *Ptahhotep*, and *Merikare*] is the imperative" (McKane, 1970: 75). The next two important formal elements are the conditional and motive clauses (pp. 75ff.). All are formal aspects of sentences and not longer units. The existence of approximately the first 50 lines of *Ptahhotep* (of approx. 650 lines), while identified as "preliminary remarks" (p. 51), receive no further notice. The formal existence of "a concluding narrative" to *Kagemni* receives no examination (p. 65). While *ANY* contains a rather lengthy epilogue, this feature does not receive notice (granted, Wilson does not include this epilogue in his translation in ANET, though he does note its existence in his introduction to *ANY*). McKane skips the material found in 1.1-3.1 in *Amenemope* and goes straight to chapter 1 which follows these lines (though he does note that there could be a similarity between the "preamble" to *Amenemope* and Prov. 2:1-9). McKane's formal evaluation of *Ankhsheshonqy* begins at 7.9f., with no mention of the chapters which precede 7. In all these cases, McKane's examination of the Egyptian material concerns selected materials of the Instruction. The other non-instructional materials found in Instruction and their influence on determining the "instruction form" do not interest McKane. His focus is on the instructional sentence, or more exactly, the mood of the verb in the sentence. He comments that Prov. 1:20-33 is not of the "Instruction genre" because, "there is not a single imperative, which is of the essence of the Instruction" (1970: 277). Thus what McKane calls the form of "Instruction" is not its form at all, rather he offers a discussion of the form of one of Instructions constituent parts, "instruction."

<sup>12</sup> Bauer-Kayatz was interested in the overall form and contents of the Instructions (Christa Bauer-Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1-9* [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966]). However, like McKane, she never mentions the epilogue of *ANY* (though she does mention the epilogue to *Ptahhotep*, she is more interested in the relation between MAAT and instruction than the epilogue's formal features), or the introductions to *Ptahhotep*, *Amenemope*, or *Ankhsheshonqy*. She does identify a form called "Prolog" (1966: 24-26), which precedes the instruction (Whybray calls this "preface," 1965: 38-39). But the "Prolog" material Bauer-Kayatz cites from *Ptahhotep*, *The Satire of the Trades* (Cheti), and *Amenemope* (pp. 24-25), is representative of only a small part of the material which precedes the instruction and she does not comment on the existence of this material. By not including

all of the “Prolog” material, or even acknowledging its existence, Bauer-Kayatz’s form “Prolog” is of limited use.

Bauer-Kayatz has observed that the compositional form (on the sentence-level) of Prov. 1-9 and 10ff. is different and this difference is similar to the variation between the compositional form (on the sentence-level) of Pre-Demotic Instruction and Demotic Instruction. However, this alone cannot support the separation of Prov. 1-9 from 10ff. as it seems to for Bauer-Kayatz (she focus exclusively on the Egyptian background to Prov. 1-9 as if Prov. 10ff. has a less legitimate background in Egyptian literature).

If one is interested in the way sentences are tied together in different literatures, distinctions between compositional form on the sentence-level are important. However, Bauer-Kayatz’s comments say nothing about the overall structure of Egyptian Instruction (or Proverbs for that matter) though her comments have been taken to be more comprehensive than they should (see Miriam Lichtheim, *Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the International context: A Study of Demotic Instructions* [Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983], p. 5.).

<sup>13</sup> James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Crenshaw presents the information found in this material such as the instructor’s name and the occasion of the instruction event, yet does not note its significance to Instructions’ overall structure. The exceptions to this are his examination of *Amenemope* where he does acknowledge its lengthy “introduction” and its “final chapter . . . [which] describes the contents as entertaining, instructive, and powerful” (1981: 220), and his identification of the introduction to *Anksheshonqy* as “opening narrative” (1981: 222). However, he does not treat this material as if it is part of Instruction and almost all the material which he quotes from the Instructions is from their respective instruction.

<sup>15</sup> It is hard to determine which has been more formative for this view: that the dated and incomplete translations of this material in ANET (which remains the primary source-book for ANE Instruction for biblical scholars) is deemed representative of “Instruction,” or that the distinction between Instruction and instruction remains unarticulated. On the latter, see Table 28 in Gottwald in which the genres of wisdom literature are listed. Instruction is not found in the list while instruction is (listed under *Didactic proverb*; Gottwald, 1985: 565).

<sup>16</sup> 1983: 6. Her discussion of the differences between Demotic and Pre-Demotic Instruction on pp. 1-12 is confusing, at best, which is due in part to her failure to distinguish between Instruction and instruction (which is one point this chapter will clarify, see the Table of Abbreviations).

<sup>17</sup> Lichtheim (1983: 6-7). The best examples of Instruction made up of these “larger compositional units” are *Ptahhotep* and *Amenemope*. Lichtheim gives the impression this feature of composition is exclusive to the instruction (the thirty-seven maxims of *Ptahhotep* and the thirty chapters of *Amenemope*), however the introduction to *Ptahhotep* contains two “long poetic speeches” addressed to Pharaoh, and the introduction to *Amenemope* is a longer “poetic” unit than any of the thirty chapters of instruction (see further discussion pp. 11, 21, 23). It is important to note, as it is too easily overlooked, that the “larger compositional units” indicative of Pre-Demotic instruction are also characteristic of Pre-Demotic introductions and epilogues, or the totality of Pre-Demotic Instruction. The “larger compositional units” which are a feature of Pre-Demotic Instruction are subsumed by the three-part form of ANE Instruction (which is common to Pre-Demotic and Demotic Instruction). In general, Lichtheim is not clear in her comments on the composition of Demotic and Pre-Demotic literature and too often gives the impression that something is a distinctive feature of instruction when it is true of the totality of Instruction.

Though she does not broach the subject her observations question the extent of “borrowing” or “dependence” found between Prov. 22:17-24:22 and *Amenemope* on a strict formal level (sentence-level). While the sayings which appear in this section of Proverbs are linked, and so differ from the presentation of sayings just prior (10-22:17), they are nowhere as thoroughly integrated as are the sayings found in chapter divisions of *Amenemope*. This is surprising because there are similar themes--and in some instances, similar sayings--which leads one to expect shared form. Proverbs has, by comparison, fragmented *Amenemope*’s presentation. This does not need, however, to reflect negatively on the writer of Proverbs as “less developed,” as Gemser suggested (Berend Gemser, “The Instructions of ‘Onksheshonqy and Biblical Wisdom Literature’”, in *Studies in Ancient Israelite*

*Wisdom* [ed. J. L. Crenshaw; New York: Ktav Pub. House, 1960], pp. 134-160); neither does it suggest, at a macro-level, that one is Instruction and the other not.

<sup>18</sup> Lichtheim comments that the composition of Demotic Instruction is “written in such a way that each sentence occupies one line on the page.” She calls this form of composition “monostichic composition” (1983: 1). The distinction between the introduction of Demotic Instruction and its instruction is that the “monostichic composition” of the introduction establishes a narrative context for the “monostichic composition” of the instruction; to serve this purpose, its sentences are integrated together in a manner not required by instruction (see further discussion p. 29).

<sup>19</sup> This distinction between length of compositional units in Egyptian literature of different periods has been seen by some to be suggestive for the division of Proverbs into chs. 1-9 and 10ff. For example, Lichtheim (citing Bauer-Kayatz) says, “the long poetic speeches of chapters 1-9 are structured in a manner comparable to the integrated sequences of Egyptian Instructions, whereas the collections of self-contained two-sentence sayings [Prov. 10ff.] have no counterparts in Egyptian wisdom prior to the Demotic Instructions” (1983: 6; Lichtheim means instruction for Instruction). This discrimination cannot suggest that the whole of Proverbs is not an integrated composition, as is implied. As we will see in *Ankhseshonqy*, it is necessary for the introduction to present an integrated prose narrative setting up the “self-contained” instruction for the work as a whole to fit the Instructional form. The narrative framework, because of its purpose, has a greater degree of integration than the instruction.

<sup>20</sup> Lichtheim is addressing in particular Glanville’s claim that the Instruction was “for the guidance of the peasant farmer” and Gemser’s “view [that] the aphoristic single sentences represented ‘a less developed form of wisdom,’” as well as McKane’s assessment of *Ankhseshonqy* as a “popular” work (Lichtheim, 1983: 4-5).

<sup>21</sup> See Gemser’s similar comment, 1960: 128.

<sup>22</sup> As we will see, this feature is also common to Instruction found outside Egypt.

<sup>23</sup> AEL, I, p. 5. Lichtheim does not distinguish between Demotic and pre-Demotic here and this is important. At the macro-level, Pre-Demotic and Demotic Instruction share formal similarities which they do not share on the sentence-level (and consequently what is happening on the sentence level is unimportant to the form of Instruction).

In her introduction to *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Lichtheim presents a short literary history of Egyptian literature. She focuses on the development of two types of literature. The first type--the Offering List--eventually evolved into the autobiography, which was an epitaphial “self-portrait” carrying one’s name to eternity. One aspect of this autobiography relevant to Instruction, was its “catalogue of virtues.” This is a stylized account of how the departed had lived a moral life in harmony with the divine order, and was therefore worthy of a good reception into the land of the dead.

Two things make the catalogue of virtues significant: first, that it reflected the ethical standards of the society; second, that it affirmed, in the form of a monumental inscription, to have practiced [*sic*] the precepts that the Instructions, written as literary works on papyrus, preached (AEL, I, p. 5).

The second major literary type, the Instructions, presented maxims and teaching on correct living. These brief maxims instructed one to be in harmony with the divine order. In Egypt’s hierarchic and parallel societies, the divine world was ordered by the rule of the sun-god as the divine king ordered the human world by his rule. The responsibility of the king to order the human world may explain the “stylistic device” of the narrative frame of a father instructing his son, which at first was the king instructing his son.

While Lichtheim never addresses this, her observations on the development of written literature in Egypt suggest that both branches of literature developed from descriptive to personal literature. The autobiographical epithet evolved from the list of offerings buried with the dead into a personal assessment of the dead’s life. Collections of maxims or teachings, when hung within the narrative framework of a father addressing his son, became Instruction. The “narrative-frame” is as important to the “form” of Instruction as the maxims and teachings, which it brackets, since the instruction only survives as Instruction.



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<sup>24</sup> AEL, I, p. 5. Lichtheim understands this framework to be an expression of literary convention not necessarily indicative of historical setting. The major argument against taking these attributions as genuine in the Old Egyptian Instructions, is that the Instructions of *Kagemni* and *Ptahhotep*, while recognized names of Old Kingdom officials, survive in the language of the Middle Kingdom.

Only the language of *Hardjedf* is sufficiently archaic to make it appear as an Old Kingdom work not subjected to major alteration. The assumption of major alterations in the course of the transmission of the works is a difficult one. There is nothing in our experience with the transmission of Egyptian Texts which parallels the assumed translation of Old Egyptian works into Middle Egyptian (AEL, I, p. 6).

Regardless of this pseudepigraphical attribution, it remains true that “contrary to all other literary works, whose authors remained anonymous, the Instruction was always transmitted in the name of a famous sage,” emphasizing the literary conventionality of the narrative framework (AEL, I, p. 6).

<sup>25</sup> She discusses the dating of some of these texts as a group in AEL, I, pp. 6ff.

<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that the assertion of an educational setting for these texts is based on archaeological evidence (the myriad of corrupt student copies), rather than inference from literary data.

<sup>27</sup> There is every reason to believe that this “father-to-son” form is indicative of a “domestic” origin for these texts, which later was adapted for schools. Even the Instructions of *The Satire of the Trades* and *Lansing* which seem to be more self-consciously tailored for scribal instruction in a school setting present private encounters.

<sup>28</sup> Part of the difference between the instruction and its bracketing material, as we will see, is that introductions and epilogues reflect on instruction (offering instructional apologetic) and do not provide instruction *per se*.

<sup>29</sup> AEL, I, pp. 58-59; ANET, pp. 419-420. All the translations used here and below in the Egyptian Instruction sections are Lichtheim’s except where noted. The Instructions are presented in the chronological sequence suggested by Lichtheim, ranging from *Hardjedef* (ca. 2450-2300 B.C.E.) to the Hellenistic Demotic Instructions of *Ankhsheshonqy* and *Insinger*.

<sup>30</sup> AEL, I, pp. 59-61; AE, pp. 66-67.

<sup>31</sup> McKane, 1970: 65.

<sup>32</sup> AE, p. 66.

<sup>33</sup> For example, in *The Instruction of Amenemhet I for His Son Sesostri I*, Amenemhet asks his son to remember his own assassination and evaluate his instruction in that light. Amenemhet says “no harm had come to me since my birth,” and because I was not prepared for the worst I was taken before “I had sat with you so as to advise you” (*Amenemhet*, 2.8, 5; AEL, I, p. 137). He tells his son not to be naive in the ways in which he was--look where he ended up. In *The Instruction of ANY*, Any also asks his son to evaluate his instruction with respect to the son’s life experience. Any asks his son to remember the care his mother had given him as a child: “Does not her care require you to care for her?” (cf. *ANY*, 7.17ff.)

<sup>34</sup> Could the phrase “after he had understood the ways of men” imply a written tradition or does it refer to life experience as I infer? In the Instruction literature there are many phrases which refer to a written tradition, such as the words “all that is written in this book, heed it as I said it” which occur in this epilogue. Other examples of instruction learned from a written tradition: “When he recited the words in the books” (*ANY*, cf. 9.16; AEL, II, p. 144); or instruction learned from other fixed traditions: “So as to tell him the words of those who heard,” “Instruct him then in the sayings of the past” (*Ptahhotep*, cf. 1.30, 38; AEL, I, p. 63). Ptahhotep’s words are especially germane since he is asking Pharaoh for permission to instruct his son; he wishes to instruct according to tradition. There is no indication that king Huni learned the instruction he passes on from any tradition.

<sup>35</sup> AEL, I, pp. 61-80; ANET, 412-414; AE, pp. 54-66.

<sup>36</sup> AEL, I, pp. 7, 62.

<sup>37</sup> AE, pp. 54-55; AEL, I, pp. 61-62.

<sup>38</sup> AEL, I, p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> It is important at this juncture to note that formally these two poetic “speeches” of the introduction are similar to the poetic chapters which make up the instruction. On the sentence-level, the form of the introduction and instruction is the same. Lichtheim says, Pre-Demotic Instruction (including *Ptahhotep*) is marked by “integrated poetic sequences,” “interconnected sentences,” “integrated speeches,” and “long poetic speeches” (1983: 2, 6). While Lichtheim is unclear whether the characteristic of “integrated poetic sequences” applies to Instruction or instruction, we can assert, on the basis of *Ptahhotep* (and *Amenemhet* also) that it is true of the whole of Instruction.

Of course Pre-Demotic introduction and instruction differ in content; the poetic speeches set up the narrative framework for the instruction whereas the poetic speeches of the instruction present Ptahhotep’s observations of the world and the wisdom of the past.

<sup>40</sup> Lichtheim here notes that “Staff of old age” is a metaphor for son or successor (AEL, I, p. 76, n. 3). Eрман likewise concurs, with his translation: “Let my son be set in my place, that I may instruct him in the discourse of them that hearken...” (AE, p. 55).

<sup>41</sup> Ptahhotep’s request is reminiscent of the *Ankhsheshonqy*. In the introduction to that Instruction, there is a dialogue between Ankhsheshonqy and his staff-bearer (more likely a guard, as Ankhsheshonqy is being held in Pharaoh’s gaol). Ankhsheshonqy says,

‘Let this favor be done to me through you. Let there be brought to me a palette and a papyrus roll, because I have a boy [whom] I have not yet been able to instruct. I shall write an instruction for him and have it taken to him in Heliopolis to instruct him thereby.’ The staff-bearer said: ‘I will report it to Pharaoh first.’ The staff-bearer reported it to Pharaoh first. Pharaoh commanded, saying: ‘let a palette be taken to him . . .’ (4.10-12; Lichtheim, 1983: 69).

Both Ptahhotep and Ankhsheshonqy acknowledge that instruction, professional in the former and personal (though, it could be argued, professional also) in the latter, is an established social function for which they must receive Pharaoh’s permission.

<sup>42</sup> The lines which follow “Said the majesty of this god” (4.37ff.) are understood as the order which authorizes Ptahhotep’s instruction.

<sup>43</sup> Note that the transition to the instruction is also marked by a change in form from this last prose section to the beginning of the maxims.

<sup>44</sup> The many chapters of the instruction which instruct correct behaviour in the presence of a superior challenge the simple assertion that the addressee of this material is a successor of Ptahhotep’s standing. In fact this instruction is for subordinates and could not be limited to anyone from the “upper classes” at all. For example, chapter 2 directs the addressee in a dispute with a superior to back down, “fold your arm, bend your back . . .” This is echoed in ch. 31, “Bend your back to your superior,/Your overseer from the palace . . . Wretched is he who opposes a superior,/one lives as long as he is mild . . .”

<sup>45</sup> Compare this self-effacing instruction (see above note) to McKane’s understanding of Egyptian Instruction’s world-view (1970: 62-63).

<sup>46</sup> In this first lengthy epilogue it may appear that the material called epilogue does not differ from instruction. Looking closely one sees that a transition has indeed been made from the instruction. The subject matter of the epilogue is not the world at large but instruction and the reception of instruction.

<sup>47</sup> As in *Kagemni*, instructional literature has authority over other forms of presenting

instruction, such as life experience. Where there could be exhortations for the “son” to weigh his own observations, this option is not taken. The act of remembering the words is sufficient, so that “They [those instructed] will not perish in this land.”

<sup>48</sup> The tradition of the transmission of instruction is reflected in the following passages:

A son who hears is a follower of Horus,  
It goes well with him when he has heard.  
When he is old, has reached veneration,  
He will speak likewise to his children,  
Renewing the teaching of his father.  
Every man teaches as he acts,  
He will speak to the children,  
So that they will speak to their children . . . (17.10ff.; AEL, I, p. 75).

How good is he whom his father taught;  
When he came forth from his body,  
He told him all that was in his mind  
And he does even more than he was told (cf. 19.1f.; AEL, I, p. 76).

<sup>49</sup> AEL, I, pp. 97-109; ANET, 414-418; AE, pp. 75-84.

<sup>50</sup> Lichtheim does not reproduce the few words extant.

<sup>51</sup> Lichtheim says that while the name of the son is clear, “that of the father is lost except for the still visible outline of the cartouche and traces of two vertical hieroglyphs forming the end of the king’s name,” and restores it to Khety (though she make no further identification with the few kings known by that name; AEL, I, p. 97). Wilson does not attempt to reconstruct the king’s name (ANET, p. 415, n. 1).

<sup>52</sup> The stress on words can be seen here: “Copy your fathers, your ancestors ... /See, their words endure in books, /Open, read them, copy their knowledge” (ll. 35f.; AEL, I, p. 99).

<sup>53</sup> See discussion in A.H. Gardiner, “New Literary Works From Ancient Egypt”, *JEA* 1 (1914), pp. 20-36.

Some examples of the life experience used by the king reported in first person as instruction are:

I arose as lord of the city,  
Whose heart was sad because of the Northland;  
From Hetshenu to “Sempaqa”, and south to Two-Fish Channel  
I pacified the entire West as far as the coast of the sea (ll. 83-86; AEL, I, p. 103).

But as I live and shall be what I am,  
When Bowmen were a sealed wall,  
I breached [‘their strongholds’],  
I made Lower Egypt attack them,  
I captured their inhabitants,  
I seized their cattle,  
Until the Asiatics abhorred Egypt (ll. 95-101; AEL, I, p. 104).

Lo, a shameful deed occurred in my time:  
The nome of This was ravaged;  
Though it happened through my doing,  
I learned it after it was done (ll. 119-122; AEL, I, p. 105)

<sup>54</sup> While the introductions and epilogues are consciously tied together, the relation of this narrative frame to the instruction does not necessarily follow. For example, such is the case for much of the instruction of Ptahhotep, it is inappropriate instruction for the stature of a successor to Ptahhotep. In the case of *Ptahhotep*, the introduction and epilogue are specific, the instruction

“generic.”

<sup>55</sup> As Lichtheim presents it, ll. 133-150; AEL, I, pp. 106-107.

<sup>56</sup> Lichtheim calls this poem a “Hymn to a creator-god” (AEL, I, p. 98).

<sup>57</sup> Johs. Pedersen, “Wisdom and Immortality”, *VTSup* III (1960), pp. 238-239.

So far in our survey of Instruction there has not been any extended address to any deity. The occurrence of this hymn in the epilogue is unique among the extant epilogues.

<sup>58</sup> Nowhere in this poem is the god praised for instructing or teaching humans. Instead, the god is praised for the concern shown for humans. The god saves people from the water monster and from their enemies, he provides them with food, watches over them, hears their weeping, gives them “leaders to raise the back of the weak,” and generally upholds social justice and provides for their welfare (AEL, I, p. 106). Instruction is a human tradition.

<sup>59</sup> AEL, I, pp. 135-139; ANET, 418-419; AE, pp. 72-74.

<sup>60</sup> The phrase “he spoke in a revelation of truth” is an innovation which argues, along with “Risen as god, hear what I tell you” (1.2) and the insertion into the introduction of a prose account of the assassination of Amenemhet I (1.12-2.6), that this Instruction is presented as Amenemhet I’s instruction from the dead. To cast this instruction as delivery from the dead pharaoh to his son--which he must give in revelation because he was taken before he could exercise his role of instructing his son--affirms the importance of the social role of instruction in Egypt. This innovation--the use of descriptive prose narrative within the introduction--shows that there was no rigid notion of the appropriate form for the introduction to an Instruction.

<sup>61</sup> This poetic stanza is not instruction *per se* because it serves the narrative purpose of setting up the instruction. This material speaks of Amenemhet’s inability to accurately judge character, which Sesostrius would hear as arguing that all people, even those as great as Amenemhet, have something to learn. So like the poetic introductory material in *Ptahhotep*, this material is providing the reader with the reason for instruction. As the last line in the poetic stanza reads:

If one fights in the arena forgetful of the past,  
Success will elude him who ignores what he should know (1.11).

This is the reason the reader must pay attention to instruction. The instruction which follows the final prose paragraph (2.7) speaks of Amenemhet’s wise and successful governing.

<sup>62</sup> 2.5-6; AEL, I, p. 137.

<sup>63</sup> Lichtheim calls this first-person instruction “orational” (AEL, I, p. 136).

<sup>64</sup> AEL, II, pp. 135-146; ANET, pp. 420-421; AE, pp. 234-242.

<sup>65</sup> McKane argues that this instruction is “an educational manual for scribes” (1970: 92- 99; esp. 99). However, the variety of instruction about all areas of life (scribal behaviour is not emphasized above the rest) argues against this. Similar to other instruction which addresses a wide area of concern, there seems to be instruction for everybody. That *ANY* is a manual for the education of scribes is no more apparent than that it is a manual for priests, marriageable youths, children, and those who frequent dinner parties (the instruction gives advice about gluttony, and table manners).

<sup>66</sup> Erman understands the last words of the epilogue’s to be Any’s (AE, p. 242). However, Lichtheim’s reading is to be preferred.

<sup>67</sup> Any says:

One teaches the Nubian to speak Egyptian,  
The Syrian and other strangers too (10.5f.; AEL, II, p. 144).

The power of the mere words of instruction is clear; just to speak the words of instruction is to be wise.

## 1. The Form of ANE Instruction

<sup>68</sup> The image that comes to mind with respect to the use of Instruction in Egypt is a gathering of school boys copying down these instructions under the watchful eye of the instructor. This image is well substantiated archaeologically since so many Instructions survive on school tablets (as do the opening lines of *ANY*). We noticed the narration of the passive reception of the Instruction by the children in the epilogue to *Kagemni*. The epilogue to *ANY* would challenge any assertion that Instruction always requires passivity on the part of the recipient.

<sup>69</sup> AEL, II, pp. 146-163; ANET, pp.421-425. F.l. Griffith, "The Teaching of Amenophis, the son of Kanakht, Papyrus B.M. 10474", *JEA* 7 (1926), pp. 191-231.

<sup>70</sup> Adolf Erman, "Eine ägyptische Quell der 'Sprüche Salomos'", *Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 15 (1924), pp. 86-93; also Hugo Gressmann, "Die neugefundene Lehre des Amenemope und die vorexilische Spruchdichtung Israels", *ZAW* 42 (1924), pp. 272-296.

<sup>71</sup> The first and last chapter reflect on instruction rather than offering further instruction and I include these chapters as part of the narrative framework. For example, chapter 1 is an apology for instruction similar to the lines that opened the Instruction as a whole. For this reason I have included the first chapter with the prologue as introduction.

<sup>72</sup> "You will find my words a storehouse for life, your being will prosper upon the earth" (4.1; AEL, II, p. 149).

<sup>73</sup> Again I make the point that the form of the introduction and the instruction on the sentence-level (integrated sentences) are similar (cf. pp. 6, 11, 21, 23).

<sup>74</sup> Lichtheim makes this observation:

In *Amenemope* the genre Egyptian Instruction had attained its maximal integration and coherence through the concentration on a few themes and their organization by means of numbered chapters (1983: 3).

<sup>75</sup> Griffith, 1926: 226.

<sup>76</sup> Some clear examples of Amenemope's concern with the scribal function occur in chapters 12-16:

Do not desire a noble's wealth,  
Nor make free with a big mouthful of bread;  
If he sets you to manage his property,  
Shun his, and yours will prosper (15.9f.; AEL, II, p. 155).

Do not cheat a man [through] pen on scroll,  
The god abhors it;  
Do not assess a man who had nothing,  
And thus falsify your pen (15.20f.; AEL, II, p. 155).

Do not dip your pen to injure a man.  
The finger of the scribe is the beak of the Ibis,  
Beware of brushing it aside.  
The scribe who cheats with his finger,  
His son will not be enrolled (17.1f.; AEL, II, p. 156).

Do not move the scales nor alter the weights,  
Nor diminish the fractions of the measure;  
Do not desire a measure of the fields,  
Nor neglect those of the treasury (17.18f.; AEL, II, p. 156).

In general the instruction concerns the problems any young scribe would face in his office: the lust after wealth, the temptation of taking advantage of the less privileged, and the use of the scribal office for personal gain.

<sup>77</sup> For example,  
Keep your tongue from answering your superior,  
And take care not to insult him (9.15-16; AEL, II, p. 153).

Do not desire a noble's wealth . . . (15.9; AEL, II, p. 155).

Do not sit down in the beer-house  
In order to join one greater than you . . . (24.21f.; AEL, II, p. 160).

If you see one greater than you outdoors,  
Walk behind him respectfully (26.6-7; AEL, II, p. 161).

See also chapters 19, 21, 23.

<sup>78</sup> For example, this advice tells the scribes to be satisfied with what they have in life:  
Plow your fields and you'll find what you need . . . (7.17; AEL, II, p. 152).

Do not strain to seek increase,  
What you have, let it suffice you (9.14-15; AEL, II, p. 152).

Befriend a man of your own measure . . . (26.4; AEL, II, p. 160).  
See also chapters 7, 11, 12, 16, and 29.

<sup>79</sup> AEL, II, pp. 167-175; AE, pp. 67-72; A. M. Blackman, "Papyrus Lansing: A Translation with Notes", *JEA* 11 (1925), pp. 284-98.

<sup>80</sup> McKane, 1970: 87. *Lansing* and *The Satire of the Trades* appear to have been written to address a specific "instructor-student" relationship which later found currency in the school setting.

<sup>81</sup> Though Lichtheim calls *Lansing* a "schoolbook" rather than Instruction (although she calls it instruction [AEL, I, p. 167]) her distinction does not seem significant. She seems to base her distinction between "schoolbook" and "Instruction" on the survival of some texts as school copies (but then most Instruction survives as school copies), on the fact that some texts share the form "teacher-student," that some texts promote the scribal profession as greater than any other, and that these same texts emphasize the point "be a scribe." Texts of this kind participate in the "genre of texts which reflected the educational process and the relation between teacher and pupil" that Lichtheim calls "schoolbook" (AEL, I, p. 167). While Lichtheim gives the impression that *Lansing* is a minimally organized text, "now and then a scribe made a 'book' by selecting compositions on related themes and putting them in a meaningful order" (AEL, I, p. 167) this is not the case. As I argue, structurally the work is organized like all other Instruction.

Is the "teacher-student" form of *Lansing* important enough to distinguish it from Instruction? No, we see that all other instructors of Instructions have an office of some sort (Pharaoh, Vizier, Scribe, etc.) and a scribal teacher would qualify as an "office." Is the specific concern of the instruction--scribal education, the privileged position of the scribe, and behaviour at school--different from other instruction? *Satire of the Trades* has similar instruction to *Lansing* though it has the form "father-son". McKane notes the similarity of the instructional content of *Lansing*, *Satire of the Trades*, and *Ptahhotep* (1970: 86ff.). I take *Lansing* as a part of ANE Instruction as understood in this study.

Also, since *Lansing* differs on the sentence-level from other pre-Demotic Instruction we should be cautioned against assuming all pre-Demotic Egyptian Instruction are composed of poetic stanzas.

<sup>82</sup> Sections two and four begin with words similar to introductory phrases found in other Instructions: "The royal scribe and chief overseer of the cattle of Amen-Re, King of Gods, Nebmare-nakht, speaks to the scribe Wenemdiamun, as follows" (cf. 3.4f., AEL, II, p. 169).

<sup>83</sup> The frustration of Nebmare-nakht's attempts to instruct Wenemdiamun is palpable in passages such as this:

But though I beat you with every kind of stick, you do not listen . . . you are busy coming and going, and don't think of writing. You resist listening to me; you neglect

my teachings . . . though I spend the day telling you “write,” it seems like a plague to you” (AEL, II, p. 169)

<sup>84</sup> AEL, I, p. 128; ANET, p. 431; BAR, I, pp. 745-748; AE, pp. 84-85.

<sup>85</sup> This is the second “appeal to the living” on the monument (the first being on the recto). In both “appeals,” Sehetep-ib-Re addresses all who would pass by his funerary monument in the temple. He requests those who read his stela to offer a “prayer” for him.

<sup>86</sup> Its recitation of Sehetep-ib-Re’s behaviour in office and its account about how the monument came to be created and consecrated is similar to the introductory story in *Ptahhotep* (which tells of him attaining the permission necessary to instruct) and *Anksheshonqy* (which tells how he came to pass his instruction on). I grant that this passage describes the origin of the monument and not the “instruction” and does not include any reference to his children. Both represent important parts of introductions.

<sup>87</sup> Nimaatre, also known as Amenemhet II, 1840-1790 B.C.E. (ANET, p. 431).

<sup>88</sup> AEL, I, pp. 185-191; AE, pp. 67-72; ANET, pp. 432-434.

<sup>89</sup> AEL, I, p. 184.

<sup>90</sup> AEL, III, p. 184.

<sup>91</sup> AE, p. 68.

<sup>92</sup> For example, some of the instruction offered in this epilogue specific to Pepi’s future school life are:

If a quarrel breaks out,  
Do not approach the contenders! (cf. 9.5f., AEL, I, p. 190)

When you walk behind officials,  
Follow at a proper distance.  
When you enter a man’s house,  
And he’s busy with someone before you,  
Sit with your hand over your mouth (cf. 9.7ff., AEL, I, p. 190).

Do not tell lies against your mother,  
The magistrates abhor it. . . .  
Do not consort with a rowdy,  
It harms you when one hears of it (cf. 10.5ff., AEL, I, p. 191 ).

These personal references within the instruction remind the reader of the narrative framework surrounding the instruction. These personal instructions are similar to Amenemhet’s narration of his assassination attempt in that the overall instructional setting is recalled (cf. pp. 6, 11, 21, 23).

<sup>93</sup> Lichtheim, 1983: 66-92; AEL, III, pp. 159-184.

<sup>94</sup> Lichtheim, 1983: ix. Lichtheim also distinguishes the form of the Demotic instructions: “In contrast with earlier Egyptian instructional words, Demotic Instructions are composed of single sentences that are grammatically and logically complete and self-contained” (p. 1).

<sup>95</sup> See discussion of McKane’s treatment of “instructional form” on pp. 5f. above.

<sup>96</sup> For Gemser, the “monostichic composition” form is less developed than earlier instruction (he also believes that common people may have composed this instruction), and he warns that the existence of a less developed instructional form late in the history of Instruction seems to preclude any “evolutionary straight line of development of Egyptian wisdom . . .” (Gemser, 1960: 128).

Lichtheim suggests the view of *Anksheshonqy* as “common” or “folk” instruction held by McKane and Gemser arises from their acceptance of “Glanville’s opinion that the work was written ‘for the guidance of the peasant farmer,’ and this is accounted for the ‘rather elementary level’ of its morality” (Lichtheim, 1983: 4f.).

<sup>97</sup> Lichtheim, 1983: 1-2. “Such single-line maxims were of necessity prose sentences, since Egyptian poetic forms depended absolutely on the couplet and its derivatives” (p. 2).

<sup>98</sup> Lichtheim observes that while “Demotic narrative literature has been shown to have borrowed themes and motifs from Greek literary sources,” no similar study on Demotic Instruction has been done. She goes on to show the results of such a study. The Demotic writer of *Anksheshonqy* was familiar with the works and themes of versions of *Counsels of Wisdom, Advice to a Prince*, Greek Gnomologia, and proverbs common to many cultures (Lichtheim calls the latter “international proverbs” [Lichtheim, 1983: 13-65]). “It is probable that the Demotic writer was also familiar with the Ahikar Story, and that his own introductory narration owed something to it, especially the motif of the sage as prisoner” (1983: 21-22).

<sup>99</sup> This passage is also reminiscent of Ptahhotep seeking the pharaoh’s permission prior to the instruction of his son or successor.

<sup>100</sup> These lines all begin with “If Pre is angry with a land . . .” and all end with different examples of the “world turned upside down.” This complaint must imply that the inversion of justice in gaoling innocents is equivalent to the upside-downness of Pre’s anger.

<sup>101</sup> Lichtheim, 1983: 21f.

<sup>102</sup> In *Ahikar*, Ahikar is presented as a man renowned for wisdom, a great wise man. He chooses to instruct his sister’s son Nadin. After receiving Ahikar’s instruction, Nadin turns on and imprisons his instructor. The great wisdom of Ahikar was not able to protect him from such attack. In the introduction to *Anksheshonqy*, the great wisdom of Harsiese is presented. Yet this wise figure is involved in a plot against Pharaoh, which ends up implicating his friend Anksheshonqy (resulting in him being sent to gaol). Harsiese’s great wisdom is not able to save him nor Anksheshonqy, and it is this feature of his character (his wisdom) which leads to both their downfalls. See also G. Mendenhall’s discussion of wisdom’s dark side (“The Shady Side of Wisdom: The Date and Purpose of Genesis 3” in *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honour of Jacob M. Meyers* [ed. H. N. Bream et al.; Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974], pp. 319-334).

<sup>103</sup> AEL, III, p. 160

<sup>104</sup> Lichtheim, 1983: 197-234; AEL, III, pp. 184-217.

<sup>105</sup> *Papyrus Insinger* had numbered chapters with topical titles explicated in the lines which compose the chapter. Each chapter ended with a “paradoxical conclusion” like “the fate and the fortune that come, it is god who sends them.” See Lichtheim’s thematic outline of the extant material (1983: 112ff.).

<sup>106</sup> McKane includes the *Counsels of Wisdom* and *Ahikar* in his discussion of Egyptian Instruction because he argues that they concur in form and content. The form they have in common is that of “father-son,” and they share a corresponding concern with “statesmanship” (which for McKane is the content of Egyptian Instruction). Though what McKane considers distinctive aspects of Egyptian Instruction have been called into question, McKane is right in grouping these with the Egyptian Instruction because they display the narrative framework which is distinctive of ANE Instructional literature (1970: 151).

<sup>107</sup> In *Advice to a Prince* the prince is warned not to neglect the rights of his citizens, or he might face divine retribution. Lambert notes that the literary form of this text, the style of omen literature, is peculiar. Each passage begins with a conditional clause. The curiosity of this style, he suggests, might be due to the author’s desire to temper his direct insinuations against the prince by using the form, “If a king . . .” Lichtheim notes that these conditional passages are of a similar



construction to Ankhsheshonqy's description of Pre's anger with the land. In *Ankhsheshonqy* these phrases leads into the instruction, whereas here, they are the body of the text. Since this text is stylistically different from Instruction, it is not covered.

*Counsels of a Pessimist* does not have the three-part form which is shared by the Instructions covered in this chapter.

<sup>108</sup> ANET, pp. 427-430.

<sup>109</sup> ANET, p. 427.

<sup>110</sup> This is confusing; though the title implies it is an independent work, this is not so. *Ahikar* exists on eleven sheets of papyrus, of which the first four sheets are called *The Story of Ahikar* (ANET, p. 427).

<sup>111</sup> ANET, pp. 427-428.

<sup>112</sup> For example:

Otherwise this old man [Ah]iq[ar] is a wise scribe [and a counselor of all Assy]ria (ANET, p. 427).

Asked of Ahikar: '[Are you] the wise scribe and man of good counsel who [was a righteous] man [and b]y whose counsel and words all of Assyria was guided?' (ANET, pp. 427-428).

He is a great man [and a bearer of the seal of [king] Esarhaddon, and the whole army of Assyria was guided by his counsel and words (ANET, p. 428).

<sup>113</sup> None of the instructors of the other instruction is presented as wise in this manner. Harsiese is presented as wise in *Ankhsheshonqy*, but he is not the instructor of that Instruction; Ankhsheshonqy is. In the epilogue to *Kagemni*, Kagemni is said to instruct his children after he had "understood the ways of men," but nothing more is said.

<sup>114</sup> See Lichtheim's extended discussion of the similarities between *Ahikar* and *Ankhsheshonqy* (1983: 13-22).

<sup>115</sup> ANET, pp. 594-595; BWL 92-95.

<sup>116</sup> There are a few Sumerian versions of this text and the restorations were made using these texts (ANET, p. 594).

<sup>117</sup> BWL 96-109; ANET, pp. 426-427, 595-596.

<sup>118</sup> The narrative framework is minimal.

<sup>119</sup> Instruction appropriate to children but not specific to them.

<sup>120</sup> A few paragraphs concerning table manners and gluttony is all the instruction available.

<sup>121</sup> The instruction has advice for many different types of people.

<sup>122</sup> Of the thirty-seven maxims and their expansions, a few can be understood as professional. However, the professional conduct recommended is for a lower official than for one succeeding Ptahhotep. See the further discussion of this above.

<sup>123</sup> The instruction's use of personal events in the king's life would be most appropriate for his son.

<sup>124</sup> Like *Merikare* above.

125 Many of the instructions seem to refer to specific things which have happened in Any's household involving his son.

126 Only a few paragraphs specifically address official or scribal life.

127 Instruction is addressed to scribes in general with nothing to suggest specific relevance for Amenemope's son.

128 The introduction tells the reader that the instruction is being given to a scribal pupil and that the instruction is about the life of a scribe.

129 Pepi is on his way to scribal school and his father instructs him concerning life outside the scribal profession as well as life at school.

130 The relevance of the introduction to the instruction is hard to ascertain.

131 There is so little instruction extant that integration is hard to comment on. However, the little instruction which exists talks about farming and is appropriate to the narrative framework.

132 Only a few lines exist.

133 Of the ten sections, two pertain to the son's future behaviour in the office of king; the remaining eight are general.

134 In only two cases is skill in wisdom attributed to the instructor, and in only one is wisdom presented as a prerequisite. In the epilogue to *Kagemni*, it says that "after he had understood the ways of men, their character having become clear to him. Then he said . . .," which is the only instance where understanding or wisdom predicates the instructor's instruction. In the introduction to Ahikar's instruction, the great wisdom of Ahikar is described, yet so is the life-threatening failure of Ahikar's instruction to his son, Nadin. In *Ankhsheshonqy*, a man of great wisdom is introduced, Harsiese. He does not offer the instruction in *Ankhsheshonqy*, and his very wisdom is presented as leading to his death. The one responsible for instruction, Ankhsheshonqy, is presented as lacking in wisdom (he unwittingly is embroiled in intrigue by Harsiese), seemingly unqualified to instruct. The only prerequisite for Ankhsheshonqy's instruction, permission from the pharaoh to instruct his son, is the same as that found in *Ptahhotep*.

135 It is tempting, when looking at the Instruction exclusive of *Amenemhet* (and to a lesser extent *Lansing*), to suggest that a marker for the start of instruction is a change in form, from the prose of the narrative framework to the "poetry" of the maxims of instruction. However, there are so many formal changes in *Amenemhet*, to call attention to the change in form is misleading.

136 See *Ptahhotep*, *Amenemope*, *Ankhsheshonqy*, and *Ahikar*, for instruction addressed beyond the addressee described in the introduction.

137 Look to these thirty chapters  
they inform, they educate;  
they are the foremost of all books (27.7ff.; *Amenemope*)

The son he understands little  
when he recites the word in the books.

. . .  
A boy does not follow the moral instruction,  
though the writings are on his tongue! (9.17f., 19; *ANY*.)

If every word is carried on,  
they will not perish in this land (15.9f.; *Ptahhotep*).

Do not neglect my speech, which lays down all  
laws for the kingship . . .

Act by what is set before you! (ll. 138, 144f.; *Merikare*.)

All that is written in this book, head it  
as I said it (2.5; *Kagemni*).

<sup>138</sup> For example, to a group of children, not pupils, who are addressed in two Instructions (*Hardjedef* and *Sehetep-ib-re*). In *Ankhsheshonqy* we assume that Ankhsheshonqy's son would be a priest as he was. The "sons" of *Merikare* and *Amenemhet* are future kings.

<sup>139</sup> Some Instructions which mix professional and personal instruction are *Ptahhotep*, *ANY*, *Amenemope*, and *Ankhsheshonqy*.

<sup>140</sup> There is instruction which is self-effacing and I have commented on it in the discussions of the instruction of *Ptahhotep* and *Amenemope*. It is not clear what evidence supports McKane's claim for the Machiavellian ethos of Instructional literature.

<sup>141</sup> As it seems Scott does in his comment, "The Egyptian Instructions have come down to us, in some cases, in copies apparently made by pupils in scribal schools, so that their educational use was much broader than their purported origin would suggest" (Scott, 1970: 26.)

<sup>142</sup> This argues against the assertion that the father-to-son form of Instruction is a metaphor for teacher-to-pupil. The father-to-son form may have become understood in this manner, but there is too much introductory, instructional, and epilogical material that is prominently personal; applicable to a certain situation.

<sup>143</sup> Whybray's study of the succession story is suggestive here (R.N. Whybray, *The Succession Narrative* [London: SCM Press, 1968]). He argues that the succession story's presentation of court intrigue through use of wisdom themes and vocabulary, is intended to offer moral instruction. I wonder if the same **instructional** intent is also found in the introductions to the Instructions of *Amenemhet*, *Ahikar*, and *Ankhsheshonqy*. All three introductions present court intrigue involving someone who is characterized as very wise (*Amenemhet*, *Ahikar*, and *Harsiese*) and yet who experiences utter failure. That these introductions are exploring what it means to be wise is evident. The instructions which follow these colourful introductions are lifeless and drab in comparison.

<sup>144</sup> *Wenemdiamun*, the student addressed in *Papyrus Lansing*, is dismissive of instruction, though more by his behaviour than by his words (he prefers hunting and idleness to school). Any's son, *Khonshotep*, plainly dismisses the instruction as an unnecessary complication in his life and it is likewise contrary to his nature: "a boy does not follow the moral instructions" (AEL, I, p. 144). *Nadin*, though instructed by a well-known wise man, *Ahikar*, shows little respect for instruction and instructor alike. *Amenemhet* speaks from the dead to give his son instruction that he himself obviously needed. Whatever the instruction *Amenemhet* himself received from his father, it was not sufficient to protect him from assassination. *Amenemhet* appeals to his son not to misjudge the intrigues of the kingdom as he had done. In *Ankhsheshonqy*, we ask what good instruction can come from prison? That these Instructions received sufficient approval to find their way into the curriculum must inform our evaluation of the authority or acceptance of the instruction presented. Consequently it is questionable to assert that ANE Instruction presents a pragmatic view concerning the efficacy of instruction. The ANE Instruction tradition seems to be familiar with the *shady side of wisdom* from the beginning.

<sup>145</sup> I find it curious that any significance is given to the fact that different compositions share similar (or even identical) proverbs. For example, "The collection of moral exhortations which has been given the English title *Counsels of Wisdom*, in tone and content recalls at many points the precepts of the Book of Proverbs and the Egyptian Instruction. 'Let your mouth be controlled and your speech guarded.' 'Requite with kindness you evil-doer.' '... (the) feeble, show him kindness'" (Scott, 1970: 27). The focus is at too basic a level to have significance. Giving significance to such observations is like calling attention to the fact that you find the proverb "A rolling rock gathers no moss" in French, German, and English.

<sup>146</sup> Wilson in commenting on *Amenemope* in ANET, p. 421.

<sup>147</sup> Erman (1924) and Gressmann (1924).

<sup>148</sup> One needs only to look at the Table of Contents in the commentaries of McKane (1970), Scott (1965), and Murphy (1981) to understand how entrenched this view is.

<sup>149</sup> Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Bible and Literature Series, 11; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), p. 46.

<sup>150</sup> Note that Proverbs is often further subdivided into seven “collections” (see n. 148). Nevertheless, I hope to show that Proverbs division is only into introduction, instruction and epilogue, with no further refinement.

<sup>151</sup> I will inquire (in later chapters), for example, whether the themes and setting described in Proverbs introduction are also found in the epilogue of Proverbs. How closely integrated is Proverb’s narrative framework to its instruction? Do Proverbs’ parts share themes, characters, settings, and intended audience? Who is presented as the instructor for Proverbs? Does either the narrative frame of Proverbs or the instruction suppose a formal educational setting and therefore differ from ANE Instruction? That Proverbs was composed for use in a formal education in Israel is a widely held idea, and is usually supported by saying that ANE Instruction always was composed for this purpose. While ANE Instruction was used in formal education, it is different altogether to say it was composed for that purpose. Lichtheim’s suggestion that in Egyptian Instructions we see the divine king guaranteeing the human order through instruction similar to the sun-god’s guarantee of cosmic order offers significant motivation for Instruction’s composition, which is quite apart from formal education (AEL, I, p. 5).

<sup>152</sup> Compare the greater coherence of the various long introductions to Instruction presenting prose tales involving the instructor (*Ankhsheshonqy* and *Ahikar*), describing the instructor’s request for permission to instruct (*Ankhsheshonqy* and *Ptahhotep*), recounting the instructor’s previous attempts to instruct (*Ahikar*), presenting the instruction of a king who was prematurely killing (*Amenemhet*), describing and praising the efficacy and benefits of wisdom (*Amenemope*). This narrative material as it reflects upon the instruction or the act of instruction (and does not present instruction *per se*) shows greater coherence than the instruction.

<sup>153</sup> Lichtheim seems to overlook her own observation that the “stylistic device by which maxims were strung together and shaped into a more or less unified work was the narrative frame: a father instructs his son” (AEL, I, p. 5) in her assessment of the material found in Proverbs 1-9 (1983: 6ff.). In commenting positively on biblical scholars’ separation of Prov. 1-9 from the rest of the book she says,

[Biblical scholars] have also noted that the long poetic speeches of chapters 1-9 are structured in a manner comparable to the integrated sequences of Egyptian Instructions, whereas the collections of self-contained two-sentence sayings have no counterparts in Egyptian wisdom prior to the Demotic Instructions (1983: 6; Lichtheim is addressing the conclusions of Bauer-Kayatz).

As we have seen in our earlier discussion of *Ptahhotep*, *Amenemope*, and *Ankhsheshonqy*, grammatical ‘form’ on the sentence-level is irrelevant to the overall structure of the Instruction. Pre-Demotic and Demotic Instruction have demonstrated how the grammatical form of the sentence can change without affecting the overall structure of Instruction. Lichtheim has also not clarified whether she is talking about Instruction or instruction; however, it remains the case that the form of instruction is irrelevant to the structure of Instruction.

<sup>154</sup> “Discourse” is the name given by Whybray (1965: 34-35; cf. note 1) to passages which exhibit the form of Egyptian Instruction.

<sup>155</sup> Compare this line to the following sentences from introductions to ANE Instruction: Beginning of the Instruction made by the Hereditary Prince, Count, King’s Son, Hardjedef . . . *Hardjedef*, AEL, I, p. 58.

Beginning of the Instruction made by the majesty of King Sesostris, son of Re, Amenemhet . . . *Amenemhet*, AEL, I, p. 136.

Beginning of the educational instruction made by the scribe  
Any of the Palace of Queen Neferari . . . *ANY*, AEL, II, p. 136.

<sup>156</sup> The introduction to Proverbs is clearly attributed to Solomon. I will assume that the “instructor” speaking throughout the introduction is Solomon. Therefore, whenever the phrase “my son” occurs, I will read it as the words of Solomon. This applies as well to the words spoken by Woman Wisdom; these I understand as the words of Woman Wisdom which Solomon tells his son. I insist on this reading fully aware of the difficulties such a position encounters. Scholarship on Prov. 1-9 has identified the frequent occurrence of the “my son” phrase (usually misinterpreting it as the formulaic marker for the start of “Instruction”) but has not addressed the question raised by this phrase, namely, “Who is the speaker understood here?” The answer intended by Prov. 1:1 seems to be that Solomon is responsible for all the material which follows.

<sup>157</sup> Compare Prov. 1:1 with Prov. 31:1, “The words of Lemuel, king of Massa, which his mother taught him.” Proverbs begins with instruction from a male Israelite and ends with the instruction of a female foreigner.

<sup>158</sup> Except for the last two superscriptions, Solomon is responsible for all the material. The final two superscriptions identify the words which follow as coming from someone other than Solomon. These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied (Prov. 25:1).

The words of Agur son of Jakeh of Massa (Prov. 30:1).

The words of Lemuel, king of Massa, which his mother taught him . . . (Prov. 31:1).  
That words other than Solomon’s are presented in Proverbs’ epilogue do not indicate a formal difference between Proverbs and ANE Instruction. For example, the words of Any’s son are presented in the epilogue of *ANY*.

<sup>159</sup> These verses are similar to the opening few lines of the Instruction of *Amenemope* (R.N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972], p. 15; 1965: 38f.; and Bauer-Kayatz, 1966: 24-26).

<sup>160</sup> Since it is said (1:5) that a man known as wise and a man known as understanding can learn from Solomon’s instruction, the wisdom Solomon will instruct is presented as beyond the wisdom of men. These few verses attribute to Solomon a special wisdom, a wisdom which exceeds the wisdom possessed by people; everyone can learn from Solomon’s instruction. These verses are in agreement with the presentation of Solomon’s wisdom in I Kings. In both passages Solomon’s wisdom is said to exceed the wisdom of all other people. The wisdom Solomon possesses in I Kings is beyond the wisdom possessed by other men (“behold I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you,” I Kings 3:12; see further discussion of the wisdom of Solomon in the next chapter). Solomon, like Ahikar, is therefore a man known for his wisdom (though outside the Instruction). Yet, unlike Ahikar, Solomon is in possession of a wisdom given to him by God. Solomon is the instructor of Israel’s instruction not because he is preeminently wise, but because he is *uniquely* wise. The special relationship Solomon had with God’s gift of wisdom, communicated in I Kings, however, is not referred to here. It could be that Solomon’s history was so well known that it went without saying. This is supported by Prov. 1:1’s identification of him with the son of David, king in Israel, which unambiguously identifies this Solomon with the Solomon of the historical books as a man of unique wisdom.

It has been suggested by Blenkinsopp (in a paper given at the 1989 SBL meeting in Anaheim) that the repeated warnings against the “evil” or “strange” woman in Prov. 1-9 indicates that the ascription to Solomon was to recall in the reader’s mind Solomon’s notorious problems with women. But, as will be argued in the next chapter, the import of Prov. 1-9 is to announce that God’s special wisdom is available to all. The aspect of Solomon’s history necessary to such a message is his exclusive possession of God’s gift of wisdom. Solomon’s problem with women, while a major aspect of the historical presentation of Solomon, is not a characteristic particularly relevant to Prov. 1-9. The gift of God’s wisdom to Solomon was what distinguished Solomon within human history (cf. I Kings 3:12) and was why his instruction to Israel would have special relevance.

<sup>161</sup> 3:11-12 is a possible eighth reference; it suggests that God gives instruction: “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be wary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

<sup>162</sup> Whybray notes that the inclusion of the mother alongside the father as a source of instruction is unique to Israel. In all other ANE Instruction the instructors are males. Whybray suggests that this unique development can be traced to the similarly unique setting of Israelite instruction. “It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this feature is an adaptation of the Egyptian tradition to the peculiar situation in which the Israelite instructions were composed: a domestic situation” (R.N. Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament* [BZAW 135; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974], p. 42).

However, most Egyptian instruction is of the form father-to-son (which is markedly different from the “scribe-to-scribe” form of *Amenemope* and *Papyrus Lansing*). This form, along with the specific personal nature of *Merikare* (frequent use of “I”), *Amenemhet* (extended first person narrative concerning specific historical events), *ANY* (the personal appeal for Khonshotep to mind his mother and the epilogue response by Khonshotep), and *Ankhsheshonqy* (his lament at not being able to instruct his son)--all personal fatherly advice--suggest that these Instructions originated in a domestic setting. This would qualify Whybray’s suggestion that the domestic origin is particular to Israel.

<sup>163</sup> This acknowledgement of the tradition of instruction is a function common in ANE introductions. Yet as Whybray notes, the tradition of Israelite instruction goes back only one generation; it is not presented as a tradition of great antiquity (1965: 70).

<sup>164</sup> Woman Wisdom, like the other instructors, is given (relatively late in the introduction in chapter 8) a family identity and an office of sorts. Solomon presents Woman Wisdom as the instructor of wisdom the “son” should seek out. In the last two chapters of the introduction to Proverbs, Solomon has stopped presenting his own instruction and quotes the words of Woman Wisdom. While on one level, these words of Woman Wisdom are still the words of Solomon’s, on another level, their intent is to communicate to the son that he should really seek after this woman and abandon his father (Solomon) as a source of instruction. It would appear that in Prov. 8 Solomon is presenting Woman Wisdom herself as the “real” instructor of instruction. Solomon rhetorically presents her name “Does not Wisdom call?” (8:1), recounts her history and her place at God’s side (her family and office?), and then quotes her apologetic for the instruction she will deliver.

<sup>165</sup> See also Prov. 10:1; 15:20; 17:25; 23:22, 24-25; 30:11; Gen. 28:7; 37:10; Judges 13:2-3, for other examples of the instruction by a woman.

<sup>166</sup> The existence of a “mother” in the instruction is an innovation of gender and does not affect the domestic setting of instruction expected in ANE introductions.

<sup>167</sup> Many of Solomon’s comments to his son recall Nebmare-nakht’s castigation of his student Wenemdiamun. Both men are critical of where the boys spend their time. Nebmare-nakht attempts to turn Wenemdiamun from spending his time hunting to his books:

Do not long for the marsh thicket. Turn your back on throw stick and chase (2.1ff.).

In a similar vein Solomon asks his son to stay away from the bad company he keeps:

My son, if sinners entice you,  
do not consent (Prov. 1:10).

Do not enter the path of the wicked,  
and do not walk in the way of evil men (Prov. 4:14).

Both men are constantly exhorting their “sons” to just listen to the words of instruction (cf. *Lansing* 2.4ff. and Prov. 1:8, 2:1, 4:1, 10). The introductions to both Instruction focus on the restless behaviour of the “sons” more than other introductions.

<sup>168</sup> Solomon says about those who turn from wisdom, “these men lie in wait for their own blood, they set an ambush for their own lives” (v. 18). Woman Wisdom says, “for the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them” (v. 32).

<sup>169</sup> “The vocabulary of wisdom which occurs in the protases (vv. 1-4) has to be interpreted in

the context of a primary claim for submission to Yahweh and dependence on a knowledge which hinges on submissiveness” (McKane, 1970: 281).

<sup>170</sup> McKane has a hard time agreeing with others (e.g. Gemser) that these opening verses of ch. 2 signify “Instruction.” He also compares these verses to the “preamble” (introduction) to *Amenemope*.

I hesitate to describe this [Prov. 2] as Instruction in that there is a lack of concrete, authoritative instruction on specific matters in this passage. The opening verses (vv. 1-9) are so general in their references that they should be compared to the preamble of an Instruction (cf. *Amenemope*), rather than to its specific contents (1970: 278).

McKane in the end does not feel that vv. 1-9 should be compared to other “preambles” because it is too “specific.”

<sup>171</sup> McKane makes the interesting comment,

My opinion on this chapter [Prov. 2] is that it exemplifies a process of formal development based on the Instruction. The tendency of this development is to diminish the element of authoritative instruction communicated briefly and precisely by imperatives, and so to substitute the more diffuse, rambling style of preaching for the more exact didactic procedures of the wisdom teacher.

If this material is seen as introduction and not instruction the “rambling style of preaching” fits nicely with Solomon’s apologetic for wisdom to the son.

<sup>172</sup> The results of putting wisdom first, are wealth, honour, and long life. These benefits echo the insight gained by Solomon’s personal experience of putting wisdom first in I Kings. God says to Solomon after he had asked for wisdom:

Behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, . . . I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour . . . And if you walk in my ways . . . I will lengthen your days (I Kings 3:12ff.).

<sup>173</sup> It might even be suggested that the primary emphasis of these chapters in the introduction to Proverbs is on marriage. If the stress of the last few verses of chs. 1-9 in any way sums up the Introduction, such well may be the case. This theme of correct marriage--that is marriage to Woman Wisdom--as being the way to acquire wisdom is re-echoed in the closing passage of the book. The mother of King Lemuel laments her son’s descent into foolishness and tries to impress upon him the importance of marrying the right woman so that he can save himself and his kingdom. The final acrostic poem where she describes this woman of worth echoes the protective aspects and benefits gained by wedding Woman Wisdom which were expressed in the introduction to Proverbs. She will also clothe her husband in honour, and sustenance for his life will come from her hands--which will also bring him praise.

<sup>174</sup> See Camp’s comments on the failure of attempts to “force” the final two chapters of Proverbs into the form of Egyptian Instruction (1985: 45ff.).

<sup>175</sup> This suggests that not only has wisdom become concrete but the “evil” of the first part of the introduction has as well. The Evil Woman is found in 2:16-19; 5:3-8, 20; 6:24-26; 7:5-27; and 9:13-18. In all instances, she is to be found in public places trying to entice the innocent man into the depths of Sheol to his death.

## Chapter 2

### The Introduction of Proverbs: An Affirmation of Biblical Wisdom Traditions

I argued in the first chapter that the structure of Proverbs, its three-part form, displays its affinity to the ANE Instructional tradition. The structural similarity of Proverbs to ANE Instruction literature could raise the question whether Proverbs is more at home in that context than in the biblical context. Although this question is interesting, it is indeed misleading because, as we observed in the first chapter, the factor which unites ANE Instruction is its structural similarity, rather than the content of that structure. One needs only to compare the introductions of *Amenemhet*, *Ptahhotep*, *Amenemope*, *ANY*, and *Ankhsheshonqy* to see the great variety of expression given ANE Instructional introductions. Found in all the introductions are themes such as the exhortations to “hear,” “listen,” and to be otherwise attentive to the following instruction. Such exhortations to attentiveness are expected in any introduction that holds what it introduces to be important and are not distinctive of introductions to Instruction. I also noted with respect to a few of the introductions the difficulty of understanding their appropriateness to the Instruction tradition. For example, why would *Amenemhet* introduce a king duped by his own guards as an instructor? Why should a “simpleminded” priest gaoled for his unwitting compliance in an assassination plot present instruction (*Ankhsheshonqy*)? Why introduce the instruction of a renowned wise man who failed so miserably with one of his previous pupils (*Ahikar*)? We are bound to ask why these men were chosen as instructors. This question, as it applies to Instruction exclusive of Proverbs, is outside the attention of this study. What will concern us is why the instructors of Proverbs (Solomon and Woman Wisdom) were chosen to introduce Proverbs.<sup>176</sup>

In the first part of this chapter, I will examine some of the biblical traditions about wisdom which I feel influenced the choice and presentation of Proverbs’ instructors. Proverbs’ stated intention,



## 2. *An Affirmation of Biblical Wisdom Traditions*

That men may know wisdom and instruction,  
understand words of insight . . . (Prov. 1:2),

is succinct, and the communication of wisdom becomes Proverbs' priority.<sup>177</sup> I will review some biblical passages outside of Proverbs which I feel could help or hinder Proverbs' stated intention: first, I will present the cosmology of separation between the divine and human realms in order that we appreciate the chasm which separates possessions of the divine sphere from the created;<sup>178</sup> second, I will present texts which say or imply that wisdom is found only in heaven; third, I will present texts which say or imply that wisdom is not found on earth but in heaven; and finally I will present texts which say that wisdom is on earth only as mediated by God.<sup>179</sup>

In the second part of this chapter I will show how Proverbs' introduction reflects these traditions and argue that the two instructors presented in Prov. 1-9 integrate these biblical traditions of wisdom.

### **Part One: Some Biblical Traditions about Wisdom Outside of Proverbs**

#### *A.) The Cosmological Separation between the Divine and Created Realms*

The radical separation between the divine and the created realms, while not a unique aspect of all the following biblical texts, is an important element in such texts. What has not been properly appreciated by studies of Israel's wisdom traditions is the problematic relationship between this cosmological tradition, with its emphasis on the separation of the divine and created realms, and the wisdom tradition.<sup>180</sup> As we will see in the following sections, the location of wisdom in the cosmos is an issue of much importance.

#### *Genesis: The Penetrability and Impenetrability of the Boundary between Divine and Human Realms*

Oden has compared the Old Babylonian epic of *Atrahasis* and Genesis in relation to their understanding of the separation between the divine and the human realms.<sup>181</sup> He argues that (whereas *Atrahasis* presents their continual closeness) Genesis--while expressing a pre-creative unity--came to emphasize the great distance between the realms (once creation starts), and that the theme of separation

drives the narrative throughout the primeval history of Gen. 1-11.

Genesis opens:

**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the [Storm of God]<sup>182</sup> was moving over the face of the waters (Gen. 1:1-2a).**

While the opening verse of Genesis draws a binary distinction<sup>183</sup> between the God who creates and the “heaven and earth” which are created, v. 2 tells us that this distinction was not always so. In the time “before” creation, the “Storm of God” was agitating the watery chaos.<sup>184</sup> God and chaos were as one in a storm, the wind and water blending. When God began to create, he separated himself from the watery chaos, the “storm” disappeared (never to turn up again in the creation narrative), and God actively began to “shape” creation. Here, at the beginning of creation, separation begins. What was once a single stormy chaos divides into creator and creation, the divine and the creature, the first and most important cosmological division.

The importance placed on keeping cosmological categories separate continues from the creation account into the primeval history. Oden argues that Genesis 1’s long list of binary pairs sets up a cosmology of division which comes under attack in later narrative. Genesis 3 tells of Adam and Eve’s theft of wisdom that was reserved for God and of their punishment as a consequence of this theft. Genesis 6:1-4 recounts the “genetic” mixing of the two realms and God’s decree of universal death. The Tower of Babel story is an attempt to erase spatial differentiation between the realms, and outlines punishment by confusing languages and geographic locales. Such attacks on the division between the divine and created spheres are judged wrong and are punished because “each is an attempt to substitute homogeneity for differentiation” (Oden, 1981: 32).

**The integrity of creation, portrayed by the systematic discriminations in Genesis 1, is a given. Anything which violates these discriminations, which attempts to confuse or blur them, thereby violates the integrity of creation. The crimes of the various narratives in Genesis 1-11 . . . are therefore to be seen as violations of the fundamental classificatory scheme articulated by the cosmology which opens the Hebrew Bible (Oden, 1981: 33-34).**

## 2. *An Affirmation of Biblical Wisdom Traditions*

In his comparison between Gen. 1-11 and the *Epic of Atrahasis*, Oden calls attention to the difference between the opening lines of their respective presentations of primeval history.<sup>185</sup> The *Epic of Atrahasis* begins with the line “When the gods were like men . . . .” Before the age of humans, the gods had toiled and laboured for their food like humanity. In *Atrahasis* there is no distinction between gods and creation and this “absence of differentiation in the beginning” continues into the story (Oden, 1981: 26, 28). This mixture of the divine and creature, while a feature of pre-creation in Genesis (the divine storm), is a cosmology which ceases to exist when God begins to create.

The story of Eden provides another contrast between *Atrahasis* and Genesis in terms of the separation of divine and human realms. In *Atrahasis*, the first divine complaint leveled against humanity concerns its production of noise and din. (That the realm of the gods could be disturbed by the activities of humanity--activities not meant to offend, defy, or exhibit disobedience--affirms the proximity of the two realms.) Atrahasis is told that he can avert impending catastrophe if he and others will pray to the enraged gods. Inarticulate “noise” of the multitudes is an affront to the gods, while articulate speech is soothing. The divine complaint of *Atrahasis* is that the created world irritates the divine world.

Genesis, on the other hand, tells of a potential divine complaint which will be leveled only if the humans eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Humans cannot inadvertently trespass into the divine realm. They must actively steal a divine possession. The knowledge the fruit imparts is reserved solely for the divinity.<sup>186</sup> The divine sphere will not be troubled by the human sphere, except if there is deliberate human trespass. Each aspect of creation should proceed “according to its kind” and not transgress its bounds. When humans experience divinely reserved knowledge there is a violation of the integrity of creation. “The crime of the first pair will then be that of attempting to blur this distinction” (between creator and creature) and obtain divine wisdom.<sup>187</sup> To blur the distinction between creator and creature is precisely the temptation the serpent offers to Eve:

You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:5).

The serpent presents the consumption of the fruit as a means to attaining divinity, and God, in commenting on the couple's transgression, affirms the truth of the serpent's claim by saying: "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil . . ." (3:22). The comments by the serpent and God suggest that, at least within the garden, the separation between the world of the creator and that of creation could be blurred. Eden must have been at the intersection between the divine and human realms: the habitat of humans and yet a place of divine visitation.<sup>188</sup> Because of the overlap between the divine and created realms, it was possible in the garden to gain access to things reserved for the divinity and thereby blur the boundary between the realms. Thus expulsion from the garden was a necessary part of the punishment for disobedience (the wrongful possession of divine property) because it made future trespass impossible. Expulsion denied access to divine possessions, thus removing the possibility that the boundary separating the two realms could be crossed.<sup>189</sup>

The explicit reason for expulsion from the garden is given in God's comment, "and now lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life . . ." (3:22). Does this also imply that access to divine wisdom is cut off? Eating the fruit of wisdom made the first couple "God-like," but does this imply that they continued to possess God-like wisdom? Regardless of the implications, the expulsion reestablishes the correct boundaries between God and humanity. Access to divinity *via* wisdom is cut off.

Interestingly, the most vivid attack on the cosmological distinction between the divine and creative realms arises in Gen. 6:1-4. In this passage there is a "genetic" attack (Oden's term) on the distinction between the divine and human realms.

What better way of expressing the desirability of those distinctions established at creation, and the danger of blurring these distinctions, than through an account of the physical mating of heaven and earth, of gods and humans? This 'genetic' confusion is then most appropriately followed by the enormity of the flood (Oden, 1981: 31).

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As the expulsion from the garden made the further possession and further acquisition of divine property impossible, so the flood eliminated the potential for confusing genetically the two realms with the limit on length of human life (Gen. 6:3).<sup>190</sup> The limit on human years made impossible, by whatever means, future acquisition of divine immortality. The access to divinity *via* immortal life is cut off.

The Tower of Babel represents a spatial attempt to blur the distinction between heaven and earth. Unlike the previous attempts to overcome the distinction between the realms, the building of the tower does not achieve “its top in the heavens” and becomes only a potential attack on separation (Gen. 11:4). God “came down” (Gen. 11:5, showing how far the builders had yet to go) and decided to stop this particular threat and thwart all future attempts to mix the two realms. This “ultimate” punishment is the further differentiation of creation into language groups and geological locales (Oden, 1981: 31).<sup>191</sup> Any access to divinity *via* a change in location is cut off.

These passages from Genesis establish the desirability of the separation between the divine and human worlds. It is also clear that God aggressively upholds that division. Each time this separation is breached--by the theft of divine knowledge, the union of the sons of god and the daughters of men, and the Tower of Babel--God’s response is harsh: expulsion from the garden, death for humanity after 120 years, and the mixing of the languages and locations. These stories suggest that at one time there were “windows” of access between the divine and human realm, but they have now all been closed. The division between realms must have been thought impenetrable after the last “correction” of Babel, since Genesis turns to other themes.

*B.) Wisdom Found Only in Heaven*

Given the importance of the boundary between the divine and human realms just established, it is necessary in the context of this study to determine the location of wisdom in this cosmology. In this section we will examine texts which say that at one time humanity had access to divine wisdom (as well as having access to the divine realm), but that this is not currently the case. The texts below acknowledge the separation of the divine and human realms and assert that divine wisdom remains in the divine realm, unavailable to humanity.

*Genesis 3*

As we have seen, wisdom provided the first window of access to the divine in Genesis' primeval history. It is clear that Adam and Eve did acquire the knowledge contained in the fruit, and that they consequently experienced a change of status (into a divinity of sorts [Gen. 3:22] and into disobedience). However, as noted, it is not clear that expulsion from Eden--which denied access to immortal life--also denied continuing access to divine wisdom. This question is not dealt with directly within Genesis, however, allusions to the expulsion from Eden outside of Genesis (Ezek. 28:1-19, and implied in Job 15:7-10 and Prov. 30:3-4 covered below) are less ambiguous. If it can be said that the Genesis account expresses a similar tradition,<sup>192</sup> it may be suggested that while in the garden the first couple partook of divine knowledge, but expulsion from the garden denied of future access to divine knowledge. (To be expelled spatially from divine company in Eden is to deny access to divine possessions, including wisdom.) Nevertheless, further argument can be made by observing that upon the closure of each window (wisdom, immortal life, and change of location) a different breach of the divine-human boundary is attempted. The primeval history of Genesis never repeats human crossing of the boundary to the divine *via* wisdom. The implication is that what was once possible has been now made impossible.

Where is wisdom to be found in Genesis 3? Wisdom is contained in a fruit on a tree in the garden of Eden. Since Genesis suggests that Eden is at the

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intersection of the two realms (God and human both casually walk there and divine possessions are within human reach), is it possible that wisdom is found in both realms? No, this is not the case, as the couple's expulsion from the garden makes clear. They are expelled from the place where they have access to divine possessions. The tree of knowledge of course remains in Eden when Adam and Eve are driven out.

The following three passages recall a tradition of a "first human" who also had access to divine council and divine wisdom at one point in history. Yet the passages claim that this is no longer the case, that no human currently living has divine knowledge. It is important to note how the possession or non-possession of divine knowledge becomes the litmus test of one's claim to divine status.

### *Ezekiel 28*

Ezekiel 28 presents another story of a "first man" (the prince of Tyre) and one theme of the story is the grave mistake this man makes by calling the wisdom he possesses and exercises "divine wisdom" (Ezekiel 28:2). When Ezek. 28 begins, God is describing the prince of Tyre's self-perception. God recalls two false statements made by the prince which will cause his expulsion from Eden: "I am a god," and I am "as wise as a god" (Ezek. 28:2). In vv. 3-5, God describes the prince as the pinnacle of human wisdom ("you are indeed wiser than Daniel," 28:3). The prince's great wisdom has brought him wealth (cf. the description of Solomon's wealth in II Chron. 1:1-17). He is without human peer. However, God continues by stating that the prince's wisdom which has brought him wealth has also brought him conceit: "your heart has become proud in your wealth" (28:5). "Because you consider yourself as wise as a god" (28:6), God says, "this has led to your punishment."<sup>193</sup> While God asserts that the prince has great wisdom, unmatched by any other human, he does not have divine wisdom.<sup>194</sup> God acknowledges that the prince may "sit in the seat of the gods" (28:2), reside in "Eden, the garden of God"

(28:13), have no secret hidden from him (28:3), but regardless of this, the prince's wisdom is referred to as "your wisdom" (חִכְמַתְךָ), "and your understanding" (וּבְתִבְוֵינְתְךָ), it is not to be confused with God's wisdom (Ezek. 28:4).

The situation described in Ezekiel 28 differs from the Genesis story on these issues: even while the prince sits in the seat of the gods, and hears all secrets, he never possesses divine wisdom; in the seat of the gods there is no threat of the prince becoming a god--it is the prince's false self-assessment that justifies his punishment--and the behaviour that is actually punished was not any usurpation of divine knowledge, but the prince's misnaming his wisdom and being, divine.<sup>195</sup>

Where is wisdom to be found? Human wisdom is possessed by the prince, but the prince does not possess divine wisdom. Divine wisdom is found in the divine realm and can only be possessed by divinities. There is wisdom found in both realms but they are different wisdoms. The great human wisdom the prince possesses enables him to acquire great wealth.<sup>196</sup> The divine wisdom the prince does not possess is not defined.

### *Job 15:7-10*

'Are you the first man that was born?  
Or were you brought forth before the hills?  
Have you listened in the council of God?  
And do you limit wisdom to yourself?  
What do you know that we do not know?  
What do you understand that is not clear to us?  
Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us,  
older than your father, (Job 15:7-10).

These verses refer to a similar story tradition of a privileged first man.

Meinhold paraphrases these rhetorical questions Eliphaz asks Job in this manner:

"Are you personified Wisdom itself? And if not, have you had the opportunity of intruding into the council of God and of drawing to yourself Wisdom, which abides there?"<sup>197</sup> Meinhold's paraphrases capture Eliphaz's affront that Job would think his wisdom is exhaustive and beyond challenge. Eliphaz would expect Job to answer these rhetorical questions with a "no," recognizing thereby that he is not the



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privileged person who once had access to divine wisdom. Eliphaz also states (v. 10) that there are those present who are older than Job's father, implying that Job could not even be the son of the man born on the mountain of God because the birth of his father is known.<sup>198</sup> Since Job himself is not this privileged man and not the son of this privileged man, he does not possess divine wisdom (which Eliphaz seems to agree would be beyond discussion<sup>199</sup>). The boundary between the "council of God" and its exhaustive wisdom (v. 8) and human wisdom known among human counsel is accepted. In context, "Eliphaz rejects any implication that Job alone is wise (v. 8b) and resists the possibility of Job's wisdom being higher than the friends (v. 9)."<sup>200</sup>

Eliphaz does not dispute the tradition that the "first man" was privy to divine wisdom. However, he does dispute that Job was this man. Job's wisdom is like the rest of those present and is not beyond discussion. Eliphaz, in 15:17-18,

I will show you, hear me;  
and what I have seen I will declare  
(what wise men have told,  
and their fathers have not hidden . . . ,

argues persuasively that the wisdom he addresses is a human phenomenon with notable continuity on earth. This wisdom is open to human discussion (as we read later in the book, divine wisdom is distinguished from human wisdom precisely because it is not open to human discussion).

Where is wisdom to be found? Wisdom is in the possession of humans (v. 9), but it is not the divine wisdom (v. 8b) that is found in divine counsel (v. 8a). There seems to be the implication in v. 8b that the existence of divine wisdom in creation would render human wisdom redundant. (If Job did have divine wisdom, the human wisdom of the friends would be silenced.)

### *Proverbs 30:2-4*

Surely I am too stupid to be a man.  
I have not the understanding of a man.  
I have not learned wisdom,  
nor have I knowledge of the Holy One.  
Who has ascended to heaven and come down?  
Who has gathered the wind in his fists?

Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment?  
Who has established all the ends of the earth?  
What is his name, and what is his son's name?  
Surely you know! (Prov. 30:2-4)

“Surely I am too stupid to be a man,” begins Agur’s confession of his own ignorance. Agur does not claim understanding, wisdom, nor the knowledge of God. Agur holds that to be human is to be stupid; wisdom resides in heaven (cf. Job 38-41).<sup>201</sup> Agur’s cosmology allows no mingling of the divine and human realms; consequently, divine wisdom as a divine possession is unavailable to creation (“Who can span both realms?”).<sup>202</sup>

In the context of the book of Proverbs these verses, 30:1-4, come at the end of the book reflecting back on instruction. Agur is passing judgment on the previous instruction by calling its origin into question. He asks, Has the instructor of the instruction of Proverbs ascended to heaven and returned? Conceivably this man or his son, if found, could enlighten Agur concerning divine knowledge. Agur’s point is that unless one has been in heaven during the creative act, one does not have wisdom. Who gathers the wind? Who wraps the waters? Who established the earth? What is his name? Agur reminds those who claim to present wisdom that wisdom is aligned with creation and the creator and is in heaven not available on earth.

Where is wisdom to be found? Agur responds that wisdom resides in heaven. “Surely you know” is Agur’s way of taunting the instructor who presumes to present wisdom.<sup>203</sup> For Agur, to be human entails ignorance; wisdom resides in heaven.

All these passages agree that at one time in history humans had access to divine wisdom, but assert that this is no longer the case. No one currently on earth is this privileged person of history (or their child), and therefore, no human possesses divine wisdom. Furthermore, the assertions of the next section are different though the implication is the same. These passages deal primarily in the present, arguing that humanity does not currently possess or have access to divine

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wisdom.

### *C.) Wisdom is not on Earth but in Heaven*

The three passages below emphasize this theme: wisdom is not found on earth because wisdom is with God.

#### *Job 28*

The two sets of three verses, below, provide a summary of this chapter:

But where shall wisdom be found?  
And where is the place of understanding?  
Man does not know the way to it,  
and it is not found in the land of the living.  
The deep says, 'It is not in me',  
and the sea says, 'It is not with me' (28:12-14).

Whence then comes wisdom?  
And where is the place of understanding?  
It is hid from the eyes of all living,  
and concealed from the birds of the air.  
Abaddon and Death say,  
'We have heard a rumour of it with our ears' (28:20-22).

Both questions are followed by statements that wisdom is not found in creation.

(Notice that these questions are spatial whereas the previous sections were historical--Were you the "first person?"). These questions attract our interest as to the location of wisdom; 'If wisdom is not found in creation where is it found?'

The first eleven verses of this chapter provide a litany of human successes in finding hidden objects. Humanity has great skill in mining; they leave no stone in creation unturned; they dig deep into the bowels of the earth; they search the land far from where people live, so far that they sometimes disappear without trace (vv. 1-4); they turn mountains upside down and cut open the surface of rocks, and they dam streams exposing the stream bed (vv. 9-11). Yet, despite humanity's success in mining and finding that which they seek, the final verse asks (v. 12), "But where shall wisdom be found? . . . Man does not know the way to it, . . . ." Though these humans are successful miners, they do not have the skill to find the way to wisdom.

In these same eleven verses the poet also discounts the possibility that

animals may have observed the place of wisdom by stating that the soaring birds of prey have not seen it and lions and other proud beasts have not encountered it on their journeys (28:7-8).

The poet even entertains the possibility that wisdom could be purchased. If attempts are made to buy wisdom with the list of most precious items found in vv. 15-19--gold, silver, onyx, sapphire, glass, jewels, coral,<sup>204</sup> crystal, pearls, and topaz--none could purchase it (28:18).

One answer to the question “But where shall wisdom be found?,” is that wisdom is not anywhere in creation.

Job 28 dares to maintain that mankind is never able to gain disposal of wisdom, because mankind does not know how to arrive at wisdom and possesses no medium of exchange by which to purchase it . . . it is nothing less than a revolutionary thesis: wisdom cannot be acquired! (Westermann, 1977: 137.)<sup>205</sup>

While this is the final word for creation, this is not to say that wisdom is unknown.

To say that wisdom is not spatially present in creation does not exhaust all possibilities. The poet continues:

God understands the way to it,  
and he knows its place (28:23).

This statement also provides the reason wisdom is not found on earth: wisdom is with God.

The poet narrates the primeval event of creation in vv. 25-27 and indicates that it was at this time that God first knew wisdom. When God was creating, he saw wisdom, he declared wisdom, he established wisdom, and he searched it out (28:27). The wisdom which creatures cannot discover is that which God has.

Murphy suggests that in the context of the book as a whole, chapter 28 “understands the bankruptcy of the dialogue which has taken place.”<sup>206</sup> The friends have attempted to judge Job’s situation, yet they do not possess the wisdom necessary.<sup>207</sup> The friends thought that they were in possession of wisdom, that they had Job’s situation in hand. “The message thrown in the face of this certainty is that such control over wisdom is possible only for the creator, never for the creature.”<sup>208</sup> Where is wisdom to be found? Only God knows the way to wisdom; it was at his

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side when he created (28:25-27). Wisdom is not spatially present in creation; consequently, creation has no independent access to wisdom.

### *Job 38-41*

God questions Job at the beginning of this passage: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” (38:2). In order to demonstrate Job’s lack of knowledge, God proceeds to bombard Job with questions. The questions are spatial (“Where were you . . .,” v. 4), related to identity (“Who determined . . .,” v. 5), factual (“On what . . .,” v. 6), and concerned with behaviour (“Have you . . .,” v. 16). These questions, which consider creation and Job’s relation to the creative process, suggest that if one is a creature, and was not at God’s side during creation, one is consequently without knowledge.<sup>209</sup>

Not all the questions posed to Job concern creation. Some address God’s ongoing governance of the world, for example:

Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? (38:33a)

Who has put wisdom in the clouds,  
or given understanding to the mists? (38:36)

Who can number the clouds by wisdom? (38:37a)

Do you know when the mountain goats bring forth? (38:39a)

Is by your wisdom that the hawk soars,  
and spreads its wings toward the south? (39:26)

Not only did God know wisdom during creation, but God relies continually on wisdom in the ongoing governance of the world. These questions have changed slightly: “Are you at my side when I currently make these decisions?” Job’s wisdom, knowledge, and understanding are on the line. Was Job at God’s side during creation? Is he presently at God’s side? If the answers to both questions are negative, then Job does not know wisdom.

Where is wisdom to be found? The litany of rhetorical questions drives the point home that wisdom is not found with Job because it resides only at God’s side. Wisdom is somehow known by God at creation and in the ongoing conservation of

creation.

*Jeremiah 10:12-16*

It is he who made the earth by his power,  
who established the world by his wisdom,  
and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.  
When he utters his voice there is a tumult of  
waters in the heavens,  
and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth . . .  
Every man is stupid and without knowledge;  
every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols;  
for his images are false,  
and there is no breath in them.  
They are worthless, a work of delusion . . .  
Not like these is he who is the portion of Jacob,  
for he is the one who formed all things,  
and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance;  
the Lord of hosts is his name (Jer. 10:12-16; cf. Jer. 51:15-19)

While in its context, this passage is about the abomination of idol making; it is also particularly pertinent to our discussion of the location and nature of wisdom.<sup>210</sup> The wisdom and understanding of v. 12 are God's wisdom (**חֵכְמָתוֹ**) and God's understanding (**תְּבוּנָתוֹ**). Through his wisdom and his understanding, God "established the world" and "stretched out the heavens." Therefore, wisdom facilitates creation.

Do humans possess wisdom, in Jeremiah's view? Jeremiah's unequivocal answer is, "Every man is stupid and without knowledge . . ." (Jer. 10:14, cf. the words of Agur, Prov. 30:2). Jeremiah illustrates this statement by discussing a goldsmith's attempt at creation. Observing the goldsmith's creations, Jeremiah judges them to be false ("there is no breath in them"), worthless, and a delusion. Humans are classified as "stupid" and without wisdom and understanding because they fail in "creation."<sup>211</sup> That wisdom is with God is proved by his successful creation. That creatures do not possess wisdom is proved by their inability to create.

In summary, the location of wisdom in these passages is plain: it is with God and not on earth; and all these passages recall the tradition of creation to prove this point.<sup>212</sup>

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### D.) Wisdom on Earth Mediated by God

We have seen above that while at one time, long ago, humans could possess wisdom they do not now possess God's wisdom. We have also seen further statements that wisdom is not found in creation. The passages covered below say that when humans possess divine wisdom, they do so only because God mediated it. Do these subsequent passages represent a challenge to earlier sections? I do not think so because wisdom never becomes generally available to creation. Further, God is not presented as overly generous with divine wisdom, as we see in the cases of Solomon and Daniel. Solomon and Daniel, while possessing divine wisdom, were unable to pass it on to others.

#### *Job 28*

While the thrust of Job 28 is to emphasize that creation has no access to wisdom, it closes by saying that, nevertheless, God is willing to give wisdom to creation:

And he [God] said to man:  
Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;  
and to depart from evil is understanding (28:28).

By reminding the reader of the controlled access creation has to wisdom v. 28 does not mitigate the negative statement of the poem--that wisdom is not found in the created realm.<sup>213</sup> That the words of wisdom issue from the mouth of God is expected; wisdom can only come to creation by divine revelation. The wisdom given to humanity is defined as "the fear of the Lord" and "to depart from evil" and we rightly ask, What kind of wisdom is this? "Man, though unable to grasp the divine Wisdom, receives a word from God to set him on a wise path: live in awe of God's reality, shun wickedness!" (Heaton, 1987: 19) Job 28:28 directs humanity to the source of wisdom and does not give wisdom *per se*.<sup>214</sup> The location of wisdom remains in the divine realm.

### *1 Kings 3*

In 1 Kings 3, Solomon makes the request that he be given divine wisdom.

Solomon is asleep at Gibeon and God appears to him in a dream:

At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I shall give you.' And Solomon said, '. . . Give thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to govern this thy great people?' It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, 'Because you have asked . . . for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you (1 Kings 3:4-6a, 9-12).

Solomon's request implies that God controls access to: understanding, discernment between good and evil, and insights into governance.<sup>215</sup> Since Solomon has none of these possessions, these possessions which are God's, can be Solomon's only if God so chooses to give them. We conclude that Solomon is dependent on God for wisdom. The passage ends with God's gift of wisdom ("a wise and discerning mind") to Solomon.<sup>216</sup> The wisdom God gives to Solomon does not have the "creative" stamp of divine wisdom covered in previous passages (cf. Job 28:25-27; chs. 38-41; Jer. 10:12-16); and incidentally, the expression of Solomon's divine wisdom does not have the stress on governance Solomon requested (see discussion below). The text does comment that whatever the divine wisdom God gave to Solomon may be, the gift was to be regarded as a singular historical event: "so that none like you has been before and none like you shall arise after you" (1 Kings 3:12). People came to hear and see Solomon's wisdom (1 Kings 4:34; 10:4-5, 8; but there is no indication that they were the better for it). Solomon displayed and exercised divine wisdom, but he was not a teacher or instructor of wisdom.<sup>217</sup>

#### **Excursus: Solomon's Expression of Divine Wisdom**

Because Solomon plays such an important role in Proverbs, and because one of our concerns is the explication of the divine wisdom which only God possesses, I will turn briefly to a study of how Solomon's gift of wisdom is defined in the narrative found in chapters 3 - 10.<sup>218</sup> (At the outset it must be said that the parallel



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story of Solomon's gift and consequent display of wisdom in 2 Chronicles 1 and following differs on many issues.<sup>219</sup>)

How does the narrative first explicate the divine wisdom given Solomon? The story of the two harlots (1 Kings 3:16-28) follows immediately upon Solomon's request. He resolves their conflict by indirect ruse, and they and all of Israel stand in awe "because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to render justice" (1 Kings 3:28). "God's wisdom" here means the ability to adjudicate disputes between people and to render justice.

The next expression of awe at the great wisdom of Solomon comes in 1 Kings 4:29-30. The material on which it comments is the material of 4:1-28 (MT 4:1-5:8), which describes the organization of Solomon's government, the hospitality of his household, and his great generosity.<sup>220</sup> What exactly about Solomon's wisdom is this passage explicating? First, the emphasis is not on the organization of Solomon's government *per se*, but on the *people* Solomon placed in political office. Officials are mentioned by name. That Solomon chose wisely and appointed great men is expressed by the tributes to their competence given them in these verses. Ben-hesed presided over "all the land of Hopher" (4:10), and Ben-geber was the official over "the sixty great cities with walls and bronze bars" (4:13). The greatness of some of these men is assured by the stature of their wives: Ben-abinadab had Taphath, the daughter of Solomon as his wife (4:11), and Ahimaa-az had Basemath, the daughter of Solomon as his wife (4:15). Following the story of the harlots, the narrator seems to say that Solomon had insight into all kinds of people, from harlots to potential leaders.

Another aspect of Solomon's wisely appointed government suggests that divine wisdom expresses itself through hospitality:

Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea;  
they ate and drank and were happy (1 Kings 4:20).

Solomon's government was generous to its people, and none had want (see also 1 Kings 4:27-28, MT 5:7-8). Wisdom is a "style" of allocating abundance (cf. 1 Kings

10:4-5).

The awe expressed in 1 Kings 4:29-30 [MT 5:9-10] catalogues further aspects of Solomon's wisdom as an addendum to the previous description of his-well run government and household. Even the accolade given Solomon's wisdom in 4:34 (MT 5:14) implies administrative wisdom rather than knowledge of nature (see above note).

The Hiram Story follows immediately after the description of Solomon's administrative wisdom and continues that theme. The story begins with Hiram, motivated by Hiram's love for David, sending Solomon some servants (1 Kings 5:1; MT 5:15). Solomon responds in turn and tells Hiram how he intends to build the Temple that David was not allowed to build and requests Hiram's help in the effort. Hiram is gladdened at Solomon's plans (because the hope of his beloved David is being realized), calls Solomon the wise son of David (5:7; MT 5:21), and begins to assist Solomon with the Temple.<sup>221</sup> After the initiation of Temple construction is recounted (5:8-11; MT 5:22-26), the narrator comments:

And the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him; and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and the two of them made a treaty (1 Kings 5:12, MT 5:26).

In the story of Solomon and Hiram, Solomon is first called wise (5:7; MT 5:21) because he realizes his father's hope and he understands the value of family relationships. By initiating Temple construction, Solomon underscores his loyalty to his father to which Hiram responds (5:8; MT 5:22). Solomon in the second instance is called wise (by the narrator) because of his ability to make peace. Solomon understands the value of personal and national relationships. Solomon's special wisdom is expressed in this story by his insight into Hiram's character and the value he places on relationships. Solomon knows the best way to win Hiram's support and peace.<sup>222</sup>

The final story demonstrating Solomon's divine wisdom occurs in ch. 10. The story of the queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon begins, "Now when the queen of Sheba heard the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to

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test him with hard questions” (1 Kings 10:1). The “fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord” in this context must refer to reports of Solomon’s divine wisdom and the queen seeks to test the claim that Solomon’s wisdom is, to a degree, divine.

The queen begins to test the claim of Solomon’s great wisdom by asking him questions; Solomon answers them all (10:3). After this test is the queen convinced of the claim that Solomon’s wisdom is divine? It does not seem so; the narrative describes the queen as continuing to evaluate Solomon. If the ability to answer the queen’s questions is sufficient demonstration of “divine wisdom,” one would expect v. 6 to follow v. 3, but this is not the case. The narrator tells us that is not when the queen *heard*, but when she had *seen*, that she knew Solomon’s fame was accurate (וַתֵּרֶא מַלְכַת-שֶׁבַא אֶת כָּל-חֻקְמַת שְׁלֹמֹה).<sup>223</sup>

*When the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of the servants, their clothing, his cup bearers, and his burnt offerings which he offered at the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her (1 Kings 10:4-5).*

The queen has no more need to verify the claims of Solomon’s divine wisdom after she witnesses the house which Solomon built, the food on his table, the clothing and organization of his household.<sup>224</sup> Divine wisdom expresses itself in the house Solomon built and the table he set (domestic rather than national demonstrations).

Another aspect of Solomon’s possession of divine wisdom is the benefits accorded to him because of it. God states these benefits clearly in 1 Kings 3:13-14: riches, honour, and long life will also be given Solomon along with divine wisdom. Solomon’s increase in wealth is seen in the comments of 1 Kings 4:20; 5:9-11;<sup>225</sup> 10:7, 10. Solomon’s increase in honour is expressed in 1 Kings 3:28 (the awe expressed at Solomon’s judgment); 4:34 [MT 5:14]; 5:12 (the treaty of peace); 10:8-9 (the queen’s blessing). Solomon’s long life is not commented upon in these passages.

How do these stories about Solomon define the divine wisdom Solomon received? It is noticeable that the explication of divine wisdom given to Solomon by God is never associated with creation as it is in the passages of section three.<sup>226</sup> It is

also interesting that the narrative expounding Solomon's possession of divine wisdom never presents him as an instructor; Solomon never passes divine wisdom on. Further, in comparison with the parallel account in Chronicles, the Solomonic tradition presented in Kings does not take Solomon's great wealth to be a significant indication of divine wisdom. Rather, the divine wisdom given Solomon assists in gaining insight into character: Solomon was able to render justice upon the harlots once he exposed their character, Solomon's judgment of character allowed him to make wise appointments in his administration, and Solomon's insight into Hiram's character lead to a peace treaty and help in realizing a hope of his father. Wisdom assists in the organization of kingdoms (4:1-20) and households (4:27-28 [MT 5:7-8]; 10:4-5, 7). The knowledge of many songs, proverbs, knowledge of animal and plant life (1 Kings 32-33), and the ability to answer any question (1 Kings 10:3), are supplemental expressions of divine wisdom, not sufficient expressions.<sup>227</sup>

#### *Daniel 2:20-23*

Daniel, like Solomon, was a man of renowned wisdom, and Daniel's great wisdom also like Solomon's, is not human wisdom but a wisdom given to him by God.

Daniel said:

'Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever,  
to whom belong wisdom and might.

He changes times and seasons;  
he removes kings and sets up kings;  
he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge  
to those who have understanding;  
he reveals deep and mysterious things . . .

I give thanks and praise,

for thou hast given me wisdom and strength . . . (Dan. 2:20-23).<sup>228</sup>

The book of Daniel is especially germane to the discussion of this section because it is about wise men (embodying human wisdom) and wise men (embodying divine wisdom).<sup>229</sup> The book of Daniel presents Daniel and his three friends as exceptional people. There are no explicit comments stating their distinctiveness (as found in 1 Kings 3:12) but it is implied in the narrative by their survival in the fiery

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furnace and the lions' den. Further, the description of Daniel singles him out as even more exceptional than his friends because of his unique ability with interpretation. Daniel is no ordinary person, and the attention drawn to his reception of special divine wisdom supports this (Dan. 1:17; 2:23, 30; 4:8-9; 5:11, 14).

What is so distinctive about the wisdom which Daniel (and to a lesser extent his friends) has? First, divine wisdom possessed Daniel, as Daniel notes in 2:20-23.<sup>230</sup> (Nowhere is the wisdom of the wise men of Babylon mentioned as having divine roots.) Daniel does not seem to be in possession of divine wisdom when he first hears of the king's plan to slay all the "wise men" in Babylon (he is uninformed about his own death warrant [2:15]). Daniel goes to the king to hear the king's complaint first-hand, and he comes to understand that he and his friends, being wise men, must die under the king's order. With his life threatened, Daniel prays to God for reprieve. "Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night" (2:19). Divine wisdom came to Daniel in his darkest hour. The "possession" of Daniel by divine wisdom, recounted in 2:17-23, gave him confidence to approach the king the second time as a "wise" man.<sup>231</sup>

Daniel then argues with the king the next day proposing that the king should expect a different wisdom from him now.<sup>232</sup> Daniel draws a distinction between human wisdom (which he had yesterday) and divine wisdom in vv. 27 and 30 (in the latter verse Daniel claims that human wisdom was incapable of revealing the king's secret). Divine wisdom is a refinement of human wisdom, in the sense that its concerns are also the concerns of human wisdom (though its insights are incomparable). Daniel succeeds in interpreting the dream and the king rewards him by placing him over the other wise men of Babylon (2:48, acknowledging Daniel's special wisdom).

The second distinctive trait of Daniel's wisdom is its ability to interpret. In the three places in the book where attention is drawn to Daniel's special gift, Daniel uses that gift to interpret (Dan. 2:26-30; 4:7-9; 5:8-15). In the first instance,

Nebuchadnezzar plans to execute all the wise men in his kingdom because of their failure to interpret his dream. This puts Daniel's own life in danger (2:13), and he seeks an audience with the king to see if there is any way out. He receives a "stay of execution" (2:15-16) provided he can interpret the king's vision. After receiving divine wisdom Daniel returns to the king and offers an interpretation (2:30). The king is so astounded with Daniel's interpretive abilities that he names him Belteshazzar, after a god (4:8). In the second instance, Daniel is summoned by Nebuchadnezzar to interpret a dream after another failure by the Babylonian wise men (4:7-9). In the final instance, Daniel has been summoned by Belshazzar to interpret the writing on the wall which none other can interpret, because, as Belshazzar says to Daniel, "the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you" (5:14). Daniel's divine wisdom is expressed in interpretation.

We have seen above that the benefits of riches, honour, and long life are benefits of Solomon's gift of divine wisdom. Daniel also experiences these same benefits. Honour and riches are given Daniel after his first and third exercise of divine wisdom in interpretation (2:46-48; 4:16, 29).<sup>233</sup> After Darius rises to power, he also gives Daniel honour because the "excellent spirit was in him" (6:3).

These comments attributing Daniel's special wisdom to God might be construed as hyperbole, but I think we see that God is thought literally to control access to divine wisdom. (God's control over the seasons and his control over kings, are compared to his control of wisdom [2:21].) Without the divine gift of wisdom Daniel would be like anyone else, yet with the divine gift, Daniel is a person apart. Daniel, like Solomon, is never presented as a teacher or instructor of divine wisdom. Divine wisdom is a private gift intended for him only.<sup>234</sup>

### *Summary*

In sections A and B, we saw that at one point in primeval history humanity had access to some divine gifts, wisdom being one of them. Humanity's free access

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to divine possessions did not continue (because of disobedience or arrogance), and consequently, humanity was cut off from divine possessions. The cosmology assumed in these passages draws an unassailable boundary between the divine and human realms, and therefore, a boundary between their respective possessions.

In section C we saw the continual emphasis on the separation of the divine and human realms centering around the possession and non-possession of divine wisdom. We also saw how divine wisdom was associated with God at creation.

We examined instances when people are said to possess divine wisdom in section D. This was not seen to conflict with the positions taken in earlier sections because the divine wisdom in human possession was dependent on divine revelation and was not available to humanity independently of this. We also noticed that the expression of divine wisdom in the lives of Solomon and Daniel did not recall the association of wisdom and creation. Solomon was presented in 1 Kings as expressing his divine wisdom by insight into the characters of others and his organizational abilities with house and government. Daniel was presented in the book of Daniel as expressing his divine wisdom in his ability to interpret dreams and visions. For Solomon and Daniel, wisdom assisted both men in the social and political realm. Divine wisdom in human expression concerns social interaction. Also in both cases the exercise of divine wisdom brought the added benefit of increased honour and riches. In neither case was divine wisdom expressed in an ability to teach or instruct others; in short, divine wisdom was not passed on.

Together these passages are understood to say that in the ontological structure of the cosmos, there is a wisdom on the divine side of the divide between creator and creation. This spatial location of wisdom makes wisdom unavailable to creation.<sup>235</sup>

Access to wisdom by creation, if possible, has always been mediated by God: in Genesis, the couple was placed by God in Eden where the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was (2:15); in Ezekiel the prince was placed by God on the holy

mountain--the seat of the gods where he heard counsel (Ezek. 28:14);<sup>236</sup> in 1 Kings 3, Solomon makes the request of God that he be given wisdom (1 Kings 3:9; cf. Wis. 9:9-10), and in the book of Daniel, Daniel fearing for his life prays to God and God gives him divine wisdom which saves him (Dan. 2:19-23).

Interestingly, what these passages present is at odds with the usual understanding of traditional wisdom “theology.” Traditional wisdom and its concurrent natural theology asserted that wisdom is embedded in the created order.<sup>237</sup> Retributional theology builds on this. But this is not the view expressed in the passages covered in these sections. Gottwald speaks for many when he says of early wisdom,

*Simply think of wisdom as a non-revelatory mode of thought that focuses on individual consciousness of truth and right conduct, displaying a humanistic orientation and a didactic drive to pass on its understanding to others . . .*<sup>238</sup>

Whatever **wisdom** this comment describes, it does not describe the wisdom of the passages I have covered. In the biblical tradition, wisdom is fundamentally **revelatory**; whether stolen by Adam and Eve, overheard by the *first human*, or received by Solomon and Daniel from God in visions at night; wisdom is **not naturally** found in the world. Consequently, a humanistic orientation will never find wisdom (cf. Job 28), to be human (as Jeremiah and Agur put it) is to be stupid. Wisdom was associated with God at creation, but as is repeatedly stated, wisdom remains with God, quite apart from creation.

We now turn to examine Proverbs and argue that the instructors presented in Proverbs’ introduction integrate Proverbs with these traditions.

## **Part Two: The Acknowledgement of Some Biblical Traditions About Wisdom in the Introduction to Proverbs**

In light of the passages covered in part one, what expectations do we have for a “biblical” book which presents itself “that men may know wisdom and instruction?” (Prov. 1:2) First, if Proverbs wishes to pass on divine wisdom (as opposed to human wisdom) as traditionally understood, it must identify its wisdom



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according to that tradition. Therefore we expect that the wisdom presented in Proverbs will be aligned with God during creation. Second, we would expect that someone known to have received divine wisdom must be recalled to present divine wisdom.

### *A.) The Solomonic Stamp on Proverbs' Introduction*

The inscription to Solomon at the beginning of Proverbs gets only cursory mention by scholars: Solomon is known to have written many proverbs (1 Kings 4:32) and there are many proverbs presented in the book of Proverbs. But is it this simple? I agree that Solomon is presented in the biblical record as a composer of many proverbs, riddles, and songs; on the other hand, he is much more than a prodigious author. Israel and the others stood in awe of Solomon's expression of divine wisdom (which had little to do with his compositional skills) when he judged between the harlots (1 Kings 3:28), when he selected people for, and organized his government (1 Kings 4:29-31), makes peace with Hiram (1 Kings 5:12), and when he sets his table for the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:6-9).<sup>239</sup> Solomon was unique among humanity because, according to the tradition in 1 Kings, he was the only human to possess "God's wisdom." Therefore, the inscription of Proverbs to Solomon takes on far greater significance than has previously been acknowledged. Solomon presents wisdom (Prov. 1:2) not because he possessed human wisdom, but because he had the gift of divine wisdom. This is supported by noticing that Solomon's personal experience of **divine wisdom** outside Proverbs is also the experience of the wisdom he wishes to present in the introduction to Proverbs. The wisdom Solomon introduces in Prov. 1-9 is not mundane human wisdom (which plenty of people have) but the divine wisdom given to him as a special gift.

An example of the way Proverbs' introduction recalls Solomon's experience of divine wisdom, is to note the benefits ascribed divine wisdom in 1 Kings with the benefits Solomon claims for the wisdom he introduces. From 1 Kings, we read that God granted Solomon wealth, honour, and long life because he sought wisdom

above other things. God says to Solomon after his request for wisdom:

I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, . . . then I will lengthen your days (1 Kings 3:13, 14).

Solomon asked only for divine wisdom, yet God included in his gift of wisdom, riches, honour, and long life (whether or not the implication is that wisdom, riches, honour, and long life are an integrated whole is not clear). Solomon, as a result of his own personal experience, can attest that keeping God's wisdom foremost carries as added benefits, riches, honour, and long life.

When Solomon describes the benefits which will come the son's way if he focuses on wisdom, he recalls his experience of divine wisdom.

My son, do not forget my teaching,  
but let your heart keep my commandments;  
for length of days and years of life  
and abundant welfare will they give you (Prov. 3:1-2).

Happy is the man who finds wisdom,  
and the man who gets understanding,  
for the gain from it is better than gain from silver  
and its profit better than gold (Prov. 3:13, 14)

The wise will inherit honour, but fools get disgrace (Prov. 3:35).

Long Life is in [Wisdom's] right hand;  
in her left hand are riches and honour (Prov. 3:16)

[Wisdom] is a tree of life to those who  
lay hold of her (Prov. 3:18).

My son, keep sound wisdom and discretion;  
let them not escape from your sight,  
and they will be life for your soul  
and adornment for your neck (Prov. 3:21-22).

Hear, my son, and accept my words,  
that the years of your life may be many (Prov. 4:10).

Keep hold of instruction, do not let go;  
guard her, for she is your life (4:13).

My son, be attentive to my words;  
incline your ear to my sayings . . .  
for they are life to him who finds them (Prov. 4:20, 22).

Solomon in telling his son that wisdom provides riches, honour, and life, reminds the readers of his personal experience with divine wisdom recounted in 1 Kings.

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An aspect of divine wisdom, as Solomon exhibited it, was his insight into character. This aspect of Solomonic tradition may be seen in some of the words to his son (1:10-19; 2:12-19; 5:1-12; 6:12-15, 24-29; 7:10-27). In these passages Solomon warns his son of evil men and women. The interesting thing about these passages is that these evil men and women are talkers, and Solomon tells his son how their words expose their true self (cf. 1:11-14; 5:3-6; 7:14-20). This insight of Solomon's is reminiscent of his encounter with the harlots and Hiram: in both instances by their words Solomon knows their heart (1 Kings 3:26-27; 5:8-9, 12).

Another point raised in Proverbs' introduction which reminds the reader of Solomonic tradition (outside Proverbs) is that Solomon does not claim to present wisdom directly. Solomon entreats his son to focus on "the Lord" in order to find his way to wisdom. For example,

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge . . . (1:7).

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own insight (3:5).

This is persuasively repeated by Solomon in Prov. 2:1-8.

My son, if you receive my words  
and treasure up my commandments with you,  
making your ear attentive to wisdom  
and inclining your heart to understanding;  
yes, if you seek it like silver  
and search for it as for hidden treasures;  
then you will understand the fear of the Lord  
and find the knowledge of God.  
For the Lord gives wisdom;  
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;  
he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;  
he is a shield to those who walk in integrity,  
guarding the paths of justice  
and preserving the way of his saints.

It may appear that this passage is saying that Solomon himself can pass wisdom on to his son, but this would be to overlook the conditional statement with which the passage opens. The conditional statement spoken by Solomon is: "if you receive my words . . . my commandments" (2:1), then you will "find the knowledge of God." However, "find" is misleading, "for the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding . . ." (v. 6). The emphasis is that the Lord controls

access to wisdom; it is a divine gift.<sup>240</sup> Prov. 2:1-8 could perhaps be construed as saying that wisdom resides in the instructor's words and commandments. It might seem that if the student listens to the instructor, then God will inevitably deliver the gift of wisdom. But, as in Job 28:28, the "fear of the Lord" only informs those who seek wisdom to turn towards God. These passages are stressing dependency on God. Solomon cannot give wisdom *per se*, "for the Lord gives wisdom" (2:6).<sup>241</sup> In Proverbs Solomon is informing his son of the "facts" as he himself has experienced them.

The many times that Solomon calls the instruction he offers "my" (Prov. 1:8; 2:1; 3:1-2; 4:1-2; 5:1-2, 7:1-2) does not contradict this. Solomon envisions himself as the conduit of wisdom. He presents to his son the "way of wisdom," not wisdom itself (4:11). As is suggested in 3:11-12,

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline  
or be weary of his reproof,  
for the Lord reproves him whom he loves,  
as a father the son in whom he delights.

Solomon understands himself to imitate the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Solomon does not directly pass on divine wisdom; that is something only God is able to do. This reflects the Solomon (presented outside of Proverbs) who is also not known for instruction (see p. 98 - 102 above).

Proverbs 5 is a point of transition for the introduction. Prov. 1-4 is predominantly Solomon's introduction to instruction. The concentration of attributions to wisdom of riches, honour, and long life, which arise from Solomon's personal experience, support the Solomonic "stamp" of this part of the introductory material.<sup>242</sup> The Solomonic introduction introduces instruction to Solomon's son as well as to readers familiar with Solomon's history.

As Proverbs' introduction progresses, Solomon directs the son's attention to Woman Wisdom with increasing emphasis. The Solomonic experience of divine wisdom, riches, honour, and long life, become the gifts bestowed by Woman Wisdom, thus easing the redirection of the son's attention. Woman Wisdom should

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be the son's desire. Where Solomon sometimes placed wisdom between his son and poverty, embarrassment in the community, and death, he also places Woman Wisdom herself. Solomon slowly focuses the son's attention from wisdom to Woman Wisdom. Solomon says this about Woman Wisdom:

Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister,'  
and call insight your intimate friend;  
to preserve you from the loose woman,  
from the adventuress with her smooth words (Prov. 7:4-5).

She [Woman Wisdom] will honour you if you embrace her.  
She will place on your head a fair garland;  
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown (Prov. 4:8b-9).

With these words Solomon wishes to step aside so as not to come between his son and wisdom. This emphasis is continued when Solomon presents the words of Woman Wisdom herself, in which she claims to be all the son needs:

Take my instruction instead of silver,  
and knowledge rather than choice gold;  
for wisdom is better than jewels (Prov. 8:10).

Riches and honour are with me,  
enduring wealth and prosperity.  
My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,  
and my yield than choice silver (Prov. 8:18-19).

Endowing with wealth those who love me,  
and filling their treasuries (Prov. 8:21).

For he who finds me finds life  
and obtains favor from the Lord (Prov. 8:35).

Woman Wisdom provides riches, honour, and life to those who follow her. Woman Wisdom takes on the attributes of the abstract noun "wisdom." These are just a few of the benefits Woman Wisdom states she offers, but they are sufficient to show that the wisdom she embodies is an expansion of the wisdom Solomon received. She provides to those who will listen to her those same benefits (benefits given to Solomon through God's gift). The divine gift of wisdom given Solomon is the same wisdom enfolded in Woman Wisdom.

In Proverbs 9, the final chapter of the introduction, Woman Wisdom is presented as busy at work in a house of her construction (cf. Prov. 14:1; 24:3); she prepares a banquet for any of the public who will accept her invitation. The chapter

itself is composed of two invitations to two meals. Woman Wisdom invites men to her feast of meat, bread and mixed wine (9:4-5) and Woman Folly's invitation is to partake of "stolen" water and bread (9:16). The boundary between these two invitations is formed by vv. 7-12.

What do these meals represent? Possible backgrounds suggested for these meals are the fertility cult or a marriage ceremony (and I wish to suggest a "wisdom tradition").<sup>243</sup> I agree in general that the "sexuality" of Woman Wisdom is a main part of her characterization and therefore the association with the "fertility cult" or a marriage ceremony is not unreasonable. However, there are traditions about "meals" which are specifically affiliated with wisdom; also recalling Solomonic traditions.<sup>244</sup>

Of the ways Solomon's wisdom is revealed in 1 Kings, twice it is revealed in the way in which Solomon sets his table (cf. 1 Kings 4:27-28; 10:4-5). In the latter case of Solomon's encounter with the queen of Sheba, the queen was not convinced that Solomon had divine wisdom though he answered all her questions. It was only,

when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, **the house that he had built, the food of his table**, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, . . . there was no more spirit [to test the wisdom of Solomon] in her (1 Kings 10:4-5).

When we read in Prov. 9 that Wisdom builds her house and sets her table we are reminded of Solomon. As the house Solomon built and the meal he prepared proved to the queen of Sheba that he possessed divine knowledge, so also do the house which Woman Wisdom built and the meal she prepared prove her claim in Prov. 8 that she is that divine wisdom.<sup>245</sup> Interestingly enough, this is the only manifestation (as opposed to benefit) of divine wisdom Woman Wisdom and Solomon share. No special attention is drawn to Woman Wisdom's extraordinary insight into character, for example. In fact, Woman Wisdom's speech in Prov. 1:24-25 suggests the opposite. She is presented there as expending effort on people who will eventually fail to respond to her call.

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### *B.) The Association of the Wisdom of Proverbs with Creation*

As we noted earlier the explication of the wisdom given Solomon is not associated with creation. This aspect of divine wisdom has not been overlooked by Proverbs' introduction even though it recalls Solomonic traditions; because Solomon, in his description of Woman Wisdom to his son, identifies her as God's wisdom, known by him from before creation, at his side when he creates, and his companion in heaven during the ongoing governance of the world (primarily Prov. 8). This description of Woman Wisdom makes it clear that she is the same wisdom identified outside of Proverbs which is associated with creation. We now turn to wisdom which recalls wisdom's association with creation.

#### *Proverbs 3:19-20*

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth;  
by understanding he established the heavens;  
by his knowledge the deeps broke forth,  
and the clouds drop down dew (Prov. 3:19-20).

In this brief statement about creation, which some have called a forerunner to Prov. 8,<sup>246</sup> we see expressed succinctly that the nature of the wisdom Proverbs seeks to introduce is the Lord's wisdom, understanding, and knowledge which pertains to creation. This wisdom that has been in God's possession from the beginning, playing a role during creation, is the same wisdom which Proverbs introduces.

#### *Proverbs 8:22-30*

Prov. 8:22-30 is found among Woman Wisdom's exhortations, her self-praise, and her participation in "current history" found in 8:1-21, and the invitation to her banquet table in 9:1-12.<sup>247</sup> This passage goes to great lengths to describe Woman Wisdom's origins. Will it recall other biblical traditions about divine wisdom?

Yee understands there to be a three-part division of this poem.<sup>248</sup> The first division of this poem is vv. 22-26, which is concerned with describing the origin of

Woman Wisdom. It begins with WW's statement that Yahweh קָנָנִי her at the beginning of his act of creating, and ends by emphasizing that when Yahweh "qana" her (in v. 22), he had not yet started to make the earth (v. 26). Though Woman Wisdom is defined with respect to God's activity, she nevertheless remains the subject of this passage.<sup>249</sup>

For most commentators, the interest in vv. 22-26 lies with the interpretation of the verb *qana*.<sup>250</sup>

The Lord created [*qana*] me at the beginning of his work,  
the first of his acts of old (8:22).

The parallelism here emphasizes that Woman Wisdom was God's initial act. The exact meaning of this "act" is then secondary to its location in time.<sup>251</sup> Time is further emphasized in vv. 23-26 by the litany of priority, "When there were no . . .," "When there were no . . .," "Before . . .," "Before . . .," "Before . . .", which establishes the setting as a time when nothing else was. Yet this is not altogether true; WW declares that when creation was not, she was. "What is being affirmed is not that Yahweh is creator, but that Yahweh's attribute of wisdom 'existed' prior to its expression in his acts of creation" (Scott, 1965: 72).

The time suggested in vv. 22-26 precedes God's act of creation. We look to Genesis for example. When Genesis opens, God is already in the act of creating heaven and earth. However, Gen. 1:2 tells of the primordial waters (תְּהוֹמִים) and darkness which existed, agitated by God's Storm, prior to creation. Proverbs states that Wisdom was begotten before even the depths (תְּהוֹמוֹת, v. 24). The time frame emphasized is *before* the beginning of creation of heaven and earth.

The origin of Wisdom was long antecedent to God's work in creating the world and is sharply contrasted with it: before the mountains and hills, before earth or heavens were made, then Wisdom existed. The emphasis is not that Wisdom came into being, by whatever process, as the first of God's creative activities nor at their beginning, but long before them (Irwin, 1961: 140).

Woman Wisdom wishes to communicate her chronological uniqueness: she was God's *first* "verbal" act. Woman Wisdom's claim to be God's first act also recalls the tradition which associates divine wisdom with the first human. Eliphaz asks Job,



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“Are you the first man that was born? Or were you brought forth before the hills?”, knowing all the time that Job is not the First Man. However, Woman Wisdom is arguing convincingly that she is the First Man (really she is claiming to be the First Woman) and as we see, she does claim to possess divine wisdom.

The setting of vv. 22-26 does not match every point of the creation story from Genesis. This is not surprising since the Proverbs passage emphasizes Woman Wisdom’s priority in time over creation rather than creation itself. The writer uses the creation tradition as a reference point for this story of WW’s beginnings. To place WW’s origin prior to creation is to make her other than creature. This general understanding of the passage must precede specific understanding of the verbs involved. Whatever *יָנַקְתִּי* means, it cannot override WW’s difference from creation and her place in the divine realm before creation commences.

Throughout this passage the repeated effort to distinguish chronologically between Woman Wisdom and creation in vv. 22-25 supports the translation of *qana* as “conceived” as opposed to “created.”<sup>252</sup> The verbs which Woman Wisdom uses to describe her becoming are all in the perfect tense, which expresses completed action. There is no overlap with God’s activity. Woman Wisdom was *qana*, *nissakti*, and *holalti* before creation began, full stop. The transition between v. 26 and v. 27 moves the setting from WW origins to the creation of the world. When the time arises that God begins to create, WW states, “I was there.” What is being communicated is that first God *qana* Woman Wisdom and then, after that act had been completed (the perfect verbs), God started to create.

The next section, vv. 27-30a, moves forward from the “birth” of Woman Wisdom to her presence with Yahweh when he starts creation. It reaffirms the distinction between Woman Wisdom and creation made chronologically in vv. 22-26 by emphasizing a spatial difference. Where vv. 22-26 stressed the existence of Woman Wisdom prior to the created things, vv. 27-30 emphasizes that Woman Wisdom was at Yahweh’s side when he was creating.<sup>253</sup>

Why does the author expend such effort to distinguish Woman Wisdom and

creation? I suggest this effort was expended to recall the wisdom tradition which associates wisdom with God during creation. Proverbs 8 reminds the reader continually that this Woman Wisdom is the wisdom the reader expects. She existed prior to creation, was present at the Creator's side during creation, and continues to be at God's side; these are all themes in common with traditions of divine wisdom outside of Proverbs.

## **Conclusion**

Since the relationship between the instructor and the instruction of ANE Instruction is questionable in many instructions, any suggestion about the relative significance of one instructor over another must be received with caution.<sup>254</sup> In the context of ANE Instruction, Proverbs' choice of Solomon as instructor has significance for Proverbs' formal tie to ANE Instruction. A king giving instruction to his son accounts for the introductory formula of six of the Instructions covered. (Also Solomon's renowned wisdom is similar to that of the instructor Ahikar.) The appropriateness of wise king Solomon to the ANE Instructional tradition is clear. The first chapters of the introduction to Proverbs, aside from the inclusion of the mother as a source of instruction, could well be an introduction to ANE Instruction.<sup>255</sup> But this literary convention provides little insight into why Proverbs chose Solomon over any other king of Israel.

The biblical context in which Proverbs resides provides materials which, as we have shown, influenced Proverbs' composition and explain its choice of instructors. The choice of Solomon, as one of Proverbs' instructors, harmonizes the ANE Instructional and the biblical tradition. But problems remain with the tradition of Solomon. Not only was Solomon never presented as an instructor in traditions outside of Proverbs, but the divine wisdom which Solomon had was defined differently than the creative divine wisdom found elsewhere. In a sense, the biblical material which supported his choice as an instructor limited his usefulness. To have Solomon present Woman Wisdom to his son as the "true" instructor of

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Proverbs would (and does) overcome these problems. WW will provide the son with benefits similar to those Solomon himself experienced (riches, honour and long life). She as well incarnates the creative associations of divine wisdom (Prov. 8) found outside the Solomonic traditions. Woman Wisdom's importance as an instructor who integrates biblical traditions about divine wisdom cannot be overstated. Where Solomon was an expected, yet an ultimately ineffectual mediator of God's wisdom, Woman Wisdom has no such shortcomings. Her ability to expand without contradicting biblical wisdom traditions makes her the preeminent instructor of wisdom in the biblical setting. It is only by examining the introduction of Proverbs in a biblical context that these aspects of its composition can be explained.

The introduction to Proverbs appears to be an introduction expected by the ANE Instructional tradition and the biblical traditions. However, this assessment is just a surface reading; there are significant challenges being made to both traditions which qualify any claim that Proverbs' introduction is simply representing ANE Instructional or biblical themes about wisdom. Further, these challenges render inappropriate any reading of Proverbs' which claims it arises from, and supports, the establishment.

The introduction to Proverbs is as untraditional as it is traditional. Solomon presents Woman Wisdom to his son as the "real" instructor of Proverbs. Consequently, the ANE tradition of males instructing their sons has been abandoned. Woman Wisdom also breaks the human instructor tradition, as her divinity attests. At the beginning of this chapter, I argued that the tradition made clear that wisdom was with God, unavailable to creation. If divine wisdom was made available, it was mediated by God and represented a rare event. Yet we read in the Wisdom poems (1:20-33; 8-9:12) that Woman Wisdom walks the earth among humanity, speaking directly to any who will hear. Wisdom is no longer in heaven. Wisdom is no longer mediated by God. Woman Wisdom is a woman inviting men to instruction. Proverbs challenges the biblical wisdom traditions in the character of

WW herself.

In the next chapter we turn to examine the innovations of Proverbs' introduction with respect to both the ANE Instructional and biblical wisdom traditions. The introduction to Proverbs deconstructs our traditional expectations and creates a new Instructional tradition.

ENDNOTES:

<sup>176</sup> I have used the plural “instructors” on purpose: while Solomon is the primary instructor of Proverbs, he recommends to his son that he seek out Woman Wisdom as his instructor. Of these instructors, Solomon and Woman Wisdom are most prominent.

<sup>177</sup> Whybray has argued against any specific interpretation of the word *hokma* (R.N. Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament* [BZAW 135; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974]). He argues that the varieties of context in which the word occurs suggest that *hokma* represents a general conceptual field. For example, sometimes *hokma* and *'eša* (“counsel”) are understood as equivalent. (The two words are used in parallel in Jer. 49:7; see also the studies of P. de Boer, “The Counselor” in *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East* [ed. M. Noth and D. W. Thomas; VT Sup 3; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969], pp. 42-71; L. Kalugia, *The Wise King: Studies in Royal Wisdom as Divine Revelation in the Old Testament and Its Environment* [Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament Series 15; Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1980], pp. 77-80; W. McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men* [London: SCM, 1965]; and Whybray, 1974: 132-133.) McKane goes further than the rest of the above studies and suggests that *hokma* has a special association with *'eša*, to the extent that *hokma* is foremost a political term (cf. Whybray’s critique of McKane’s suggestion; Whybray, 1974: 132-133). However, *hokma* is used in parallel with so many different words (e.g., understanding, knowledge, instruction) that its meaning cannot be limited to one of these possible connections. (The studies of Whybray [1974] and Kalugia [1980] present the great variety of possible interpretations for *hokma*).

However, though the spectrum of the possible meanings of *hokma* exceeds the meaning suggested by any small collection of contexts, this does not imply that *hokma* cannot have a specific meaning within a selection of occurrences. *Hokma* can be given specific meaning if it is used repeatedly in similar contexts (expressing similar themes) and it is remembered that this meaning is appropriate only for those contexts. Because *hokma* which has such a wide range of meaning, it is tempting to forget that while one may have discerned a clear meaning in one group of contexts, this meaning has no application for occurrence of the word outside similar contexts.

The error that arises, when the ‘meaning’ of a word (understood as the total series of relations in which it is used in the literature) is read into a particular case as its sense and implication there, may be called ‘illegitimate totality transfer’ (James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961], p. 218).

In this chapter, I will present a series of biblical texts and argue that the consistency of context and themes expressed in these texts justifies a shared understanding of *hokma*. The *hokma* specified in this chapter will sometimes be called by me “God’s wisdom” or “divine wisdom” (but not always). (In all cases the understanding of *hokma* in these texts applies only to these texts, and likewise, the understanding of *hokma* found outside these texts does not apply to these texts.) The understanding of *hokma* the passages of this chapter share are: the location of God’s wisdom is in God’s presence (sometimes mention of God’s wisdom occurs in a context of creation), and God’s wisdom is unavailable to creation directly (God always controls access to it).

This is not to say that there is no *hokma* of any kind in creation. Humans possess plenty of *hokma* (see Whybray’s survey of “human” *hokma* in his section “‘Wisdom’ as Intelligence,” 1974: 6-14); however, “God’s wisdom” is not a ready human possession.

<sup>178</sup> This cosmology, as presupposed in Genesis 1-11, implies that any movement across this chasm is only initiated by the divinity. When creation attempts to cross this chasm it never succeeds. As we will see, wisdom was one window of access across the boundary between creator and creation.

<sup>179</sup> While the material is organized in this manner, this scheme is by no means pure. Much of the material supports more than one theme, consequently confusing its presentation. This thematic overlap does support my claim, however, that the understanding of “wisdom” addressed in these differing contexts is shared.

<sup>180</sup> I am referring here to studies of the “wisdom tradition” in Israel which assume the cosmology expressed in Prov. 8 is the same cosmology found in other passages which address the

relationship of wisdom with creation. For example, von Rad interprets Job 28 in light of the cosmology concerning Wisdom's location presented in Prov. 8 (he titled the chapter in which he discusses Job 28, "The Self-revelation of Creation," in Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* [tr. James D. Martin; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972], pp. 144-176). This leads him to say that while Job 28 looks as if it is saying that Wisdom is not available in creation (which is exactly what the passage is saying!, cf. Claus Westermann, *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977], p. 137) this is really not its message. Job 28 is saying, according to von Rad, that "wisdom is to be found somewhere in the world; it is there, but incapable of being grasped. If it were not inside the world, the references to men digging through the earth would be meaningless" (von Rad, 1972: 148). Von Rad too easily assumes the cosmology of Prov. 8 lies behind the Job passage.

<sup>181</sup> Robert Oden, "Transformations in Near Eastern Myths: Genesis 1-11 and the Old Babylonian *Epic of Atrahasis*", *Religion* 11 (1981), pp. 21-37.

<sup>182</sup> See G. von Rad (*Genesis: A Commentary* [OTL; tr. John H. Marks; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970], p. 49) for this translation. He supports this translation from Daniel 7:2, "Daniel said, 'I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.'" Von Rad is seeking to capture the chaos of the "watery primeval element" as "agitated by a divine storm." "The declaration then belongs completely to the description of chaos and does not yet lead into the creative activity; in fact this 'spirit of God' takes no more active part in creation" (p. 49). This storm of God agitating the watery chaos is the state of the cosmos before creation, and it is noted that the primeval water and God's storm together form one indivisible element.

Guthrie observes that the existence of a pre-creation unity of undefined matter is a common belief:

Both in Greece and in the Near East generally it was an ancient and widespread belief that in the beginning all things were fused together in a undifferentiated mass. The initial act in the making of the world was regularly seen as the separation or division of what had been one (W.K.G. Guthrie, *In the Beginning: Some Greek Views on the Origins of Life and the Early State of Man* [London: Methuen & Co., 1957], p. 18).

This preexistent unity is what von Rad hoped to communicate in his translation.

<sup>183</sup> The term "binary," means that the creation story in Genesis 1: "is constantly setting up and opposing categories" (E. Leach, *Genesis as Myth: And Other Essays* [London: Jonathan Cape, 1969], p. 8). This binary style of narrative allows the creative items to be defined both positively, for what they are, and negatively, for what they are not. Though this is a common way of presenting creation, the lack of this type of presentation in *Atrahasis* heightens this style of Genesis 1.

This binary style is not unique to Genesis or the Hebrew tradition, as it is also found in other ANE creation texts. The comparison of Genesis and *Atrahasis* serves only to highlight the "binary style," so that its traits can be more easily followed through Genesis' primeval history.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. von Rad, 1972: 49f.; see the above note on "Storm of God."

<sup>185</sup> Briefly stated, the epic of *Atrahasis* recounts how in the beginning the gods found it hard to get food. There was a group of younger gods appointed to labour and toil, irrigating fields and growing food. These gods revolted against Enlil, god of the earth, and refused to labour. It was decided that a new race of beings was needed to do this hard toil, and humans were created. They were made from clay and the blood of the god who led the labour revolt by Ea/Enki and the birth goddess Nintur (this reading is suggested by W.G. Lambert and A.R. Millard in *ATRA-HASIS: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969], pp. 61, 63). Humanity proves to be a temporary respite, and soon begins to multiply and, because of the noise they raise, become another annoyance to the gods. To quiet the world, Enlil makes three attempts on the life of humanity. In each of these cases, Enki, the creator, saves humanity from total destruction. Enki tells *Atrahasis* (the king and "all-wise") why the gods are angered and how best to pacify them. Humans need to stop their excessive noise and pray to the offended gods. When Enlil sees that his previous attempts to get rid of humanity have failed, he seeks a final solution: a flood. *Atrahasis* and his family are the only ones to escape this catastrophe, thanks to advice given by Ea to build an "ark." The story closes with regulations given which restrict the numbers of humans.

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See also: Oden, 1981; *Atrahasis* in ANET, pp. 104-106; Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "The Atrahasis Epic and its Significance for our Understanding of Genesis 1-9", *BA* 40 (1977), pp. 147-155; and Walter Beyerlin, *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), pp. 90-93.

<sup>186</sup> Commentators on this passage have associated the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil with divine wisdom:

Though the precise meaning of this phrase [the knowledge of good and evil] has been debated . . . its use in Genesis 2-3 plainly indicates that it is some sort of knowledge which the god of Israel possesses and which was to be denied to human beings (Oden, 1981: 30).

Good also understands the knowledge of good and evil to be a divine possession which is placed off limits to creation:

Whether or not the snake is wrong in saying that the deity wishes to prevent their getting it . . . because the humans have wisdom, they must leave the Garden. Yes, human wisdom is condemned as a trespass on divine territory . . . (Edwin M. Good, "Deception and Women, A Response", *Semeia* 42 [1988], pp. 126-127).

See also Westermann's review of those studies which understand the fruit to represent "divine" knowledge (C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* [tr. J. J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984], pp. 243ff.).

<sup>187</sup> Oden, 1981: 30. In Job 15:7-8, Ezek. 28:11-19, and Sir. 49:16, there is allusion to a primeval man who had, before the fall, access to divine counsel, but attempted to acquire divine wisdom (the ability to provide his own counsel for himself?) and subsequently "fell." See also Westermann, 1984: 247ff.

<sup>188</sup> Ezek. 28:1-19 also presents Eden as a place of divine habitation.

<sup>189</sup> The curses upon the couple have traditionally been attributed to their acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil. While this interpretation is questionable, it has led many to understand Gen. 3 to arise from within the "wisdom tradition." Here, I will briefly mention the study of G. Mendenhall ("The Shady Side of Wisdom: The Date and Purpose of Genesis 3" in *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honour of Jacob M. Meyers* [ed. H. N. Bream et al.; Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974], pp. 319-334). He understands Gen. 3 to be an expression of something akin to a mid-life crisis for the Wisdom Tradition. This crisis was brought about by the calamity of the destruction of the Temple and state (587 B.C.E.). The wisdom tradition "had been chastened by the calamity and . . . was forced to the conclusion that the old time religious tradition was, after all, in the right" (p. 320). Gen. 3 was composed to suggest a limit for wisdom. Unbounded wisdom, represented by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, if grasped for, leads to expulsion from the tree of life. Wisdom's penchant to grasp beyond the bounds set by Yahweh for wisdom is wisdom's "shady side" (pp. 323-324). For Mendenhall, Gen. 3 is a corrective for the wisdom tradition which states that wisdom must accept restrictions established by Yahweh, and thereby find itself within the Yahwistic tradition.

Mendenhall's argument concerning Gen. 3 is suggestive but as is argued in this chapter, the cosmology assumed by all passages covered in this section suggest access to wisdom outside divine revelation is impossible. As such, the wisdom tradition (exclusive of Proverbs as we are to see) does not need Genesis to remind itself that the access to divine Wisdom by creation is only granted, never grasped. Wisdom cannot be obtained by the created outside of God.

<sup>190</sup> Genesis 6:1-4 has been compared with "The Catalogue of Women," an anonymous addition made to Hesiod's *Theogony* (John Van Seters, "The Primeval Histories of Greece and Israel Compared", *ZAW* 100 [1988], pp. 1-22). The Catalogue is an attempt to provide primeval history for humans as the *Theogony* has presented divine primeval history. The Catalogue begins its "universal" primeval history by recounting the genealogies of the sexual union of gods and human women. These encounters inaugurated the golden age, which was distinguished by heroes and heroic acts. Zeus considered the acts of these demigods to be an affront to the gods (because the divine should never know the taste of death) and set about to destroy them and found a new generation of humanity which

knows its bounds and kept to them. (The disaster which is inflicted by Zeus seems to be the Trojan War [cf. *Odyssey*, V. 118-136]. In the *Odyssey*, Kalypso recounts the actions of the male gods [Zeus among them] who have succeeded to kill off all the goddesses' lovers who were mortal men. Or, because the text is hard to interpret it may have been some natural disaster--a flood--and the Trojan war a secondary interpretation.) The result of this disaster, whatever it was, was to kill off all those who mixed divine and human blood, again separating the divine and human realms and initiating the present age.

What the Catalogue suggests to Van Seters concerning the relationship between the flood and Gen. 6:1-4, is that the story of the union of gods and human women is more an integral part of the primeval history of Genesis than has been assumed. In the Catalogue (also for Genesis), the genealogy of present humanity does not commence until the demi-gods and heroes of old are killed by flood or war. In comparison, the reason for the flood expressed by some ANE stories is that of human overabundance (e.g. *Atrahasis*; Van Seters, 1988: 8-9). The mixture of divine and human blood is not a rationale for the elimination of humanity by the flood in the ANE tradition. Gilgamesh, for example, part god and part man, is a descendant of the flood survivor and a great hero.

The ANE theme of overpopulation is found in the Genesis account by the bracketing material of "When mankind had begun to multiply 'upon the surface of the earth' (v. 1a) and "And the Lord was sorry that he had made man . . . [and] I will blot out man who I have created . . ." (6:6-7, Van Seters p. 8). Into this traditional Ancient Near Eastern explanation for the flood Genesis adds a western rationale--that of the union of gods with human women (Van Seters, pp. 9, 13). It is not surprising therefore that the transition between Gen. 6:1-4 and the flood narrative is awkward, combining as it does both the eastern and western rationales for the flood. Nevertheless, overpopulation and the demigods are, in their respective traditions, integral parts of the traditions of primeval history and both are cited as reasons for the flood in Genesis (Van Seters, pp. 8, 21).

The comparison of Gen. 6:1-4 with *The Catalogues* highlights Genesis' rationale for the flood as the elimination of the demi-gods and the necessity of reestablishing the divine-human boundary. This supports Oden's thesis that a main concern of Genesis' primeval history was the fortification of the boundary separating the divine and human realms. Thus the inclusion of the western account of the union of gods and man in the eastern context of humanity's overabundance as the rationale for the flood allowed the writers of Genesis to vocalize their cosmology of separation in a unique manner.

<sup>191</sup> This punishment (the confusing of languages) is reminiscent of *Atrahasis*' focus on speech. That, however, is the extent of the similarity. While humanity's abundance on earth led to quarrels, it was their babble (desecration of language) which proved the insufferable irritant in *Atrahasis*. *Atrahasis* is told he can soothe the gods and stay humanity's destruction with words of prayer (sacred use of language). In Genesis, God is not worried about humanity's babble; rather, God encourages it by mixing humanity's speech. Instead, God is disturbed by humanity's pretensions to the divine.

It is not clear how humanity's trait of desiring the divine has been permanently modified by the mixing of languages. It is clear, however, that *Atrahasis*' concern is for the sacredness of articulate language (expressing a lack of interest in the establishing distance between realms), whereas Genesis asserts the sacredness of the distinction between realms (expressing a lack of interest in articulate language).

<sup>192</sup>See Westermann, 1984: 245f., on the strengths of such an assumption.

<sup>193</sup> Compare with "everyone who is arrogant is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished" (Prov. 16:5). "It was [the prince of Tyre's] claim to the possession of the divine *hokma* which led to the down fall of [the prince] placed by God in the garden of Eden" (Whybray, 1974: 81).

<sup>194</sup> It is important to notice that God never doubts that the prince also possess great wisdom; to the contrary, God does acknowledge the prince's great wisdom (Ezek. 28:3-5, 7), but God also knows the prince does not possess "divine wisdom" (Ezek. 28:2, 6). Because the text is clearly distinguishing between them, it is unfortunate that the same word "*hkm*" is used for the wisdom the prince has and that which he does not have.

<sup>195</sup> Ezek. 28:2. Compare a king's similar affront to God in Is. 14:13-14.



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<sup>196</sup> The acquisition of wealth is also a measure of the wisdom of Solomon, especially in 2 Chron. 1. In fact, the account of Solomon's wisdom in 2 Chronicles focuses exclusively Solomon's riches as an explication of his wisdom.

<sup>197</sup> Ringgren's translation (Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom* [Lund: H. Ohlssöns, 1947]), p. 90.

<sup>198</sup> See the Words of Agur (Prov. 30:4) where Agur would likewise grant "divine wisdom" to even the son of the first man, if this son could be found.

<sup>199</sup> Note that Eliphaz does not question the relevance of divine wisdom to the argument, but Job's possession of it. While in the next section of this chapter the strong association between divine wisdom and creation will be highlighted it would be wrong to say that divine wisdom was limited to creative wisdom. Eliphaz's reference to divine wisdom implies that it exceeds human knowledge, not that its concern is different from human wisdom. See a further discussion of this in the section on Daniel below.

<sup>200</sup> David J.A. Clines, *Job 1-20* (Word Biblical Commentary 17; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), p. 349.

<sup>201</sup> The word translated as "stupid" here, נָעַר, is the same word used by Jeremiah when he concurs with Agur concerning the human condition: "Every man is stupid [נָעַר] and without knowledge" (Jer. 10:14). See discussion of this passage below.

<sup>202</sup> There is much debate over the point of view and the subject of v. 4. Scott casts the questions of v. 4 in the mouth of a non-Israelite, and "his words are cited only to be refuted" (R.B.Y. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom* [New York: Macmillan Co., 1971], p. 165) Accordingly these questions of an agnostic are answered in vv. 5-6; God does make himself known. W. McKane (*Proverbs* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970], p. 643) understands these verses to describe the hiddenness of God, his otherness, thus requiring any disclosure of God to be self-disclosure. With respect to the texts already covered, and their agreement that divine wisdom is heaven with God, these questions hardly need to be those of a non-Israelite agnostic (see note above), but express an orthodox Hebraic understanding that humans do not possess divine wisdom.

<sup>203</sup> "Who determined its [the earths] measurements--surely you know" (Job 38:5). God is questioning Job's pretense to wisdom here: exactly the point Agur is making.

<sup>204</sup> The comparison to 'coral' (*peninim*, 28:12) is unique to the wisdom tradition (see the discussions of Prov. 3:15; 8:11; and 31:10). In this context it is said that wisdom could not be bought with coral. Coral may be a rare material, but wisdom is presented as 'rarer' than rare things.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. J.H. Eaton, *Job* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), p. 18.

<sup>206</sup> R.E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther* (FTOL 13, Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1981), p. 37.

<sup>207</sup> This same sentiment is expressed in Job 26:4. Job asks his friends "with whose help have you uttered words [of wisdom], and whose spirit has come forth from you?" The question implies that the friends' words of wisdom, if they are "wisdom," are not their own. Job implies that to speak wisdom the friends must be possessed from the outside.

<sup>208</sup> Westermann, 1977: 137.

In a similar vein, God's statement to Job's friends in the closing verses of the book of Job is that his anger is kindled against the words they spoke on *his* behalf. The friends do not acknowledge that creation is bereft of wisdom. To alleviate God's anger, Job does not speak the words of wisdom that the friends should have offered (see comments on 28:28), thus righting the wrong of the un-wise words--Job prays to God. Wisdom never becomes a human possession in the book of Job; the only

approach that creation has to wisdom is cultic.

<sup>209</sup> Westermann understands there to be one primary question here, “Are you Creator or creature?”--which is worked out in these speeches of God (Westermann, 1977: 107). While I agree with Westermann in principle, I do not agree that the question ever becomes, “Are you the Creator?” It seems better to phrase the question, “Are you divine or creature?” or “Were you present with the Creator at creation?” Both God and Job know there is only one creator, but this is not Job’s problem.

<sup>210</sup> Most commentators see here the comparison between Yahweh and the idols of the nations; however, in the poem itself, the Creator of vv. 12-13 is contrasted to the human creator of v. 14. The creation of idols, no matter how appropriate to larger themes, demonstrates the failure of humanity to create and its dependence on the creator.

<sup>211</sup> This contrast between God with successful creative knowledge and the goldsmith without is also found in Is. 40:18-23.

<sup>212</sup> An example of the association of God and wisdom together during creation, without the stress on wisdom’s absence from the world, see Psalms 104:24.

<sup>213</sup> Von Rad, understands this verse to be a late insertion which seeks to offset the negative aspect of the poem by providing “a way to wisdom,” i.e. by the “fear of God.” In offering this “way” to wisdom, von Rad suggests, this verse softens the hard line drawn in the previous verses--that creation can find no way to wisdom. Von Rad’s title for the section of his book *Wisdom in Israel* concerning this passage is: “Wisdom Immanent in the World” (1972: 145-156). This title expresses von Rad’s belief that wisdom is spatially present in creation. Therefore, for von Rad, the search described in the first part of the chapter had the *potential* to discover wisdom. The rhetorical suggestion of this passage is that “this wisdom is to be found somewhere in the world; it is there, but incapable of being grasped. If it were not inside the world, the references to men digging through the earth would be meaningless” (p. 148). But he goes on to say that wisdom is also presented as something separate from creation and he comes to the conclusion that wisdom “must signify some ‘meaning’ implanted by God in creation” (p. 148).

I am in full agreement with Camp who understands von Rad’s interpretation of Job 28 to clash with his more general belief of the self-revelation of wisdom: “namely that there is an order in things and in events and that this order is not a mystery, but makes itself known” (von Rad, 1972: 170; see also Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* [Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985], p. 299 n.12). As I have argued in section C, the poet states that there is no potential for creation to find or obtain wisdom exclusive of God. This is a hard line. However, the poet does not leave it at that; creation can have access to wisdom but it must be mediated by God. If wisdom makes itself known, it is only through the mediation of God, and never independently. Wisdom is with God (not *in* creation) and is unavailable independent of God.

<sup>214</sup> The wisdom known by God does not seem to be the wisdom given to humanity in v. 28. The type of wisdom God searched out at creation--“creative wisdom”--is not given in 28:28.

<sup>215</sup> The following passage from Wisdom of Solomon also recounts Solomon’s request of God for wisdom in a like manner. It locates wisdom at God’s side and goes beyond the 1 Kings passage by concentrating Solomon’s request to be solely for wisdom and identifying this wisdom as that which God knew during creation.

With thee is wisdom, who knows thy works  
and was present when thou didst make the world . . .  
Send her forth from the holy heavens,  
and from the throne of thy glory send her,  
that she may be with me and toil,  
and that I may learn what is pleasing to thee (Wisdom 9:9-10).

<sup>216</sup> Is it correct to assume, as I have done, that the gift God gave Solomon was “divine wisdom?” This assumption is supported by noting that the narrative claims God did give Solomon

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“divine wisdom” (cf. 1 Kings 3:28; 4:29; 5:12) and does not use the phrase “a wise and discerning mind” outside of the vision.

<sup>217</sup> This same point will be made with respect of Daniel’s gift of divine wisdom covered below. Daniel’s possession of God’s wisdom enabled him to have insight into dreams and visions, but Daniel was never portrayed as teaching others to exercise similar gifts.

<sup>218</sup> I understand the material which follows Solomon’s request for wisdom up until 1 Kings 11 (where the subject changes from Solomon’s unusual wisdom to Solomon’s love of women) to expound Solomon’s special gift of wisdom. This material loosely divides into the story of the harlots (1 Kings 3:16-28), Solomon’s administration of his kingdom (4:1-34; MT 4:1-5:15), the relationship established between Solomon and Hiram (5:1-12; MT 5:15-27), and Solomon’s encounter with the queen of Sheba (ch. 10). Each passage highlights different aspects of Solomon’s wisdom and each closes with the narrator reminding the reader that God gave Solomon special wisdom (*inclusio*; 3:28; 4:29; 5:12 [MT 5:27]; 10:24). This last feature of *inclusio* is important because it is the writers way of informing the reader that Solomon’s divine wisdom was on display in the story just told. At Gibeon we read that Solomon was given God’s wisdom and at the end of each of these stories we are reminded again that God gave Solomon wisdom.

A notable lack of *inclusio* is found at the end of the report of Solomon’s compositional and encyclopedic knowledge [4:30-34; MT 5:10-14] and the temple narrative [5:13-9:28; MT 5:28-9:28]. The usual understanding for the aspect of Solomon which best explains his renown for wisdom as utilized by Proverbs, is the report of his great composition of proverbs, songs, riddles, and hard questions in 1 Kings 4:32 [MT 5:12] (cf. R.B.Y. Scott, “Solomon and the Beginnings of Wisdom in Israel”, VTS 3 [1969], pp. 262-279, p. 262; Scott, 1971: 4; Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], p. 552; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* [New York: Harper & Row, 1965], p. 473). However, I argue that not only is Solomon’s compositional abilities a peripheral concern to the narrative following Gibeon in 1 Kings, but also this ability also plays little role in the Solomonic tradition which Prov. 1-9 recalls.

Sheppard’s work which presents wisdom as a hermeneutical construct may also be relevant here (Gerald Sheppard, *Wisdom as Hermeneutical Construct* [BZAW 151, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980]). He argued that the hand of wisdom editors can be seen in the epilogue to Qohelet (12:13-14), the ending of Hosea (14:9 [MT 14:10]), and the last words of David (2 Sam. 23:1-7). Of these, it is the ending to Hosea which is most applicable, “Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them . . .” (Hosea 14:9). What this ending does is to give a wisdom cast to what was previously non-wisdom material; which I suggest is similar to the cast given the stories of the harlots, the organization of the kingdom, Hiram, and Sheba by the narrative *inclusio* comment which closes each story. That these stories may have had legendary existence does not alter the fact that in their present context their purpose is to expand on the wisdom given Solomon at Gibeon as the narrator emphasis (see Scott [1969] on both points).

Since the wisdom of Solomon is not specifically mentioned in the section dealing with the design and construction of the Temple (chs. 5:13-9:28; though the wisdom of a certain craftsman is [1 Kings 7:14]) and neither does this passage close commenting on the wisdom of Solomon as the passages mentioned above do, I do not interpret it to comment directly on Solomon’s possession of divine wisdom.

Scott (1969) treats the stories which follow Gibeon in a similar manner--to explicate Solomon’s great wisdom. However he does not note the significance of Solomon’s reception of divine wisdom at Gibeon (therefore treating material earlier than Gibeon as also providing insights into Solomon’s wisdom, cf. 1969: 270). He finds three interpretations of the kings *traditional wisdom*: wisdom is the ability of the successful ruler (demonstrated in the Hiram story), wisdom is the insight to distinguish right from wrong (demonstrated in the harlot’s story), and wisdom is intellectual brilliance and encyclopedic knowledge (demonstrated primarily in 1 Kings 4:32-33) (1969: 270-271).

<sup>219</sup> Chronicles defines Solomon’s gift from God to be wealth rather than understanding or knowledge (the great wisdom of the prince of Tyre also occasioned great wealth, cf. Ezek. 28:5). It was Solomon’s gift of wisdom that led to wealth which attracted the Chronicler. Compare the differing accounts of Solomon’s uniqueness expressed in Kings and Chronicles: “I [God] give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you” (1

Kings 3:12), with “riches, possessions, and honour, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have like” (2 Chron. 1:12). The different views of Solomon’s uniqueness, wisdom or riches, are further developed in each narrative. In 1 Kings 3:15, Solomon awakes from his “request” and:

then two harlots came to the king, and stood before him. . . . and all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king because they perceived that the *wisdom of God was with him, to render justice*” (1 Kings 3:16, 28).

Immediately upon Solomon’s waking, the narrative in 1 Kings focuses on Solomon’s gift of wisdom and a discerning mind. When Solomon returns from his request in Chronicles, 2 Chron. 1:14-16 reads like the “Lives of the Rich and Famous.” It catalogues Solomon’s chariots, states that Solomon made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stone, tells of the great price paid for Kue’s horses, and it lists some other prices paid by Solomon to increase his kingdom. The Chronicler then tells about the Temple Solomon builds with much emphasis on the high quality of workmen and materials Solomon was able to procure. Immediately upon coming down from the mountain, the Chronicler is caught up in Solomon’s great wealth. Nowhere is his wisdom to render judgment or to govern mentioned.

<sup>220</sup> It could be argued that the wisdom of Solomon commented on in 1 Kings 4:29 (MT 5:9) is defined in the following verses 4:32ff. (MT 5:12ff.), and does not refer to the previous description of Solomon’s administration. However, these verses (4:32ff.) seem to be a further catalogue of Solomon’s renown (his great knowledge of proverbs, songs, and trees) in addition to his administrative wisdom. Gray observes that the last verse of this passage (4:34) continues to highlight Solomon’s administrative brilliance, providing the transition into the next story:

The wisdom of Solomon is taken as that which provided him pre-eminence among contemporary kings, thus serving as a introduction to Solomon’s dealings with Hiram in preparation for the building of the Temple, and the visit of the Queen of Sheba (J. Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963], p. 142).

Solomon’s knowledge of proverbs, songs, and trees is incidental to these needs and does not provide him with “preeminence among contemporary kings.” Solomon’s administrative talent demonstrates his great wisdom.

<sup>221</sup> One wonders if God’s gift to Solomon at Gibeon was also motivated by Solomon’s love and respect shown his father (1 Kings 3:3, 6).

<sup>222</sup> Gray, 1963, and G. Jones (*1 and 2 Kings*, Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) are in agreement about the understanding of wisdom in this passage. For Gray, the wisdom of Solomon’s which brings peace is “Solomon’s (administrative) wisdom” concerning the exchange of materials for constructing the temple (1963: 143). Gray is saying something like, ‘Solomon’s administrative competence has a peaceful effect.’ For Jones, “Solomon’s advance preparations for the Temple are brought within the purview of the wisdom theme . . .” (1984: 153). Both commentators understand wisdom to refer to Solomon’s association with the temple (a deuteronomistic understanding?) and make no mention of the relationship of wisdom to peace (except within the context of temple building). However, this is not supported by the text. Solomon’s gift of wisdom enabled him to establish peace with Hiram as well as the writing of a treaty between them. Hiram did not notice Solomon’s administrative talent but that he was fulfilling his father’s wish. There is no reference to the temple in this verse, nor is it necessarily implied.

Scott, however, does note that the Hiram story *echoes* the language of Solomon’s dream at Gibeon because it makes clear that Solomon’s wisdom is displayed by “competence in negotiation and administration which marks the successful ruler” (Scott, 1969: 270). Competence in government is the kind of wisdom given Solomon at Gibeon.

<sup>223</sup> A contrast between seeing and hearing is made again in 10:7. The distinction being drawn emphasizes that Solomon’s expression of divine wisdom is best seen (a visual as opposed to a verbal expression).

<sup>224</sup> While Crenshaw understands Solomon’s great wisdom to be demonstrated through Solomon’s handling of the Queen’s riddles, he presents the expansions of this story in other traditions

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which emphasize Solomon's way with food as demonstrating his craftiness or great wisdom (James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981], p. 43).

<sup>225</sup> Hiram does not demand equal payment for the materials he sends Solomon, only that food will be provided for his household. The tenor of the passage presents Hiram as if he participates alongside of Solomon in fulfilling David's wish. This is supported by 1 Kings 9:26-28 and 10:11-12; in both instances Hiram provides Solomon with labour which brings to Solomon riches (there is no comment on Hiram becoming enriched by his business with Solomon). Solomon benefits greatly from his exchange with Hiram.

<sup>226</sup> The reference to Solomon's knowledge of nature (1 Kings 4:33 [MT 5:13]) could have been far more extensive than it is. Because Solomon's knowledge of nature was noted but not elaborated, it must be an insignificant expression of Solomon's possession of divine wisdom.

<sup>227</sup> Is the wisdom of Solomon best understood as "royal wisdom," wisdom specific to the office of king? The actions which witness Solomon's special wisdom are not tied to his royal office (his administrative brilliance is on a domestic level not national, the Hiram story excepted). The manner in which the correct identity of the harlots is executed, the ability to have insight necessary to find competent people, behaviour which leads to peace, the stocking of provisions, the organization, hospitality and generosity expressed by one's household are not beyond the means of anyone but the poor. The divine gift of wisdom may have been given to one of royal standing, but there is nothing about "royalty" necessary to receive or execute that gift.

These observations of how the 1 Kings narrative explicates Solomon's possession of divine wisdom questions as well the relevance of Egyptian understanding of wisdom to its composition. Emphasis has been placed on the connection between 1 Kings 4:33 and "the encyclopedic nature-wisdom of Egypt and Mesopotamia" (Scott, 1969: 265) out of proportion with the emphasis which the narrative places on the importance of this type of knowledge to Solomon's renown. Also, 1 Kings presents Solomon's wisdom as clearly having divine roots, questioning the influence of Egyptian wisdom which is non-revelatory.

<sup>228</sup> Compare Daniel's assessment of the origin of his wisdom with the assessment of his wisdom made by the narrator, "As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all letters and wisdom . . ." (Dan. 1:17). See further comments on wisdom as a gift from god in Whybray, 1974: 81, and Kalugia, 1980: 76. McKane points out that even the comparatively mundane 'skill' (hkm) of a craftsman can be understood as a gift from God.

In Ex. 28:3, the skill of the craftsman is not portrayed in terms of native endowment; it is not the result of a period of rigorous apprenticeship, but is rather the gift of Yahweh who has filled the *hakeme leb* with the spirit (ruah) of wisdom. (1965: 16)

<sup>229</sup> The root  $\text{חכ}$  is used to describe the wise men of Babylon as well as Daniel and his friends (2:12-14, 18, 24, 27, 48; 5:7-8, 15; and 1:4, 17, 20; 2:21, 30, 48; 5:11, 14, respectively); however, the book of Daniel draws clear distinctions between them according to the nature of their wisdom.

<sup>230</sup> It is interesting how Daniel characterizes divine wisdom. Daniel, in his hymn of blessing to God, relativises his experience of divine wisdom to that of his experience of the seasons and his experience of political regimes. With respect to seasons and political regimes it can be said that one experiences their effects but is unable to exercise control over them. This raises an interesting issue. What can it mean for Daniel to say that his experience of divine wisdom is similar? Is Daniel suggesting that God's gift of wisdom comes upon one like a possession? By "possession" I mean something similar to what Amos describes of his calling to Amaziah ("the Lord *took* me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel'" 7:14). I think Daniel is suggesting something similar for two reasons: divine wisdom seems to "possess" Daniel at one point, changing his life thereafter (Dan. 2:18-19), and Daniel's uniqueness is described by others as being possessed by "the spirit of the holy gods" (4:8-9; 5:11, 14). In fact, Nebuchadnezzar names Daniel after a god in acknowledgment of Daniel's difference from other men, 4:8.

<sup>231</sup> The vv. 13-23 are hardly "redundant to the narrative" (P.R. Davies, *Daniel* [OTG; Sheffield:

JSOT, 1988], p. 46) but are necessary to show that Daniel received God's special wisdom. If 2:13-23 offers nothing more than was offered in 1:17 (Daniel and his three friends are treated as equal recipients of divine wisdom), Davies' reading is correct. However, 2:13-23 differs from 1:17 by focusing the reception of God's wisdom on Daniel only and narrating how Daniel came to possess divine wisdom. It is probably better to say that 1:17 overstepped its bounds by ascribing divine wisdom to the three friends. In ch. 2, Daniel's divine wisdom saves his friends, not the other way around. Also, after the king's dream receives interpretation, the king honors Daniel and Daniel then honors his friends. The book of Daniel never highlights the wisdom of the three friends as it does Daniel's. These verses are necessary to the story of ch. 2 because they recount how Daniel became aware of the limitations of human knowledge (Daniel could have interpreted the king's dream on his first visit had he been able; he knew his life was in danger). With this realization, is it any wonder he gathered his friends together to pray? Daniel, praying to save his life, was ready to receive divine wisdom. Daniel awakes that morning a new man desiring a new audience with the king.

Daniel's difference from "normal men" is not only supported by his own words (2:30), but also by Nebuchadnezzar calling him a god (4:8), and the many acknowledgments that there is a divine spirit possessing Daniel that makes him different from all others (4:8-9; 5:11, 14; 6:3).

<sup>232</sup> Notice that Daniel's possession of divine wisdom did not set him off on a new path. He did not sit around talking about the speed of cedar tree growth in drought, or the foraging habits of lions (the type of wisdom one would expect if divine wisdom always meant creative knowledge). Daniel in possession of Divine wisdom repeats his behaviour of the day before. Divine wisdom enhanced Daniel's abilities, but did not change them. Creative wisdom is but a subset of what divine wisdom is.

<sup>233</sup> If Daniel did not receive reward after his second interpretation for Nebuchadnezzar because it was such bad news, then why did he receive reward and honour after equally bad news to Belshazzar?

<sup>234</sup> The presentation of divine wisdom in chs. 1-6 was shown to be clearly distinguished from human wisdom. Daniel's success where the wise men of Babylon failed emphasizes that their wisdom is different. Not only is Daniel's divine wisdom distinguished from the "pagan" wisdom of Babylon, but it is also different from the wisdom spoken about in the last chapters of the book. The mark of the "wise" in 11:33 is to "make many understand." This teaching or instructing is not an expression of divine wisdom exhibited by Daniel in the first chapters of the book.

<sup>235</sup> Compare this point with a conclusion Crenshaw makes concerning Egyptian Instruction, "In a word, for the ancient teachers no chasm separated divine truth from ordinary knowledge" (Crenshaw, 1981: 214). It is important to note how many biblical passages stress the fundamental difference between divine and human wisdom.

<sup>236</sup> Eichrodt argues that one of the causes against the prince was that he "set up his impregnable divine dwelling in the heart of the sea, and has thus broken down the eternal boundary between the Creator and the creature" (Walter Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* [tr. Cosslett Quin; London: S.C.M. Press, 1970], p. 390). However, v. 14 informs that it was God that placed the prince there. The prince in v. 2 is falsely claiming divinity for his wisdom and his being.

<sup>237</sup> Von Rad states it strongly when he says of Job 28 and Proverbs 8, "speak of 'wisdom' as a personified entity immanent in creation" (Von Rad, 1972: 144; see also R.E. Murphy, "Wisdom--Thesis and Hypotheses" in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in honour of Samuel Terrien* [ed. John G. Gammie et al.; Missoula: Scholars, 1978], pp. 35-42; p. 38ff.).

<sup>238</sup> Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), p. 567, emphasis his. See note 239.

<sup>239</sup> As I have commented above in the excursus on how Solomon expresses divine wisdom, Solomon's expression of divine wisdom in 1 Kings 4:32-34 [MT 5:12-14] is insignificant (in comparison to his ability judge between people, his ability to select people for political office, his ability to build his house and set his table, etc.). However, these verses are usually claimed to be the principal way

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Solomon expressed divine wisdom in 1 Kings as well as the manifestation of wisdom the ascription in Proverbs 1:1 recalls. Since I have already challenged the importance of these verses to the Solomonic tradition of Solomon's divine wisdom, I will comment only on the importance of these verses from 1 Kings to Proverbs.

Commentators on Proverbs 1:1 have mistakenly focused on this inscription as highlighting Solomon's literary activity (McKane, 1970: 262; Scott, 1969: 262, Scott, 1971: 4; Crenshaw, 1981: 45; Childs, 1979: 552; R.E. Murphy, *Seven Books of Wisdom* [Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1960], p. 8; Eissfeldt, 1965: 473), overlooking Solomon's ability to instruct Israel. Therefore a paraphrase of Prov. 1:1 along these lines would be "The proverbs of Solomon which he composed." In contrast, many have noticed the similarity between Prov. 1:1 and the openings of the Egyptian Instructions (McKane, 1970: 262; Murphy, 1981: 54; Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9.45* [London: SCM Press, 1965], pp. 38-39) which stress the *educational* or *instructional* aspect of the instructor they identify. The instructors of ANE Instruction are identified because they have something to say or instruct, not because they are known as authors. Likewise, the Solomonic tradition presented in 1 Kings suggests that Solomon possessed divine insights into people and society and it is for this reason he presents proverbs. An apt paraphrase of Prov. 1:1 along these lines would be, "The instruction of Solomon." This study, by continuously reminding the reader that all of Prov. 1-9 is presented as the words of Solomon, directs attention to Solomon as an instructor, and away from Solomon as composer.

<sup>240</sup> Whybray, 1965: 41. Whybray classifies this section of verses as part of the "group 2" insertions (1965: 73). These additions to Prov. 1-9 were necessary to ascribe an origin to wisdom and to relate wisdom with God (1965: 75). Both themes receive no comment in the texts of traditional wisdom which form the groundwork of Prov. 1-9 (Whybray's proposed first edition of Prov. 1-9).

I agree with Whybray that this passage explains the origin of wisdom and its relation to God, but I question whether this was done in a late edition as a response to secular wisdom. This passage concurs thematically with the passages covered in previous sections which locate wisdom in the divine realm, restricting creations access to divine revelation; consequently, the passage is not a response to "secular" wisdom. As Prov. 2:1-8 presently stands, the wisdom of the human instructor's words depends on the beneficence of God in giving wisdom. The only way to "find" wisdom is to have God "give" wisdom (Whybray, 1974: 22).

<sup>241</sup> See further discussion on whether Solomon presents himself as a source of wisdom in chapter 3.

<sup>242</sup> We have seen personal observations and advice concerning the value of instruction, in *Amenemhet I's* introduction, where the event of Amenemhet I's assassination is more than ample apologetic for his son to be attentive to his instruction.

<sup>243</sup> Many see behind the presentation of the meals in Prov. 9 and the meal described in Prov. 7:10-23 features of a fertility cult (McKane, 1970: 360f.; von Rad, 1972: 167; Ringgren, 1947: 133f.; Whybray, 1965: 13, 77, 89 n.4, 104; Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* [Sheffield: JSOT, 1985], p. 42; R.B.Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* [AB 18; New York: Doubleday, 1965], p. 77; and J.W. Kleinig, "The Banquet of Wisdom--An Exegetical Study of Proverbs 9:1-12", *Lutheran Theological Journal* 17 (1983), pp. 24-28, p. 25). (In distancing himself from what he calls speculation due to "erotic fantasy," Lang sees no basis for suggesting that such cultic feasts of the goddess of love actually occurred, much less that it could have influenced the meals offered by the women of Prov. 9 [B. Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: A Hebrew Goddess Redefined* [New York: Pilgrim Press, 1986], pp. 168-169 n.21, also p. 98.)

Further biblical support for the background for the meals in Prov. 9 being from the fertility cult are found in two passages from Ezekiel (16:30-34; 23:40-43). Women go out to call and invite men (Prov. 7:11-12; 9:3; Ez. 16:33; 23:40, 42; cf. Hos. 4:14 and Songs 3:1-2) back to their sacrificial meal (Prov. 7:14-16; 9:2,5; Ez. 23:41) and sexual intercourse (Prov. 7:18; Ez. 23:33, 43). One item shared only by Prov. 9:1 and Ez. 23:31 is that this cultic sequence takes place after a woman has constructed a "house."

The association of Woman Wisdom's meal with fertility rites is challenged by the tradition of inviting people to a sacrificial or communion meal (outside the fertility rites). In Num. 25:2 the people

of Israel are invited to a sacrificial meal by the people of Moab and later in v. 6 a Moabite is invited into an Israelite temple (tent of meeting). In 1 Sam. 9, Saul and his companions go in search of Samuel. As they approach his city they ask some young woman drawing water if Samuel is in town. They reply that he will bless a sacrifice today and the people are at this moment awaiting that blessing before they eat (1 Sam. 9:13). The people who are to partake of this sacrificial meal must be invited (9:13) and Saul is indeed invited by Samuel to the sacrificial meal (9:19). Similar is the story of David and Nabal in 1 Sam. 25. David sends ten of his men, who previously had “protected” Nabal’s flocks and helped his servants (1 Sam. 25:15-16), to Nabal on a feast day (v. 8) fully expecting them to be invited to partake of the feast. This is a feast of the shearers with no overt religious overtones. The behaviour of inviting people to sacrificial meals is not specifically related to fertility rites, neither is it seen as specifically “pagan.”

Given the repeated injunctions to take Wisdom as a wife earlier in the introduction (cf. 3:13; 4:5b-9; 5:15-19; 7:4; 8:17, 34-35), Ringgren proposes that while 9:1-6 presents a scenario reminiscent of the cultic meal of 7:10ff, it “is probably conceived as a wedding feast” (Ringgren, 1947: 134). Kruger suggests that in the context of the extended “bridal” language used in Prov. 1-9, the imagery of 9:1-6 should also be seen in this “intimate” context to refer to marriage (P.A. Kruger, “Promiscuity of Marriage Fidelity? A note on Prov. 5:15-18”, *JNSL* 13 (1987), pp. 61-68; p. 61). Whybray when dealing with the extent of bridal language (he cites Prov. 4:6, 8f.; 7:4) suggests that 9:1-6 could be reference to a wedding feast (1965: 89, esp. 77 n.4). McCreesh says, “but Wisdom, who up to this point has been little more than a voice, has just finished describing her origins (chapter 8), and now presents herself, in her own house, as a young woman seeking marriage” (T.P. McCreesh, “Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31”, *RB* 92 (1985), pp. 25-46; p. 44). Matthew 22:2-4 offers no proof that the events of 9:1-6 “necessarily” present a wedding feast, but it does share the features of sending out of servants after the oxen and calves have been slaughtered, to invite any and all who will hear.

<sup>244</sup> Some other stories of “wise” meals are Abigail’s meal which offsets the foolish refusal of a meal by Nabal (1 Sam. 25), the harlot’s meal prepared for Enkidu in *Gilgamesh* (Old Babylonian Version, II, iii), for the meals of Esther and Rebekah (see Camp, 1985: 133ff.).

<sup>245</sup> What is usually thought to reflect Solomonic tradition exclusive of Proverbs is the proverb collection of Prov. 10-29. According to this view Prov. 10-29 explains and expands the reference in 1 Kings to Solomon’s prodigious output of “three thousand proverbs” (1 Kings 4:32). However I have questioned the relevance of 1 Kings 4:32 to the tradition of Solomon’s wisdom.

<sup>246</sup> Scott has called this passage an earlier draft of Proverbs 8 (1965: 16). McKane understands it to lead into the extended picture of personified wisdom in Prov. 8 (1970: 296). “The poem, 8:22-31, is not more than an expansion, in personified terms, of the statement in 3:19 that ‘Yahweh founded the earth by wisdom’” (Whybray, 1965: 103).

<sup>247</sup> When the examination of wisdom, *hokma*, in the Wisdom poems (also Prov. 1:20-33, 9:1-12) is undertaken difficulties arise. The root *hkm* is not always presented as an abstract noun; it is sometimes a proper name, “Woman Wisdom.” Is it then questionable to apply the understanding of the root *hkm* as an abstract noun to the occurrences of this root in a personal name? Not if it can be shown that the characteristics of the abstract noun are also those of Woman Wisdom. No where is it easier to see the claims made about divine wisdom assumed by Woman Wisdom than in Prov. 8.

<sup>248</sup> Yee, in agreement with Aletti, understands there to be a three-part movement of Woman Wisdom in this passage: “progression from passivity, to presence and ultimately to activity” (Gale A. Yee, “An Analysis of Proverbs 8:22-31 According to Style and Structure,” *ZAW* 94 [1982], pp. 58-66; p. 61 and J.N. Aletti, “Proverbes 8,22-31. Etude de Structure,” *Bib* 57 [1976], pp. 25-37). Yee’s study emphasizes the importance attaches to the poem on the description of Woman Wisdom.

<sup>249</sup> Lang agrees, “Wisdom, not the Creator and his work, is the central theme and focus of the poem” (Lang, 1986: 66).

<sup>250</sup> The translations for *qana* are usually split between “to acquire” or “to possess,” and “to create” or “to beget.” The first pair offers the most basic understanding of *qana* (cf. Irwin’s summary



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of the discussion on *qana* in W.A. Irwin, "Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?" *JBL* 80 [1961], pp. 133-142, p. 134). The second pair of translations, "to create" or "to beget," is supported by Ps. 139:13 and Deut. 32:6.

For thou didst [*qana*] my inward parts,  
Thou didst knit [*ssk*] me together  
in my mother's womb. Ps. 139:13

Do you thus requite the Lord,  
You foolish and senseless people?  
Is not he your father, who [*qana*] you,  
who made [*'sr*] you and established you? Deut. 32:6

In the Psalms passage, it does not make sense to say that God acquired or possessed the Psalmist's inward parts, whereas it does make sense that God "created" those inward parts. Likewise, in the Deut. passage it makes little sense to assert to Israel that their refusal of God is inappropriate given that he acquired and possessed them. The writer, by calling God father (and translating *qana* as "begot or created"), attempts to draw a familial closeness between God and his people, highlighting their foolishness.

To these two passages in which *qana* should be translated as "to form, or create, or beget" Irwin adds: Gen. 4:1; 14:19, 22; Ex. 15:16; Ps. 74:2; and Is. 11:11 (Irwin, 1961: 136f). The reading of *qana* as acquired or possessed is difficult in these passages because these verses all contain the theme of parental relationship. The translation of *qana* along the lines of "begetting" continues the image of parental relationship.

These examples leave open the possibility of the infrequent translation for *qana* as begot or create for the present passage because the language used in Prov. 8:22ff. is reminiscent of birth. This birth language (the *nissakti* and *holalti* of vv. 23-24), like the familial language of the above passages, suggests that here *qana* should be translated "begot or created."

See a further discussion of *qana* in the discussion on *holalti* and *nissakti* below.

<sup>251</sup> "The many difficulties of interpretation of particular words in this passage do not obscure the fact that great emphasis is placed on the *priority in time* of wisdom as the associate of Yahweh" (Whybray, 1965: 99).

<sup>252</sup> This translation of *qny* as "conceive" follows Camp's suggestion (1985: 306 n.7).

The words which support birth imagery for the context of *qny* are primarily "*holalti*" and to a lesser extent "*nissakti*." Of these three problematic verbs in this first passage, *holalti* is the one which presents the least amount of trouble. Whybray translates the *holalti* passage as "I was brought forth (in labour)" (v. 24a). For support, he cites Deut. 32:18, "You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you [*yalad*], and you forgot the God who gave you birth [*holalti*]" (Whybray, 1965: 101). Lang also argues that *holalti* should be translated as "I was born." He compares this translation of *holalti* to that in a passage in Ps. 51:7. Here the psalmist states: "Behold, I was brought forth (or born, *holalti*) in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Lang, 1986: 63). Yee translates *holalti* as "brought forth" (Yee, 1982: 61). Scott translates *holalti* as "brought forth or originated" but qualifies the specifically "human" birth imagery by comparison to Ps. 90:2 and Job 38:8-9 where *holalti* refers to the "birth" of mountains and the sea (Scott, 1965: 73). McKane accepts the validity of birth imagery here because of his common understanding for *holalti* as well as his understanding of the other three verbs (McKane, 1970: 352). Ringgren uses *holiti* to help confirm his choice of the possible translations of *qana* (which he translates as "begat") (Ringgren, 1947: 102).

On the basis of his understanding for *holalti*, Whybray translates *nissakti*, which is parallel to *holalti*, as "to weave," metaphorically referring to the process of conception. He derives this understanding from *skk* (in the Niph., *nesakkoti*--a possible repointing of *nissakti*) found in Ps. 139:13 and Job 10:11; which is "used of the formation of the fetus in the womb" (without the vowel change [cf. Is. 25:7, 30:1] Whybray, 1965: 101 n.3). Lang and Yee also believe that *nissakti* relates to birth; they translate it as "begotten" and "engendered" respectively. They both offer the same support as does Whybray (Lang, 1986: 63-64; Yee, 1982: 62-63). Yee also notes that in Ps. 139:13 *nesakkoti* is parallel to *qana*.

Scott, on the other hand, translates *nsk* as "to pour out." He cites for comparison Is. 29:10 and Joel 2:28. Dahood, while also understanding *nsk* as "to pour out," does not eliminate the birth

imagery. He argues differently though, suggesting that *nissakti* has similarities to *nsk* (“to pour”). In Canaanite texts, *nsk* suggests divine emanation (M. Dahood, “Proverbs 8:22-31; Translation and Commentary”, *CBQ* 30 [1968], pp. 512-521, p. 515). This translation would support Irwin’s suggestion for *any* below.

Another possibility advanced for *nissakti* is that it refers to the exaltation of a prince (noun *nasik*) (cf. verb *nsk* in Ps. 2:6), hence the “Ages ago I was set up” (RSV 8:23).

*Qny*, though the first verb of this passage, is the most difficult to translate (cf. note on p. 115). While it has been covered briefly above it deserves another treatment here in the context of these other verbs. Reviewing briefly, the primary translation of *qny* is “to possess or acquire” with the possibility of being translated as “to create or beget.” McKane argues against understanding *qny* as possess or acquire by saying in its context “we expect some indication of how Wisdom originated and not the bald statement that Yahweh acquired her” (McKane, 1970: 352).

This passage is indeed about origins, both of the world and more importantly Woman Wisdom. Irwin summarizes the material concerning *qny* and comes to the conclusion that *qny* is best understood as “to be, become, parent of” (Irwin, 1961: 142). He starts with a summary of the occurrences where *qny* does not make sense translated as to possess or acquire (Gen. 4:1; 14:19, 22; Ex. 15:16; Deut. 32:6; Ps. 74:2; 139:13; and Is. 11:11 (Irwin, 1961: 136f.). The usual alternative translation in these cases is “to form or create.” Irwin argues that the translation for *qny* carries the force of “begot by parenting.” Outside of the biblical texts, he cites Gordon’s study of *qny* in Ugaritic literature. The root occurs nine times and in one case Gordon translates it as “obtain” in another “create.” He dismisses two cases as unknown. In the remaining five cases, *qny* occurs in an epithet of Asherah, *qnyt ilm* [“Creatress of the gods”]. In contrast Irwin notes that El is given the epithet *bny bnwt* [“Creator of creatures”]. Outside the possibility that there were gender specific terms of “create” Gordon argues that the gods were physically born to her and not creatures shaped by her hands. So from the Ugaritic parallel the translation “create” loses support in comparison to the translation “begotten” which Irwin has suggested for *qny*.

Next Irwin examines *qny* in the context of 8:22-31. V. 22a has been variously translated as “in the beginning of his way,” “as the first of his works,” “as the beginning of his way,” “at the beginning of his work,” etc. The problem with these translations is that they capture only the temporal force of what is being said and not the qualitative.

The origin of Wisdom was long antecedent to God’s work in creating the world and is sharply contrasted with it . . . the emphasis is not that Wisdom came into being, by whatever process, as the first of God’s creative activity nor at their beginning, but long before them (Irwin, 1961: 140).

God’s action here is something other than “creation,” God’s action as creator comes later when God creates. Also in comparison with the other verbs in this passage, Irwin says, “the imagery here is not of the creation, but of the birth of Wisdom.” He concludes that the meaning “create” for *qny* has slim support and he suggests “to parent.” Camp concurs with Irwin’s study and “conceive” is her choice for *qny* (Camp, 1985: 306).

Lang understands Wisdom to be born (parallel with *holalti*) from Yahweh and translates *qny* as “begotten” (Lang, 1986: 64). To support his translation which states that Wisdom is Yahweh’s daughter, Lang argues from the history of religions. That Yahweh assumed the attributes of other gods is well attested. The Semitic inscription “El, creator of the earth” has its parallel in Gen. 4:19 “El Elyon, the creator of heaven and earth.” El’s “consort” Athirat (Asherah) is known from Ugaritic texts (e.g. the Baal Epic) as “Mother of the gods” or “Creatrix of the gods.” Rather than drawing attention to the similar root used in Asherah’s title (also Irwin) Lang is suggesting that Yahweh is assuming other gods’ attributes. It is not clear whether Lang is saying that Yahweh takes on the attributes of El/El’s consort (understood singly) or that Yahweh takes on the attributes of Asherah. Nevertheless, *qny* in this context refers to “male birth.”

Whybray understands *qny* to be either “to create or begot.” The usual understanding of “to acquire or possess” is not to be asserted here because the passage is concerned with God’s creative activity. The discussions which seek to distinguish between “to create” and “to beget” are inconclusive because if the latter is supported the assertion becomes that Yahweh is a father by sexual act, which is unparalleled in the biblical record (Whybray, 1965: 100-101).

Vawter, like Irwin, challenges the translation of *qny* as “to create.” He contends that *qny* means “to possess” (Bruce Vawter, “Prov. 8:22: Wisdom and Creation”, *JBL* 99 (1980), pp. 205-216, p. 213). His argument is based on a comparison with Job 28 and his assertion that in no case is *qny* in

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biblical or cognate literatures understood as “create.” In Job 28 Yahweh finds Wisdom. Man, though accomplishing great things, has not found wisdom, neither has Death. Wisdom is pre-existent and Yahweh alone has found it (v. 23). This acquisition of something by Yahweh is paralleled in Deut. 32:8-14 where “Elyon is represented as parceling out the peoples of mankind and allotting Israel to Yahweh, a people who Yahweh then adopts as his own. There is no creation here; Yahweh ‘finds’ Israel ready-made, as in Ezekiel 6” (Vawter, 1980: 206). In a survey of the occurrences of *qny*, Vawter suggests that the translation of possess or acquire will suffice.

As understood in this study, these three verbs have birth imagery in common. *Holalti*, *nissakti*, and *qny*, are understood as “brought forth” as in labour, “engendered” and “conceived.” As mentioned in the text, the setting laid out in 22-26 is static in time. There is no movement. All of the verbs which refer to Woman Wisdom pertain to the same event--the origin of Wisdom as a daughter of Yahweh (Brenner, 1985: 41).

<sup>253</sup> The major point of contention found in this section is the interpretation of *'amon*, v. 30a. In what way was Wisdom at God's side? *'Amon* has been variously translated as craftsperson/architect (Dahood, 1968: 518-519), mother-official (de Boer, 1969: 70), child (Yee, 1982: 64; Lang, 1986: 65-66; Camp, 1985: 84; von Rad, 1972: 153 n. 10), or counselor/official confidant (McKane, 1970: 357; cf. Lang, 1986: 65, also p. 164, n. 20). The translation of “child” tries to capture the diminutive form of *'amon* and fits in with the “childish” *saasumim* (delight) and *mesaheqet* (play) of 30b-31a (see Yee, 1982: 64, Whybray, 1965: 102, von Rad, 1972: 157, Lang, 1986: 64, 66, 78-79, and Camp, 1985: 84).

Because the first section, vv. 22-26, stresses the great priority in time of Woman Wisdom over creation, and the second section (vv. 27-30), emphasizes that she was there at Yahweh's side when he created, the image of Woman Wisdom as a child throughout this great passage of time will not work. Even though Yahweh is clearly the more active in creation (and this militates against the translation of Woman Wisdom as craftsperson/architect, though not her important status [cf. Whybray, 1965: 102-103]), Woman Wisdom is part of the divine world.

The translation of *'amon* as child has the most supporters, but as alluded to above, the great sweep of time, from pre-creation when Wisdom is created, to creation, and post-creation, makes the final stage of Wisdom growth more mature than a translation of a child suggests. Lang has noted the implication of a great sweep of time which transpired through creation in Job 38 (1986: 67).

Have you commanded the morning since your days began,  
and caused the dawn to know its place,  
You know, for you were born then,  
and the number of your days is great. Job 38:12, 21

The separation in time between the present questioning of Job by God and the creation is great. Creation is presented as a lengthy process, not just an event which happened long ago. The numerous questions imply the lengthy and complicated processes involved in creation. In Wisdom's poem here pre-creation, creation, and post-creation must involve a duration of time. However, de Boer's translation of ‘mother official’--a mature figure--is questioned rightly by McKane because “if she is represented as the dignified, senior adviser of Yahweh, how does it come about that she is so sportive, so full of jests and laughter?” (1970: 357). In answer to this criticism it can also be observed that in the texts covered in the section, when wisdom is mentioned (granted she is not personified as she is in the present text), she is passive. A passage from Is. 40:12-14 especially emphasizes this:

Who had directed the spirit of the Lord,  
or as his counselor has instructed him?

Whom did he consult for his enlightenment . . . ? (Is. 40:13-14a)

The expected answer in Isaiah is that God alone determined action. While this passage doesn't challenge the presence of wisdom during creation, it does challenge any assertion of wisdom's active role. It also challenges translations of craftsperson/architect. “Nowhere else in the poem is there any suggestion of independent creative activity on the part of wisdom” (Whybray, 1965: 102). I may add that neither is independent creative activity ascribed wisdom outside of Prov. 8. McKane's translation of ‘confidant’ is best able to capture Wisdom's passive, yet also her “necessary,” presence at creation. Whybray is right when he asserts:

If the author of the poem had intended to represent wisdom as a divine being who assisted actively in the creation of the world it is highly improbable that he would have made the single word *'amon* bear the whole burden of his meaning (1965: 103).

So while McKane's translation is questionable because of its political overtones, it best captures the

way Wisdom is being presented within Proverbs and without.

Consequently **דִּי־עֵץ** and **חֵן־חַיִּים** (8:30), rather than capturing the image of a child playing in God's presence (so Yee, 1982: 65), emphasize the mature Woman Wisdom's difference from creation by virtue of her being specially begotten by Yahweh and being a companion of Yahweh's during creation. In 8:31 we read that Woman Wisdom has taken her jesting and playing (**חֵן־חַיִּים**) humour from heaven to earth. Wisdom's playing in creation continues to stress her difference from creation (even while present in creation) which previously relied on her presence with God. Contrary to created humanity, who must sweat and toil in creation, Wisdom delights and plays in it. The life given to Adam in Genesis because of his wrongful possession of divine knowledge is hardly playful:

And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it', cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you: and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:17-19).

The life of humanity in God's created world is a life of work and toil. Woman Wisdom's superiority over and difference from creation is captured in the effortless with which she enjoys the world that God has made.

<sup>254</sup> Whether this is attributable to a paucity of contextual materials for the Instructions or not, cannot be decided (see the discussion in the introduction to this chapter).

<sup>255</sup> Which is a considerable "aside" as the role of women in the instruction of Proverbs makes that book so different from ANE Instruction, and in the case of Woman Wisdom, so "biblical."

## Chapter 3

### Proverbs' Introduction of Divine Wisdom

Wisdom in general, and Proverbs in particular, evoke a sense of stability and regularity in the minds of many. Though Crenshaw said this of Egyptian Instruction, it applies equally to the ethos of Proverbs: "In this thought world there is no place for the creative thinker who charts new paths for the imagination . . . The operative words seem always to have been 'tradition'."<sup>256</sup> Proverbs, after all, presents wisdom gained from observation of life: common sense.

As is well known, wisdom searches for the knowledge of order, or, for those whom this seems too rigid, for a certain regularity within the diversity of the phenomena of the world.<sup>257</sup>

[Wisdom] comprises both optimistic and pessimistic strains--the one conservative, practical, and didactic (so Proverbs), and the other skeptical of traditional values and beliefs (so Job and Qoheleth).<sup>258</sup>

The first two chapters of this study presented the background of Proverbs as I see it: the book's form shares that of ANE Instruction, and its identification of wisdom recalls a wisdom familiar to other biblical traditions. While the traditions which Proverbs recalls, as identified in this study, are different from those usually seen in Proverbs, this does nothing but further support claims of Proverbs' conservatism.

I propose to challenge conservative assessments of Proverbs in this chapter by pointing out how Proverbs transforms many of the traditions it uses. In the first part of this chapter I will review Proverbs' background traditions identified in this study. In the second part of this chapter I will present Proverbs' transformation of these traditions. In the final part of this chapter I will provide a reading of Proverbs' introduction (Prov. 1-9) which incorporates Proverbs' use, and transformation, of the traditional introduction to ANE Instruction and the usual understanding of divine wisdom. Since the instruction of Proverbs (chs. 10-29) survives as a part of Proverbs' Instruction, the introduction becomes the only lens through which to view the instruction. I will accent the *new* way Proverbs wishes us to read the instruction. The introduction which Prov. 1-9 gives Proverbs' instruction is hardly expected given

its use of the form of ANE Instruction and biblical wisdom traditions.

## **Part One: Traditional Expectations of Proverbs' Instruction**

### *A.) Formal Expectations*

I have already argued in chapter one that Proverbs shares the formal tradition of ANE Instruction, and will summarize briefly the formal features of the ANE Instructional introduction in general. The formal feature most basic to Instructional introduction is that the instructor of the instruction is identified: according to name, family, and office. This instructor (always male) is intended to be understood by the reader as the origin of the instruction. The office the instructor holds varies from king to an ordinary scribe; nevertheless, in all cases the office of the instructor is superior to that of the "son" he addresses. Every Instruction is presented as "man talk": a one-sided communication from an older male to a younger male. While deities are mentioned in the introductions of Instruction in no case are they to be understood as presenting instruction; the act of instruction is a human role. Though all the instruction which the instructor presents is not necessarily presented as his, since many times the instructor refers to instruction as a written tradition. The recurrence of the phrase, "He spoke to his son," indicates that the act of instruction is a private event between father and son.<sup>259</sup> There are usually not many characters introduced in the introduction besides the father and son, but all those that are, are male. In a nutshell, ANE Instructional introduction *should* present a male instructor, his family, an office superior to the son he addresses; presenting instruction as human artifice apart from divine revelation within a private instructional setting between father and son.

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#### *B.) Conceptual Expectations*

I have pointed out biblical themes and traditions outside Proverbs which are recalled by Proverbs in the second chapter. Proverbs identifies the wisdom it seeks to present as *divine* by recalling the biblical wisdom traditions that says the cosmological position of divine wisdom is at God's side and not in creation (Prov. 3:19-20, 8:22-30).<sup>260</sup> The ascription to Solomon in Prov. 1:1, the benefits Solomon tells his son he will receive if he seeks wisdom above all else, and Solomon's description to his son of the house that Woman Wisdom built and the table she set, recall Solomonic tradition.

Besides these formal and conceptual expectations of Proverbs' introduction identified in this study, other claims have been made. It is important in evaluating these claims to distinguish between claims that can be substantiated from the book of Proverbs itself, and claims which are thought to be supported by Proverbs but are really generalizations made concerning Egyptian Instruction.<sup>261</sup> Another problem with past claims made about Proverbs is that the distinction between the point of view of Proverbs' introduction and of its instruction has not been made; consequently, it is hard to know what some claims refer to.

#### **Part Two: Proverbs' Transformation of Traditions**

Let us first look at some general differences between ANE Instruction and Proverbs. First, where instruction had human origins outside of Proverbs, within Proverbs there are references that instruction comes from God. Second, the introduction of Woman Wisdom as an instructor differs from the ANE Instructional tradition of male instructors. Third, the multiplicity of instructors which Proverbs introduces (Solomon, God, mother, and Woman Wisdom) differs from the single instructor introduced by ANE Instruction. In these three deviations from ANE Instruction we can already see that Proverbs' introduction is charting new territory.

The father-to-son form of Proverbs has been used to support its similarity to

ANE Instruction and its authoritarian structure.<sup>262</sup> The first thing I wish to examine, however, is whether the father-to-son form is the best description of Proverbs' introduction. I will not question whether Proverbs' introduction displays the father-to-son form (in the first chapter I argued that it clearly does); however, within that traditional structure is Solomon deconstructing that form by his words to his son? I will argue that Solomon deemphasizes his role as an instructor (to the extent that he effectively eliminates himself) by telling his son he cannot pass on wisdom; only God and Woman Wisdom can. Solomon also undermines his position of authority with respect to his son by describing the life and death choices the son must make in order to find the source of divine wisdom, and then providing insufficient details to enable his son to make the decision.

#### *The Form of Instruction Solomon Encourages in Proverbs' Introduction*

If we seek to answer the question, "Who is the instructor of Proverbs?" considering only the form of the instruction, we must answer "Solomon." If we look further into the introduction and evaluate how Solomon presents himself to his own son, we will arrive at a different conclusion. I question whether Solomon presents himself to his son as a source of wisdom or knowledge<sup>263</sup> when Solomon, in fact, never offers his son wisdom.<sup>264</sup> This is not to say that Solomon has no real task in the introduction. Instead of telling his son that he is the source of wisdom, Solomon tells his son how to go about finding divine wisdom: this wisdom is found with God and Woman Wisdom.<sup>265</sup> Solomon, however, does not pass on divine wisdom to his son.<sup>266</sup>

Solomon stresses his inability to offer wisdom in other manners as well. As the introduction develops, he ceases to talk directly to his son. While the first person narrative of the introduction is understood by the reader as all coming from Solomon's mouth, there is a point of transition which happens between Prov. 4 and 5, where Solomon changes voices (cf. pp. 61f., 110f.). In Prov. 1-4, Solomon speaks directly to his son about importance of instruction. In Prov. 5-9 Solomon



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speaks in greater frequency through other voices (predominantly that of Woman Wisdom). After chapter 7, Solomon does not use his real voice again in speaking to his son.

In Prov. 8 Solomon identifies Woman Wisdom by her name (8:1), family origins (8:22), and occupation (8:14-16; 30). He provides the same information about her as the narrator provided about him in Prov. 1:1. It is as if there has been a formal transference of the role of the instructor. Though Solomon remains speaking in Prov. 8, he disappears behind the character of Woman Wisdom whom he creates.

Solomon the instructor becomes more comfortable using the persona of the instructor Woman Wisdom than speaking directly to his son. Through narration, Solomon controls the speech of all the characters in the introduction and it seems odd that he would, with respect to the characters he cites, diminish his own importance. Solomon disappears as the introduction progresses because it seems he, as Solomon, is not what his son needs in order to gain wisdom. Solomon, in orientating his son away from himself, effectively breaks the pattern of fathers instructing their sons (if there ever was such a tradition in Israel).<sup>267</sup> Instead of their fathers, sons are to seek out God and Woman Wisdom if they wish to find wisdom and instruction (according to Solomon's instructional model). Solomon's intent in the introduction is to remove himself completely as a source of instruction *vis-à-vis* his son.

The other side of Solomon's acknowledgement that he cannot be his son's instructor is that the son has lost his privileged position with respect to instruction. According to the tradition of instruction, the son would rightly expect his father to provide, and privilege him with, instruction.<sup>268</sup> Solomon tells his son he must look elsewhere. While Solomon speaks directly to his son, there is no indication that Wisdom will. Furthermore, according to Solomon's instructional model we notice that the son's royalty will not privilege him in any manner; Solomon presents Wisdom as calling out to the public in general, not searching the royal son out from

the crowd. Solomon also gives no indication that once the son finds Wisdom, she will privilege him with direct address. The picture which Solomon paints for his son is that he will take his place among the crowds, his royal connections offering no assistance in his pursuit of divine knowledge. (This could be understood as a criticism of past royal privilege.) Solomon's son loses out with respect to his ANE peers on two counts: his father will not provide him instruction, and the person whom his father encourages him to seek out for instruction will not acknowledge him or his royalty.

This points out another difference between instruction, as Solomon presents it, and ANE instruction on the issue of the *physical* form of instruction. The instructors of Instruction frequently refer to their instruction as a written tradition. Yet Solomon never indicates to his son that instruction has written form. In the only place that Solomon mentions what he received from his father, he does not suggest that he received anything besides discourse (Prov. 4:3-4). Moreover, when Solomon describes Woman Wisdom's mode of instruction she is calling out to people, not passing out tracts. Instruction as Solomon presents it has verbal form.

In short, the model of instruction which Solomon recommends to his son has nothing in common with the ANE instruction tradition. Rather than the private father-to-son form, Solomon presents the woman-to-public crowd model to his son. In addition, wisdom is verbal, never written and the son cannot expect his royalty to assist his acquiring of instruction.

#### *A.) Where is Proverbs' Instructor?*

Solomon has stated that he is not rightly his son's instructor and in his stead has placed Woman Wisdom.<sup>269</sup> How easy will it be for the son to find this instructor? Woman Wisdom is found moving inside the city (streets, markets, atop the city walls, and at the city gates, 1:20-21) and outside it (the heights beside the way, paths, beside the city gate in front of town, and at crossroads, 8:2-3); she can hardly be easy to locate. If Solomon had said to his son, "You can always find

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Woman Wisdom at the city gate,” some of the son’s anxiety of being turned out of the house to receive instruction would be lessened. He has, at least, a reliable place to turn for instruction (as he must have assumed he had in turning to his father) but Solomon does not provide his son with even that security. He describes his son’s instructor as being active and roving around inside the city and outside it. Granted, these are all public places and easily available, but that is small consolation. All Solomon really tells his son is that Woman Wisdom is found outside. The son’s instructor cannot even be found by any significant building or place.<sup>270</sup> Instead of the ANE Instructional model of looking for instruction from Solomon in some private royal setting, Solomon tells his son that he should look somewhere outside the family and home for a woman.

#### *B.) Who is Proverbs' Instructor?*

Let us ignore the difficulty of Solomon’s description of where the woman instructor can be found, and examine how easy it will be to spot her once the son finds himself in the correct public place. The public setting in which the son is supposed to seek out Woman Wisdom seems to allow potential confusion between Wisdom and other women of the street (which Solomon is adamant his son should avoid but which Solomon makes little attempt to clarify).<sup>271</sup> The all but identical presentation of Woman Wisdom and the Evil Woman has been well documented;<sup>272</sup> what I will add is a better appreciation of the way in which the confusion between the two women obfuscates instruction for the son (how is he to find his source of instruction?). The ease with which Solomon describes these two women and the life and death difference of choosing between them, must cause his son great anxiety if all he has to go on to decide between these two women is Solomon’s description. Solomon, in turning his son away from him and the home and towards a single woman alone in the streets, is not improving on the ANE Instructional model, unless Solomon’s confusion or complication of the transmission of wisdom is his message.

*Excurses: Does Solomon's Description of Woman Wisdom Present Her as a Member of the Establishment?*

Some of the son's anxiety over where to find this instructor could be lessened if Woman Wisdom were distinguished from the public in some way. Lang holds that Wisdom puts on the mantle of orator, merchant, prophet, or outdoor wisdom teacher because of her place by the city gate and the similarity between her words and the words of these professions (Lang, 1986: 25-26). I question whether Wisdom's location is significant, though regardless of the significance of any place where Wisdom is found, the question of whether or not she is presented in a manner of a recognizable social institution remains. If the answer to this question is yes, then the son will have something to go on when he looks for this woman.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that Woman Wisdom is found exclusively at the city gate. What is clear from other biblical references to independent women (without male company) at city gates is that these women are thought to be, or actually were, prostitutes. In the story of Tamar (Gen. 38) her place by the city gate (as well as her dress) identifies her to Judah as a harlot. Rahab, also a harlot, has a house in the city wall close to the gate (Jos. 2). The picture of a single woman calling out to men from the city gate or the city streets also identifies a woman as a prostitute in Proverbs. If Wisdom recalls any recognizable social institution, it is prostitution. A single woman out in public would be rare, no matter what one's historical reconstruction of the era is. Woman Wisdom is rightly seen as a liminal woman of prostitution (cf. Lang, p. 26, for his reconstruction of expectations of single women alone in public). Lang has failed to cite biblical support for the presence of women (without male company as Woman Wisdom is presented) at a city gate as representing any social institution besides prostitution.

If Wisdom's gender were different, Wisdom might have recalled other social institutions. But Proverbs' choice of gender for Wisdom is intentional and the

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confusion between Wisdom and the Evil Woman is equally intentional. While the writer's choice of gender for Wisdom may or may not have been free, they would have had greater freedom to decide which social institution Wisdom recalled. That they chose to confuse their presentations of the Evil women and Wisdom, substantiates their intention to present divine wisdom in a liminal characterization. (This characterization of Proverbs' instructor makes her *inferior* to the royal son--one more change with respect to ANE Instruction.)

Are these women presented as identical as they seem? Some have attempted to distinguish Woman Wisdom from the various *bad* women described in Prov. 1-9 by reading these women symbolically, as boundaries to Proverbs' world of instruction.<sup>273</sup> These two women represent for the "sons" the choices they will make in life.<sup>274</sup> They can either choose death or life, foolishness or wisdom, fall in with the evil woman or marry the wise woman. This is the dialectic with which the son is presented. In this manner, they belong to the same symbolic world as the wise and foolish men of the sentence proverbs (Prov. 10ff.). The clearer this dialectic the less ambiguous Solomon's metaphor for Woman Wisdom is. However, the two women, while giving every appearance of organizing the introduction of Proverbs, of firming in the mind of the reader the categories of wise and foolish, good and bad, do not do so. The reader of Proverbs may wish to believe that the good and the evil are distinguishable, but Solomon's description of the two women for the son indicates just the opposite, and must throw the reader and the son into confusion. Camp, evaluating the effect of the confusion in the presentation of these two women, has put it well:

On the one hand, they [Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman] represent the idealized conceptualization of good and evil: ever separate, with ever inevitable consequences. Under the surface, however, as Aletti's analysis makes clear, lurks the dangerous knowledge that life does not always work so neatly. The Strange Woman is such a horror because her words are so close to the truth, not the truth of tidy theological packages, but the truth as humans really experience it. Husbands do go away on business, and strange beds do offer delight. The depth of the paradox only becomes visible when we acknowledge the unity of the female imagery that embraces the duality. In their embodiment, Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman are one, a fact that the sage's evaluations of them (e.g., 7:4-5) only partially mitigate (1988: 28-29).<sup>275</sup>

But even understood symbolically, it is not possible to assert that these passages contrast Woman Wisdom as an “establishment” figure with the various “liminal” Evil Woman. By asking ourselves what is demonstrative of the Evil Woman’s spurning of social conventions (Evil Woman are found alone, wandering the street, approaching young men, promising sexual pleasure, food, and the use of their house) we see that Woman Wisdom is guilty of violating the same social conventions. The details of the difference between these two women do not have sufficient magnitude to offset their similarities.<sup>276</sup>

The son must be frustrated when his father so clearly calls these women different names (implying that he sees differences between their characters) yet describes women of such similar appearances.<sup>277</sup> Though the son never gets a word in within the introduction, he must say to himself, “Why can I not see decisive differences between these women as my father does?” The differences between the two women offer little observational detail to aid the son’s choice between them. The trenchant critique of the Evil Woman, from the mouth of Solomon, is suspect in light of his inability to provide clearer distinctions between the women which the son can use. This inability of Solomon to interpret the world in an intelligent manner to his son would undermine any claim he would make to his own authority.

*C.) What Kind of Relationship is Encouraged with the Instructor?*

Let us overlook the problems of where to find the woman who will instruct the son, and exactly who this woman is, to examine the type of relationship which Solomon encourages his son to establish with this woman once he finds her. One might expect that though the instructor has changed from Solomon to this woman, the type of relationship between the son and his instructor would remain the same. However, this expectation is not met. The relationship Solomon encourages his son to have with this woman instructor is not similar to any relationship the son could have with his father, instructor or not. Solomon urges his son to seek out this instructor, Woman Wisdom, as a wife with increasing stress as the introduction

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progresses (3:15-18; 4:5-9, 13; 5:15-19; 7:4).<sup>278</sup> Is Woman Wisdom really a “woman whom the young man is urged to embrace and make his bride”?<sup>279</sup> Or is Solomon using “marriage style” language as a metaphor of how diligently his son is to embrace Woman Wisdom as a patroness/instructor?<sup>280</sup> Or finally, does Solomon heighten Woman Wisdom’s sexuality just to keep his son away from “foreign” women and religions?<sup>281</sup> Of these choices, it is the first which squares with most of the texts. In Solomon’s model of instruction, the relationship between the son and the instructor is sexual--a puzzling relationship for the transmission of wisdom.<sup>282</sup> The reason it looks as if Solomon is recommending Woman Wisdom as a wife to his son is because he actually is.<sup>283</sup> Why does Solomon stick to adjectives which dress his metaphor for wisdom in clothes more befitting a prostitute than an instructor (or potential wife)? To argue that Solomon paints an alluring image in the mind of his son to tempt him (pedagogical temptation?) in the right direction overlooks the complications such a metaphor entails.

The actual type of relationship Solomon wants his son to form with the instructor, Woman Wisdom, is not a relationship which is appropriate to any social institution; moreover, it is not a relationship we would expect between an instructor and her student.

### *Summary of Proverbs' Formal Challenges*

Does Solomon’s model of instruction lend itself for use by any social institution? First, the only actual authority figure of Proverbs’ introduction, Solomon, eliminates himself as a source of instruction, directing his son instead to Woman Wisdom.<sup>284</sup> The son, it would seem, rightly turns to his father for instruction (cf. Prov. 4:3-4), only to be told that this is not the right thing to do. Not only does Proverbs’ authority figure discount himself as an instructor, he discounts any advantage the son’s social position (as a royal son) may have with respect to instruction. (One would assume one established social institution would acknowledge another.) The son is on an equal footing with the general public in

receiving Wisdom's message, even though he is socially *superior* to Wisdom as well as the crowd. Proverbs argues that where one might expect an authority figure to provide instruction (whether from parallels to ANE Instruction or because some social institution speaks through Proverbs), no recognized authority figure provides instruction. Proverbs argues that where one would expect royalty to be afforded some privilege with respect to instruction, none will be given. In Proverbs, *sons* or royalty are no longer the instructed elite.

Second, I pointed out how hard it will be for the son to find Wisdom and stressed that her outside setting eliminates any association between Wisdom and any special place. She is not found near the royal court, temple mount, or scribal school (if such existed). She wanders through the city without an affinity for any special place. Her location outside the city walls would even dissociate her from the city. Proverbs' presentation of Wisdom's location on earth, in all its variety, stresses her availability to everyone. Proverbs argues that instruction has no physical alignment with any recognized building or institution.

Third, I recalled the similar presentation afforded Wisdom and the Evil Woman and questioned assertions that Wisdom represents any accepted social institutions. Of all the possible social institutions with which Wisdom may have been aligned, Proverbs presents her as all but undistinguished from the institution of prostitution. Proverbs says the source of divine instruction looks like a prostitute (though she was found at God's side during creation).

Fourth, even as the son and reader are questioning that Solomon is *really* suggesting that Wisdom has closest affinity to the liminal women of prostitution, Solomon reasserts this association by encouraging his son to have a sexual relationship (marriage) with Woman Wisdom. That the son's sexual energy can easily be misdirected to the Evil Woman in such a model, as Solomon acknowledges, seems reason enough to express disbelief at Solomon's new model. Even suggestions to understand these women symbolically do nothing to amplify the difference between them. Proverbs asserts that the relationship between instructor



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and instructed is not that of ANE Instruction or even what one would normally expect. Metaphorical or not, such a relationship seems unbecoming an instructor.

What do these observations about Solomon's instructional model imply about his desire for "authoritarian control" over his son? Why would Solomon choose a symbol for establishment ideals so indistinguishable from his symbol of anti-establishment ideals? If Solomon wishes to groom his son to adopt his values and judgments, he does not further this goal by confusing his son as to where to turn for instruction or to whom.

Solomon characterizes Woman Wisdom in a surprising liminal manner, distant from any recognized authoritative institution. The ways in which Wisdom is presented--no name, no business location, no payment for her instruction, no special dress, no husband (she is always looking!), no special words (the Evil Woman and Wisdom utter the same words), and a house she built herself--presents Wisdom in an even more "vulnerable" light than the Evil Woman (who does have a husband). Wisdom does claim divine origins, but once on earth these connections do not bring her special treatment. McKane captures the vulnerability of the instructor Wisdom:

When she raises her voice it is not to deliver an academic lecture in a classroom, or a sermon in a temple to a crowd of worshipers (cf. Jer. 7), or to enlighten an *élite*, but to summon men from their occupations and distractions to take part in an open-air meeting (cf. Gemser). She has no assurance of an audience, no prior publicity, and there are no established conventions in connection with this mode of address which guarantee that she will be treated with deference and have an easy passage. She operates where the competition is fiercest, not so much the competition of other orators as men's preoccupation with those things which they take more seriously than listening to speeches--earning their living, making bargains, getting wealth, transacting local politics, settling disputes, and other less deliberate gregarious enjoyments.<sup>285</sup>

Is the model of instruction which Solomon offers his son an advance over the ANE model? The model of instruction which Solomon presents does not have any possible association with formal institutions. By telling his son that instruction is to be found in the liminal woman of Wisdom, Solomon has discounted formal associations. This anti-establishment characterization of Wisdom is even more surprising if one remembers that Wisdom's description comes from Solomon's royal mouth. I use the term *anti-establishment* because so much of Wisdom's characterization goes against tradition. Royalty or socially superior sons are no

longer recipients of instruction; Woman Wisdom brings her instruction to the public. Royalty or the upper-class is not the source of Proverbs' instruction, but a woman who can be frequently confused with a prostitute is. In characterizing Woman Wisdom as a woman of questionable virtue, Proverbs makes it more difficult for the socially elite to attain instruction. Proverbs' introduction is anything but apathetic with respect to established social institutions; it systematically inverts traditional expectation.<sup>286</sup>

### *Challenge to Biblical Traditions*

One of the claims concerning Wisdom which receive repeated emphasis in the biblical tradition is that Wisdom is at God's side unavailable to creation, and as we have seen, Proverbs' introduction recalls that tradition. Prov. 8:22-30 in particular emphasizes the radical difference between Wisdom and creation by underscoring the great priority in time of her birth, her location with God in the divine realm during creation, and her place at God's side after creation (v. 30). Wisdom's separation from, and unavailability to creation, is the most basic theme of biblical wisdom traditions. When the account of primeval history in Genesis emphasizes the separateness of the divine and human realms (placing wisdom off-limits to creation), when the stories about the first human argue that divine wisdom is found and remains in the divine realm, and when the stories of Solomon and David acknowledge that divine wisdom is unavailable to them apart from God's bequest, the centralness of this theme is seen. This cosmological assertion all but eliminates divine wisdom's presence on earth.

At first glance, this biblical theme would challenge claims made by Egyptian Instruction that it presents exhaustive instruction or insights apart from divine revelation (e.g. the opening lines of *Amenemope*), as well as Proverbs' own assertion in 1:2. As has been attested in the first chapter of this study and elsewhere, there is no tie between ANE instruction and divine revelation. The argument could be raised that it is wrong to compare the biblical tradition about wisdom (which

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pertains to God and creation) with ANE Instructional tradition (which focuses on social behaviour). Yet, however strong the biblical association between divine wisdom and creation is *vis-à-vis* God, this does not exhaust the content of divine wisdom. When divine wisdom is given to Solomon, it increases Solomon's abilities in the social realm as opposed to increasing his knowledge of creation.<sup>287</sup> The biblical notion of divine wisdom is defined by knowledge of creation and by social behaviour; both manifestations of divine wisdom are present with God unavailable to creation. So the claim of ANE Instruction to present non-revelatory instruction about social interactions would be problematic to the biblical tradition of wisdom as so far developed.

Hypothetically, if Proverbs aspires to imitate ANE Instructional literature, it must respond to ANE Instructions' non-revelatory stance. Proverbs' introduction (as covered so far) argues that wisdom and instruction have their origin in the divine realm with God and Woman Wisdom. But this creates another problem: wisdom and instruction according to biblical tradition are unavailable to creation. But as we have already seen, Solomon urges his son to initiate an intimate relationship with divine wisdom by searching out Woman Wisdom on earth.

With Job 28's radical thesis in mind ("wisdom cannot be acquired"<sup>288</sup>), we rightly ask, "Since when is wisdom on earth?" Surprisingly, further development of Woman Wisdom's story, which is needed to corroborate Wisdom's presence on earth, occurs after Prov. 8:22-30 which has trenchantly affirmed divine Wisdom's distance from humanity. The transcendence of Woman Wisdom over creation--her priority in time, presence at Yahweh's side, and her playing where men toil--could emphasize her distance from the created order, which indeed has been the intention of these verses. In vv. 30-31 which immediately follow the acts of creation just described, Woman Wisdom steps back and reflects on her relationship to the creator and her state of being (*תְּשׁוּבָה*) with the creator. She then introduces a subtle change of location:

Then I was beside him, like a [confidant]<sup>289</sup>  
and I was daily his delight,

rejoicing before him always,  
rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the sons of men (Prov. 8:30-31).<sup>290</sup>

Wisdom, who was before the creator, has become a celebrant in creation with the sons of men, thus dismissing intimations of her transcendence. She has been with the creator during creation, affirming a biblical tradition, and then she descends to be in creation to provide instruction, challenging biblical tradition.

What this change in location between v. 30 and v. 31 does, with respect to Wisdom's story, is to set up the rationale for Woman Wisdom's direct presentation of instruction to men in vv. 32-36 (and for that matter, the instruction of Proverbs as a whole). These verses announce Woman Wisdom's mediatory role between the divine realm and creation.<sup>291</sup> In the past God mediated wisdom. Here in the final verses of Prov. 8, explanation is offered on how Woman Wisdom is also able to mediate wisdom between creator and creation. With the divinity of Woman Wisdom and her closeness to Yahweh established, Proverbs proclaims that this Wisdom is now on earth delighting in, and instructing the sons of men.

The assertion that this begotten "daughter" of Yahweh found delight with humankind (v. 31) is reminiscent of Gen. 6:1-4, and is a fitting close to Proverbs' account of Wisdom's primeval history in Prov. 8. In the Genesis version of a story of gods cohabiting with humanity, the sons of god found the daughters of men to be beautiful and took them as they chose. Yahweh's response to these events in Genesis was to emphasize the difference between divinity and humanity by decreeing mortality to humanity after one hundred and twenty years (thereby making human flesh incompatible with divine immortality). The story of gods cohabiting with humans told in Proverbs 8, sets the Genesis 6 account on its head. In Genesis, it was the sons of god who took "delight" with the daughters of men; here it is the daughter of god who delights in the sons of men.<sup>292</sup> In Genesis, the result of this encounter was death. In Proverbs, Woman Wisdom brings life to those men who seek her (8:35a). In Genesis, Yahweh perceives this union of the divine and human as a threat. In Proverbs, Yahweh perceives the union of men with

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Woman Wisdom as favorably (8:35b). This story in Genesis reemphasizes the distance between the divine and human realm and may explain the flood and the extermination of humanity. This story in Proverbs recounts how the sons of men can draw close to the divine realm by drawing close to divine Wisdom. It also attributes the good in creation to Woman Wisdom. In 8:32 and 34, Woman Wisdom brings happiness (אשר) to the sons of men. She is able to make creation a pleasant place to be. The joyfulness Wisdom expressed before the creator, she brings to earth. Where the Genesis account closed one chapter on human hubris, this Proverbs account opens the present and future to a decision by the sons of men. Wisdom is a divine mediator ordained to share her divine gift of wisdom.

In the previous section I drew attention to the type of relationship Solomon encouraged his son to have with Wisdom, and as we will see, when Solomon speaks through Wisdom he encourages the same type of relationship. In v. 34 the picture of an eager son waiting by Wisdom's house is presented. The son probably has more on his mind than instruction; compare

Watching daily at my gates  
waiting besides my door (Prov. 8:34).

with the similar scene presented in Songs 2:9b,

Behold, there he stands behind our wall,  
gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice.

The scene described in Songs is that of a lover waiting outside his beloved's house and this seems to be the implication of 8:34 as well (cf. Prov. 8:17).<sup>293</sup> This continues in line with the numerous injunctions by Solomon to seek Wisdom out as a wife (which Solomon stated directly to his son rather than as he does here through the *persona* of Wisdom). Also if we compare the next verse (8:35) with Prov. 18:22,

For he who finds me finds life [says Wisdom]  
and obtains favour from the Lord (8:35).

He who finds a wife finds a good thing,  
and obtains favour from the Lord (18:22).

we see that Wisdom views herself as a potential wife. The only alternative for the sons of men who refuse to Woman Wisdom as a wife or lover, is for them to admit

they love death (8:36).

Prov. 9 continues the theme of the immediacy of Wisdom to creation and her desire for intimacy with the sons or men begun in the story of her origins in Prov. 8. 9:1-2 report the preparations Wisdom has made for a festive banquet. After the preparations have been made, Wisdom sends out invitations to anyone who will respond to come to her house for a feast. Wisdom is planted decisively in creation and she is actively soliciting the sons of men to come to her. The chapter itself is composed of two invitations to two meals. Wisdom invites men to her feast of meat, bread and mixed wine (9:4-5); and Folly's invitation is to partake of "stolen" water and bread (9:16). These two invitations are set off by vv. 7-12. The two feasts are transparently set up to mirror each other. The name Folly, opposite to that of Wisdom, starts the invocation of comparisons. The words each woman offers as invitation are the same, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" To him without sense she says . . ." (9:5 and 9:16). The place where this invitation is broadcast "the highest places in town" is the same for both (it follows that they are in competition for the same guests). The only place where these passages diverge is concerning the meal.<sup>294</sup>

I have argued in chapter two that one aspect of Wisdom's meal is its recollection of Solomon's meals and how those meals revealed the divine nature of wisdom. However, in the context of Wisdom's announcement of her intention of intimacy with humanity (the last few verses of Prov. 8), and the overt parallel with the feast of the Evil Woman in 9:13-18, reading Wisdom's meal as a wedding feast is also appropriate (acknowledging its entree to sexual participation).<sup>295</sup>

The transition from the account of Woman Wisdom's origin and subsequent history to the present can be summarized like this: Wisdom descends to "delight" with the "sons of men" (8:31); men wait upon her doorstep with more than instruction on their minds (8:34), and the delight which Wisdom portends in establishing a marriage relationship with the sons of men (8:34), is borne out by her invitation to the wedding feast (9:1-6). In this context, the meal Woman Wisdom

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offers stresses her presence among men and her desire to have a relationship with them. In other words, Wisdom sees little difference between her role as instructor and as sexual partner. (So the message Solomon spoke directly to his son [to seek out Wisdom as wife] he repeats when he speaks as Wisdom.) Though this confusion of instruction and marriage appears problematic, it serves to accentuate Proverbs' foremost intention of asserting the immediacy between Wisdom and creation. That this agenda confused the relationship between instructor and instructed did not seem to bother Proverbs' authors. For these authors, Woman Wisdom behaved as they expected an instructor to behave. This stress on Wisdom's immanence to creation and her desire for intimacy with the sons of men questions any impulse to separate Wisdom's sexual invitation from her instructional invitation because they are part of the same message.<sup>296</sup>

These new concepts concerning Wisdom's location in the cosmos and her availability to men are not confined to these last two chapters of Proverbs. There are other passages (stressing her immanence) in Proverbs which confirm the new location of Wisdom explained in Prov. 8 and 9. When we examine these passages it is also important to keep the "radical thesis" of Job 28 in mind to appreciate better how different Proverbs' cosmology is from the cosmology discussed in chapter two of this study.

In Prov. 1:20-33 there are no direct indications that Wisdom has ever been God's associate at creation. Neither does her name, *Hokmot*, in v. 20, match with the word "*hokmah*" used in the passages of chapter two for "wisdom".<sup>297</sup> The passage begins in v. 20 with a third-person description of Woman Wisdom. She is described as raising her voice in streets, markets, atop the city wall, and at the city gate, all earthly settings. She is described in a rapid succession of four verbs and four locations. She cries in the street. In the markets she raises her voice. Atop the city wall she cries out. She speaks at the city gate. She is active in contrast to her potential students' passivity; she is coming to them. Wisdom is on earth actively addressing humanity. Whether or not v. 28,

Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;  
they will seek me diligently but will not find me.

refers to Wisdom's future inaccessibility is not clear. The threat of Wisdom's possible unavailability does integrate well with what is known about her history; nevertheless, this Wisdom poem presents Wisdom on earth soliciting humanity.

In Prov. 3:13-20, it is apparent that this passage expects a positive answer to the question "Where is wisdom to be found?" The search for wisdom is capable of success. The verses preceding this passage stress the bankruptcy of humanity in relying on wisdom of their own (3:5-8). These verses do not say that humanity is without "insight" or "wisdom" (3:7). Humans are in possession of these things. What Solomon is telling his son is not to trust his own insight or trust his own wisdom, but to wait upon the Lord.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own insight.  
Be not wise in your own eyes;  
fear the Lord and turn away from evil (3:5, 7).

These verses by limiting the availability of wisdom to an act of the Lord, do not acknowledge the presence of Woman Wisdom among humanity independent of God. However, further on in v. 13, the limitation that the Lord is the only conduit of wisdom is challenged. Verse 13 assures those that search for Wisdom that blessedness and gain will result (no mention of the Lord here). The success of the search is implied by the description of the gains which reward the diligent. Here, failure to discover wisdom even in the face of diligence, as was told in Job 28, is not communicated. Blessed are those who search for wisdom and *find* her, for they will gain long life and riches (3:16).<sup>298</sup>

In these verses there is also a clever transformation (and challenge) of the wisdom tradition from Job 28. This centers on the change in meaning of comparing wisdom with 'coral' (פְּנִינִים).<sup>299</sup> Prov. 3:15 speaks of wisdom being "more precious than 'coral'" (יִקְרָה הִיא מִפְּנִינִים). In Job coral may be rare and consequently precious, but wisdom is more than rare; it is unavailable to creation.<sup>300</sup> The comparison with coral in Job, which emphasized the unavailability of wisdom,



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has been revised in Proverbs to emphasize wisdom's rare availability. Job 28:18 compares wisdom to coral to underscore that wisdom is not a commodity: "the price of wisdom is beyond coral" (וּמְשֹׁךְ חֶכְמָה מִפְּנֵי יָגִים). The presentation of wisdom in 3:15 acknowledges Job's comparison of Wisdom to the rare occurrence of the word 'coral,' but advances a new understanding. Prov. 3:15 uses this comparison to say that wisdom, while rare, is available to those who seek her. This transformation of the comparison of wisdom with coral is carried throughout Proverbs (and in contrast with Job 28); wisdom is more precious than coral, not unavailable.<sup>301</sup>

Prov. 3:16 and 18 present Wisdom in possession of the gift of life which she is willing to give to those who search and find her. "And who, apart from Yahweh, can say to man, 'Whoever finds me, finds life . . .?'" (von Rad, 1972: 163). Her mediatory role between the divine realm and creation is spoken of here, as well as her advocacy of creation's survival (cf. 8:35-36). Wisdom, while available to creation, is not an ordinary inhabitant; humanity's life depends on finding her. 3:19-20 plays a role similar to the role played by 8:22ff. in its context. These verses identify the Wisdom being presented as God's wisdom, associated with him during creation. This eliminates the possibility of confusing the wisdom addressed in this passage with the human wisdom talked of above in 3:5-8. The reader is reminded that the wisdom which was connected with God during creation is now on earth.

I now turn to examine those verses in Prov. 8 which precede Wisdom's description of her origin. Prov. 8 opens with a question which recalls the questions of Job 28 ("Where is wisdom to be found?") by asking "Does not wisdom call, does not understanding raise her voice?" This opening implicitly asserts that Wisdom is found on earth. Verses 2-3 proceed to describe the places on earth where Wisdom calls (affirming that she is indeed on earth). In vv. 2-3, the settings described are busy public places, and though similar to the setting described in 1:20-33, differ in depicting Woman Wisdom outside the city. Though outside the city walls, she still instructs in heavily travelled and popular spots: at crossroads (8:2), beside the gates, and at the approaches to the city gates (8:3). Verses 10-11, with their comparison of

instruction to gold, silver, and jewels, are references to merchandise carried by merchants on their way into and out of the city. Wisdom is found in urban and rural settings addressing the people found there.

The comparison of 8:11,

Take my instruction instead of silver,  
and knowledge rather than choice gold;  
for wisdom is better than jewels (פְּנִינִים וְיָכָר)  
and all that you may desire cannot compare with her (Prov. 8:10-11).

as was noted above of Prov. 3:15, is a comparison of special significance to the wisdom tradition presented in Proverbs. As in 3:15, the context in which this comparison occurs, assumes the availability of wisdom to creation but the implication of the opening question makes this clear. Wisdom is asserting that instruction, knowledge, and wisdom are available to those who seek them as diligently as the rarities of silver, gold, and jewels.

In vv. 12-21, Wisdom sings her own praises. She declares that she is responsible for advice and judgment. It is only by her counsel that kings and state officials wield their power justly.<sup>302</sup> She also claims to possess “riches and honour” (v. 18). Woman Wisdom is, by these claims, inserting herself into social interactions. She has claimed to be behind “just” governmental action (vv. 15-16) as well as behind hopes of individual wealth.

Wisdom is placed on earth in 8:1-21 by both her setting and influence. She is not the distant “God’s Wisdom” that she is outside of Proverbs. She is on earth making herself available to people. Wisdom maintains that she is behind the life experiences of just governance and the search for wealth. Wisdom presents the justification to her claim of being found on earth (in deference to wisdom tradition outside Proverbs) by narrating her descent to creation in 8:31ff.

### *Summary of Proverbs’ Conceptual Challenges*

The cosmological view concerning wisdom outside of Proverbs states that wisdom is a divine possession, at God’s side, unavailable to creation. The introduction to Proverbs presents Wisdom’s place in the cosmos as radically

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different: Wisdom is on earth. Westermann notes these differences when he argues that Job 28 and its “revolutionary thesis: wisdom cannot be acquired! . . . stands in opposition to the frequent admonition to ‘acquire wisdom’ in Proverbs 1-9” (1974: 137). The very assumption of instructional or didactic material is that Wisdom is available unmediated to all; it can be taught and appropriated (1:2). Since the thesis of Job discounts Wisdom’s availability to humanity; another thesis is needed. There is a prayer to God in the Book of Wisdom which concurs with the revision of cosmological conceptions found in Proverbs 8. The sage hints that without her descent, Wisdom is not available to help him.

With you [God] is Wisdom, She who knows your works,  
She who was present when you made the world;  
She who understands what is pleasing in your eyes  
and agrees with your commandments.  
Dispatch her from the holy heavens,  
send her forth from your throne of glory  
to help me and to toil with me  
and teach me what is pleasing to you (Wis. 9:9-10, JB trans.).<sup>303</sup>

The only feature of Wisdom’s primeval history new to the biblical wisdom tradition outside of Proverbs is her “descent” (though this is a major innovation). If Wisdom’s descent is examined within its context, as coming at the end of her primeval history as well as introducing the wisdom of 10-29 to an Israelite audience, the descent of Wisdom is indispensable to these tasks. When so many passages deny her presence on earth, Wisdom could not be presented on earth without a description of how she got there.

Proverbs acknowledges previous traditions of form and concept, yet dismantles them. Solomon, a father looked to by his son for instruction, directs his son’s attention away from himself. Proverbs tells the reader not to look to fathers for instruction. Solomon describes Wisdom’s joy and glory with God during creation, and yet goes on to say that she brought her joy and glory to earth. Proverbs tells the reader divine Wisdom is on earth. Why are these traditions recalled only to be repeatedly transformed throughout Proverbs’ introduction?

Since Proverbs’ task is to tell its audience where to turn for wisdom and

instruction, how much clearer it would have been to present only God or Woman Wisdom as instructors and to have Solomon out of the picture. The father-to-son form is a complication to Proverbs' message, something it could easily have done without. Since Proverbs believes divine wisdom is on earth, why recall the tradition wherein Wisdom is unavailable to creation? The simplest explanation appears to be the best. Proverbs sought to transform (or develop) these traditions because they address the same audience. Proverbs retained the trappings of the form of ANE Instructional introduction and traditional cosmology because it was good rhetorical strategy.

The transference of instruction recounted in the Egyptian Instruction *Kagemni* is elementary,

Then they [those who heard the instruction] placed themselves on their bellies, they **recited** it as it was written. It seemed good to them beyond anything in the whole land. They stood and sat accordingly (2.6f.; AEL, I, p. 60; emp. mine).

In the epilogue to *Ptahhotep* we also read how easy the act of receiving instruction can be:

If you **listen** to my sayings,  
All your affairs will go forward;  
In their truth resides their value,  
Their memory goes on in the speech of men,  
Because of the worth of their precepts;  
If every word is **carried on**,  
They will not perish in this land . . . (cf. 15.5ff.; AEL, I, p. 73; emp. mine).

If a man's son **accepts** his father's words,  
No plan of his will go wrong (cf. 16.19; AEL, I, p. 74; emp. mine).

If the sons will just recite, listen, carry on, and accept the words of instruction, all will go well with them. Of course from the epilogue to *ANY* and the introduction to *Ahikar* we read how some *sons* refuse instruction. But the overall feeling one gains from ANE Instruction is that if one has the right attitude towards instruction, appropriation of that instruction easily follows. There is nothing in the introductions to ANE Instruction that would challenge the simplicity of embracing instruction described in the epilogues (excluding *Ankhsheshonqy* and *Ahikar*). In fact, in Instructions which have short introductions, it appears that one is able to move on to instruction with little preamble.

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When we turn again to examine the model of instruction which Proverbs presents--Solomon telling his son to turn to God and Woman Wisdom for instruction--we ask, "How easy is it for the son to turn away from his father and seek these two out?" To turn the son from his father is to turn him away from a secure relationship. To turn the son out of the house to the public space (to find Woman Wisdom) allows many uncontrolled variables. The son to whom Proverbs speaks has much greater anxiety than his Ancient Near Eastern counterpart, as we have seen. What was the compensation the writers of Proverbs felt would result from their tradition of instruction? In light of the changes made to these traditions, insight into the emphasis of the introduction may be obtained. Where the tradition of ANE Instruction would create an expectation of a male instructor, Proverbs presents us with a woman. Where the tradition of ANE Instruction holds that instruction is a private event, Solomon insists that Wisdom is found outside on the street. Where the tradition of God's wisdom is found with God in heaven (unavailable on earth) Proverbs claims that Wisdom is on earth. Where tradition suggests that instruction originates with a king, Proverbs says it is found in a woman with the appearance similar to a prostitute. Where tradition associates instruction with the court, Proverbs argues that instruction is found out on the street. In Prov. 8, after Woman Wisdom recounts her divine credentials (consequently her authority and identification with biblical tradition), Proverbs presents her all but total confusion with Folly in Prov. 9. Proverbs by denying Solomon as a source of wisdom and in choosing Woman Wisdom to be the source and instructor of wisdom, makes curious implications about wisdom along the lines of gender, its establishment or non-establishment alignment, the ease with which it can be found, and the social institution with which it is most confused. I now wish to take the challenges to tradition which Proverbs makes and view them positively as statements about divine wisdom and instruction. I will do this by looking primarily at the figure of Wisdom.

### **Part Three: Proverbs' Introduction as Deconstruction of Tradition**

The final way in which I wish to examine Proverbs' introduction will be to focus on how Proverbs' challenge to tradition is embodied in the character of Wisdom. It is usually accepted that the imbalances of power in the social context of a composition is accepted and affirmed in the literature which that society produces. Proverbs, however, seems to be an exception. Though Solomon represents establishment society and though he controls how he presents wisdom to his son, the wisdom he presents stands outside his world, confronting it. Proverbs' introduction does not affirm the power structure which supposedly produced it. The message of Proverbs is addressed to an audience outside the establishment, and it is with this focus that the book of Proverbs intends itself to be read.

Viewing the introductory narrative of Proverbs simply, we see that the introduction presents a male king, Solomon, and a female "divinity", Woman Wisdom. Both characters are presented with substantial credentials: Solomon by the historical record (as implied from outside of Proverbs),<sup>304</sup> and Woman Wisdom by virtue of her close association with God and her divine origin. By means of these divine qualities, WW outshines Solomon.

Let us examine the relative independence of these characters. As a king, Solomon would, one would assume, have full freedom of movement within the human world of the narrative. WW, being divine, has full freedom of movement within the cosmos of the narrative, divine and human.<sup>305</sup> So on this level both main characters of Proverbs' introduction exhibit autonomy.<sup>306</sup>

As we focus closer on the introduction, we begin to see formal aspects of the composition which challenge the relative independence of its characters. Most importantly we notice that Solomon speaks Proverbs' introduction, including the Wisdom poems. Proverbs' introduction never allows Wisdom to directly address the son (or the reader). When Wisdom speaks, the reader understands that Solomon is repeating her words to his son. Elizabeth Harvey calls the appropriation of the female voice by a male author "transvestite ventriloquism".<sup>307</sup> This phrase captures

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Solomon's linguistic control over Woman Wisdom; But does Solomon's control over Wisdom's characterization extend beyond this?

Newsome, more than any other, has argued that Solomon's control over Wisdom extends beyond language.<sup>308</sup> She argues that Solomon presents his own values and "patriarchal" agenda through the character of Wisdom. In other words, Solomon presents Wisdom as if she is an independent character (from himself) when in fact she is differentiated in name only. Even though a woman, she represents male patriarchal values. For Newsome, the linguistic control Solomon exerts over the character Wisdom indicates an imbalance of power between their characterizations that enables Solomon's ideology to dominate. Though Newsome does not articulate it as such, she implies that patriarchal narrative controls its female characters as completely as patriarchal society controls female sexuality.

Regardless of the debatable assumption that linguistic control over characters parallels actual historical context, with respect to Proverbs it is notable that even though Solomon has absolute linguistic control over how Wisdom is presented to his son, his characterization of Wisdom places her outside his sphere of influence. Nowhere does Solomon describe Woman Wisdom as encountering himself or any member of the royal court. Nowhere does Solomon describe Woman Wisdom at a place, inside the city or in a rural setting, where she would encounter and respond to formal social institutions (temple, royal court, or formal town meeting). Yet Solomon has not presented Woman Wisdom as an inhabitant of some imaginary society. The setting of Woman Wisdom, though simplified, is not foreign. Wisdom walks through some market place and strolls by a city gate, but this lack of specific reference does not imply that Solomon is talking about a different world. The world in which Wisdom walks is a world well known to both father and son. Solomon presents Woman Wisdom as totally outside his realm of influence even though she inhabits his world.<sup>309</sup> In locating Woman Wisdom outside formal society, Solomon has relinquished ability to control *his* character with respect to his son. There is just no way Solomon (or the formal society he

represents) can impose himself upon Wisdom. Whatever values, world-view, or behaviour Wisdom expresses, are understood as independent of those of Solomon.

Not only is Wisdom found in settings different from those of Solomon, but she addresses her audience in a manner different from the king or any other member of the upper-class. She never acknowledges the presence of royalty, priests, business people, scholars, farmers or any other social class. Wisdom is unconcerned with the social classification of the people she addresses, calling them together fools (1:22, 32; 8:5), simple (1:22, 32, 8:5; 9:4) and scoffers (1:22). In her address she collapses the social structure of her audience as if it held no meaning. This is hardly a style of address Solomon could use. The only distinction Wisdom makes with respect to her audience is that she first comes to an urban audience (1:20ff.) and notes their resistance to her message (1:24-25). In her address to her rural audience (Prov. 8), she notes no similar resistance to her message, instead she reveals her unique primeval history which exposes her true identity. Since Wisdom does not offer any instruction in the introduction we have no idea whether it is significant that one audience seems resistant to her message and the other receptive.

Whether or not Woman Wisdom's values differ from Solomon's cannot be decided by noting her independence from his social position or his sphere of influence. The best demonstration of the radical difference between Solomon's and Wisdom's values arises from Wisdom's sexual characterization. It is assumed that a narrative which arises out of patriarchal society will control its female characters as tightly as that society controls its female members.<sup>310</sup> At the core of patriarchal control of women is the male control of woman's sexuality. That Proverbs arose out of patriarchal society seems beyond dispute, and that Solomon exerts literary control over Woman Wisdom is clear. However, the question remains, Does the control over women's sexuality which we know Solomon exerts over women in real life, find parallel in his control over Woman Wisdom's sexuality within the narrative?<sup>311</sup> The answer to this question seems to be no. The independence of Woman Wisdom from Solomon hinted at when Solomon characterizes her in a setting separate from him,



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gains momentum when we observe that Wisdom's sexual expression is not controllable by not only Solomon, but by all male characters. Woman Wisdom's control over her own sexuality is expressed when she comes to earth of her own accord to delight with the sons of men,<sup>312</sup> when she decides where she will look for men to address, when she calls out to men (they may call out to her but she may or may not respond, cf. Prov. 1:28), when she invites men to her home for the wedding feast, and when she wanders through the city and country without male accompaniment. All of Wisdom's encounters with men are her initiative; she calls to them and they must respond. (Though Solomon has told his son to pursue Wisdom, Wisdom determines where she will be found.)

In addition to these examples of Wisdom's independent expression of her sexuality, or perhaps because of her control over her own sexuality, Wisdom is easily confused with a prostitute. Patriarchy typically views women who control their own sexuality as a threat; for example, Lilith and the Whore of Babylon are symbols which threaten male control over women's sexuality, whereas the virginal Mother of God is a safe positive image because control of her sexuality is not an issue. Given this observation of patriarchal symbols, we ask, Why does Solomon characterize Wisdom as exercising independent control over her own sexuality? I see no answer to this, unless Solomon is taking great pains to tell his son how far Wisdom lives from the establishment. What seems to be the case in patriarchal society is that the extent to which a woman controls her own sexuality is also indicative of her distance from institutional society. Solomon's inability to articulate the difference between Woman Wisdom and prostitutes to his son strongly suggests that Solomon is creating a character he does not conceive of clearly. Solomon knows that Wisdom is to be found in a level of society quite distant from his own. His inexperience with life at this level is seen in his stereotype for women there--they are all prostitutes.

Though Solomon exercises complete linguistic control over Wisdom's characterization, this formal feature provides potentially misleading clues concerning her independence from Solomon who created her. Solomon describes

Wisdom's independence from him (and his son) when he presents her in settings outside the formal social institution where he would be found. The other side of Wisdom's independence from formal society is formal society's inability to control her. Solomon never presents her as responding to any authority outside her own. Solomon acknowledges the threat an independent woman poses to himself and male society when characterizing her as a prostitute (or visa-versa). What has happened here in Proverbs' introduction with respect to patriarchal narratological and social structures? Why does the pinnacle of male patriarchal society, the king, tell his son that divine wisdom comes to earth in a form indistinguishable from that of a prostitute, patriarchy's lowest point? Why does the divine presence in Proverbs rest in patriarchal society's least expected place? I have no answers to these questions but can only reiterate that the problems caused by Solomon's metaphor for divine wisdom (primarily a subversion of patriarchal values and expectations) seem to outweigh any advantage such a metaphor could offer. Had Solomon wished to channel his son's sexual energy towards the acquisition of wisdom, he could have presented the metaphor of Wisdom as the single virginal daughter of a respectable family. If Solomon wished to emphasize to his son that wisdom is not found in books, schools, or the royal court, he could have used the metaphor for Wisdom as a street-wise old man. If Solomon sought to tell his son that wisdom was on earth, he could have used the metaphor of wisdom as a wise old king, world-famous for his knowledge. Solomon chose none of these options because these metaphors were not appropriate expressions of divine wisdom.

I think the absolute independence of Solomon's characterization of divine wisdom from himself (as well as the patriarchal society he may represent) and the threat her characterization represents to the social institutions which enthroned him suggest that Solomon could have himself been threatened by his own insight into the presence of divine wisdom on earth. Are those who enthroned him going to be pleased when they hear that divine wisdom came to earth with no intention of making herself available to their society? I realize that we may have no ability to

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understand a narrative in which the narrative voice creates a character (of greater importance than itself) who criticizes the values and institutions which empowered the narrator to speak in the first place, but such seems to be the case in Proverbs' introduction. Solomon's passion is to get his son to turn away from him and search out Woman Wisdom as the source of divine wisdom in the world, and consequently to remain as far from Solomon's world and what he represents as possible.

The way Solomon introduces Wisdom challenges what one normally thinks of as patriarchal or establishment values. Why would Solomon create and place a character who embodies Wisdom so far from the royal court? Why does the character of Wisdom behave so much like a prostitute? Why is Woman Wisdom so sexually aggressive with respect to men when she must know that this gives them the wrong conception of her? Why would Solomon send his son out from the controlled environment of the royal court into the streets to receive instruction? Solomon must have taken these risks because he was being true to his understanding of divine wisdom (gained from divine revelation?).

The interpretation which is usually given of the sentence proverbs--that they are staunchly pro-establishment--may lead one to believe that the reading I have provided misses the overall intent of the book of Proverbs. However, in the next chapter I will show how understanding Wisdom coming to earth outside formal social institutions highlights some of the instruction preserved in the sentence proverbs, continuing the stress that divine wisdom is found outside formal society.

ENDNOTES:

<sup>256</sup> Crenshaw, 1981: p. 214.

<sup>257</sup> Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, "Observations on Creation Theology in Wisdom," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, ed. John G. Gammie et al. (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), pp. 43-57; p. 44 (emphasis mine).

<sup>258</sup> Scott, 1970: 20-45, p. 27.

<sup>259</sup> The case of *Ankhsheshonqy* excepted. In fact, that the pharaoh violates Ankhsheshonqy's private instruction by his prerequisite (the reading or editing of Ankhsheshonqy's instruction before it is forwarded to his son) is seen as a further humiliation of Ankhsheshonqy and is not presented as the norm.

The only Instruction which is set outside in the presence of others, *Satire of the Trades*, is nevertheless presented as private words expressed from Pepi to Dau-khety. Nowhere is mention made of any of the others travelling on the boat with them.

<sup>260</sup> The biblical wisdom tradition outside Proverbs cited here is discussed in chapter two above.

<sup>261</sup> Some past conclusions which find little support from Egyptian Instruction are: 1) that Instruction speaks with one voice, Egyptian Instruction was directed towards a specific social class (usually royal or scribal), 2) Instruction has a political orientation, 3) Instruction was composed for a school setting (it was *used* in a school setting, but this is altogether different), 4) the father-to-son form is a metaphor for teacher-to-student, 5) Instruction makes reference to formal education (only a few do), 6) *order* (MAAT or whatever) plays a big role in Instruction, and 7) the ethos of Instruction is best seen in the instruction. These were covered in greater detail in the summary of ANE Instruction in chapter one.

<sup>262</sup> Carol Newsome argues that the form of the introduction is its message: powerful males inculcating their values in less powerful males. The father-to-son form represents the patriarchal *status quo* (whether or not this ideology was institutionalized historically in formal education; Carol A. Newsome, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* [ed. Peggy L. Day, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989], pp. 142-160).

<sup>263</sup> Or even if Solomon is telling his son that he received wisdom from his own father (cf. Prov. 4:3-4). All that Solomon says he received from his father was direction or orientation (יָרָא), words (דְּבָרִים), and commands (צִוִּיּוֹת); there is no mention of his reception of wisdom from his father (4:4). From Prov. 1:2 we know it is Proverbs' intention to provide wisdom, though we must look closely to see who offers wisdom. In the following note I will cover in greater depth whether Solomon supplies wisdom.

It is interesting that in the two references where Solomon tells his son to pay attention to his parents (Prov. 1:8; 6:20), the male parent provides discipline (מִסְדֵּר) while the female parent provides instruction (תּוֹרָה). The actual provision of content to the son appears to be gender-related, an assertion which gains momentum as one reads Proverbs (cf. Prov. 31, where we are no longer presented with the male tradition of instruction, but with a female's instruction).

<sup>264</sup> As I argued above (chapter two), Solomon informs his son that God is a source of wisdom and instruction (cf. Prov. 2:1-8, esp. v. 6; 3:5). Is this to be understood as a fiction of Solomon, mere rhetoric he uses to enforce the authority of his own words? When one looks beyond Proverbs to Solomonic tradition as recounted in I Kings 3ff. (as I did in chapter two), it is easy to see that as Solomon experienced it, God is the source of wisdom and he himself is unable to give wisdom to others. This is not fiction.

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If we wish to examine whether Solomon presents himself as a source of wisdom from within Proverbs, what can be said? It is worth pointing out that nowhere is Solomon ever described as passing on wisdom, the source of wisdom, or knowledge. Here is a list of verses (in Prov. 1-9) where the writer or Solomon comment on the nature of the words he offers to his son: "The Proverbs of Solomon" (1:1), "Hear, my son your father's [discipline (רָסוּם)]" (1:8), "My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding . . ." (2:1-2; note the first person possessive is used with *words* and *commandments* and not with *wisdom* and *understanding* [because as we read shortly, "the Lord gives wisdom;/ from his mouth come knowledge and *understanding*," 2:6]), "My son, do not forget my teaching,/ but let your heart keep my commandments" (3:1), "Hear, O sons, a father's [discipline] . . . for I give you good precepts:/ do not forsake my teaching" (4:1-2), "Hear, my son, and accept my words . . . I have taught you the way of wisdom" (4:10-11), "My son, be attentive to my words;/ incline your ear to my sayings" (4:20), "And now, O sons, listen to me,/ and do not depart from the words of my mouth" (5:7), "My son, keep your father's commandment" (6:20), "My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you;/ keep my commandments and live, keep my teachings as the apple of your eye" (7:1-2), "And now, O sons, listen to me,/ and be attentive to the words of my mouth" (7:24). Except Prov. 5:1, in no case does Solomon claim to present *wisdom* to his son. Maybe we are to understand these verses to imply that Solomon can in fact give wisdom to his son. In that case, when Solomon tells his son to be attentive to his proverbs (מִשְׁלֵי), words (דְּבָרִים, 4:4, 20), sayings (אָמַר, 2:1; 4:10, 20; 5:7; 7:1, 24), commandments (מִצְוָה, 2:1; 3:1; 6:20; 7:1, 2), discipline (מוֹסֵר, 1:8; 4:1), teaching (הוֹרָה, 3:1; 4:2; 7:2), the way of wisdom (דִּבְרֵי הַחָכְמָה), and good precepts (לְקַח טוֹב, 4:2) we are to understand that he means wisdom (חָכְמָה). Yet, if we look at the verses which comment on what either God or Woman Wisdom provides--"For the Lord gives wisdom;/ from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;/ he stores up sound wisdom for the upright" (2:6-7), "Happy is the man who finds wisdom (חָכְמָה),/ and the man who gets understanding" (3:13), "The beginning of wisdom is this: Get Wisdom,/ and whatever you do get insight" (4:7), Woman Wisdom says in Prov. 8 and 9, "Take my instruction instead of silver,/ and knowledge rather than choice gold;/ for wisdom is better than jewels" (8:10-11), "I have counsel and sound wisdom,/ I have insight" (8:14), "And now, my sons, listen to me:/ happy are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise" (8:32-33), "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave simpleness, and live,/ and walk in the way of insight" (9:5-6)--we see that they can provide wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel, and insight. What God and Woman Wisdom provide is qualitatively different from what Solomon says he can give his son. If the writer meant that Solomon was able to give his son wisdom, s/he could have said it directly (as they did in the case of God and Woman Wisdom). When Solomon says he can give his son words, sayings, commandments, and teaching, he does not mean he can also give his son wisdom; for wisdom, Solomon directs his son's attention to God and Woman Wisdom.

But can we overlook 5:1? 5:1 appears to suggest that wisdom and understanding are attributable to Solomon; "My son be attentive to my wisdom,/ incline your ear to my understanding" (5:1). I think when this verse is evaluated against the weight of evidence marshalled above, we must read "my wisdom" as actually the wisdom given to Solomon by God. Nowhere else is Solomon cited as a source of wisdom; Solomon's extended discussion of the origin of wisdom in 2:1-8 says clearly that God gives wisdom. As we know from Solomonic tradition found in I Kings and found endorsed in Proverbs, Solomon is not the source of wisdom and neither does he directly pass it on. This is not to say however that one cannot obtain wisdom by following Solomon's instruction.

<sup>265</sup> Solomon's presentation of God and Woman Wisdom as the sources of wisdom is not an attempt to shore up his status as an instructor, as Newsome maintains. She argues that Solomon is not offering real instructors (when he identifies God and Woman Wisdom) with distinct points of view from his, but fictional instructors who restate his instruction and values. In so doing, Solomon increases his own authority as an instructor by seeming to claim support from other authority figures (Newsome, 1989:145-146). This argument, while convincing at first view, overlooks the trajectory or progression of introduction. In the introduction Solomon does not consolidate his authority as the introduction progresses (which is what this argument requires). Rather, his presentation of other instructors appears to be more than fictional: they really are where he wants his son to seek instruction. Solomon is well aware of his inability to teach wisdom, as his words attest. If Solomon were concerned with increasing his authority in his son's eyes, he would hardly openly admit that he cannot pass on wisdom. See also p. 147 (the lack of distinction between WW and EW); and the urge to marriage (which can hardly be an oblique reference to Solomon!) pp. 161ff.

<sup>266</sup> According to the literary tradition of Instruction, we recall that it is the *fathers* who express a strong desire to instruct the *sons*. For example, in the Instructions of *Amenemhet*, *Ptahhotep*, *Satire of the Trades*, and *Ankhsheshonqy*, we read of the driving desire which the fathers had to pass on instruction. The sons are never pictured as coming to their fathers for instruction. It is reasonable then to understand Solomon as seeking out his son to pass on his insights, rather than the son seeking Solomon out.

<sup>267</sup> Proverbs is as orthodox an Instruction as was collected in Hebrew scripture. Given this context it is not surprising that God is presented as a source of instruction. But Proverbs also presents women as having a far greater role in offering instruction to men than other ANE Instructions suggest (in fact, other ANE Instructions do not mention women as a source of instruction, either good or bad). Proverbs either refused to acknowledge the social convention that men instructed their sons, or this social convention was not the one which truly passed on wisdom; women offering instruction was.

<sup>268</sup> The great difficulty which Ankhsheshonqy took to get his instruction to his son though he was gaoled, shows how strong the tradition of fathers instructing their sons was in Egypt. In comparison, Solomon extends effort to instill in his son that he cannot provide instruction. Whether this suggests that the Israelite tradition of instruction was not from father to son is not clear.

<sup>269</sup> I will treat Woman Wisdom as the instructor Solomon wishes his son to find. Though God is mentioned as another source of wisdom, Prov. 1-9 clearly focuses on the figure of Wisdom by the choice of her name and by the amount of material which pertains to her.

<sup>270</sup> Lang argues that in the Wisdom Poems, Woman Wisdom is found at the city gate because it is a place of institutional and authoritarian association, with which he concludes is education (1986:22ff.). Consequently, Solomon's mention of this setting for Woman Wisdom would bring to his son's mind images of teachers he has heard there in the past. I question this. Lang treats the settings of the Wisdom Poems as similar, but they are not. Wisdom's setting is not restricted to the gate areas. While Prov. 1:20-21 and 9:3 describe areas inside the city, 8:2-3 describes settings outside the city walls. Whereas Lang locates the settings described within the city around the city gate, the use of four different place names stresses Woman Wisdom's movement throughout the city (as her address to three types of people stresses her universal address). Lang fails to argue that all the settings mentioned have institutional associations. She is found throughout the town, she is a wanderer. She is at the gate not because she wishes to align herself with any institution found there, but because it, and the other places she visits are public; she seeks a public audience. Lang suggests that Wisdom is behaving like an orator, merchant, or prophet, because she assumes these *personae* in her setting at the city gate (1986:25-26). Yet within Prov. 1-9 she is not confused with any of these professions, but with the liminal women of harlotry and adultery (who are also found at city gates but fail to gain mention by Lang) who are found in public places. Not only is Wisdom's gender wrong for Lang's claim, but Wisdom distances herself from those professions by attacking them. Wisdom attacks the orators and prophets by claiming exclusivity for her words ("Because I have called and you refused to listen," 1:24, and "but he who listens to me will dwell secure," 1:33). She challenges the merchants' focus on profit by stating that her instruction has more to offer than jewels and gold (8:10-11). With these words Wisdom isolates herself from these professions and does not put on their mantle of authority.

The city gate has no special meaning as a setting for Woman Wisdom. It is one of the many places she frequents. Her presentation stresses that she is everywhere (outside: in the city or outside its walls) trying to instruct. "Why does Wisdom happen to appear in the street, in the squares, at the city gate, and not elsewhere?" (Lang, 1986: 23). Contrary to Lang, it may just be that it is exactly because these places are unaligned and lack institutional or authoritarian connotation that she chooses them. The "city gate" may well be an institution, but it does not authorize Woman Wisdom.

<sup>271</sup> An example of the narrative supporting the confusion of Woman Wisdom and the Evil Woman is to compare the description of where Wisdom is found in 1:20 with that of the Evil Woman in 7:11-12.

<sup>272</sup> See the studies of J.N. Aletti ("Séduction et Parole en Proverbs I-IX," *VT* 27 [1977], pp. 129-44), Gail Yee ("I Have Perfumed my bed with Myrrh': The Foreign Woman (*'issa zara* Interpretation of the Female Imagery in Proverbs in Light of Trickster Mythology," *Semeia* 42 [1988],

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pp. 14-36). Others have suggested that there is one literary or historical tradition which is behind both literary figures: the role played by the harlot. Harlots play a literary role in ANE literature of initiating, instructing, and providing hospitality to young men. Wisdom legitimized the "harlots" role of instruction (see Brenner [1985:106-114], Lang [1986:128], and John B. Bailey, "Initiation and the Primal Women in Gilgamesh and Genesis 2-3," *JBL* 89 [1970], pp. 137-150).

Aletti has shown convincingly how similar the language used by Woman Wisdom is to that of the Evil Woman in the wooing of young men (though the wooing of the Evil Woman is never to marriage). Not only is the language used by the two women similar, but also their settings and actions: both these women are found in public places actively pursuing men (WW: 1:20; 8:2-3; 9:3 | EW: 7:12; 9:14), imploring men to listen to their words (WW: 8:6-8 | EW: 2:16; 6:24; 5:3; 7:5, 21), offering them food (WW: 9:5; | EW: 7:14-16; 9:17), seeking to embrace (WW: 4:8; 3:18; | EW: 5:20), both have lips which drip honey (WW: 24:13-14 | EW: 5:3). Brenner also finds the differences between these two women trivial:

Nevertheless, the similarities far outweigh the differences (between Wisdom and the Evil Woman). It seems possible that the prototyped description of the foreign woman serves as a literary model for the personified figure, notwithstanding their being antithetical in so many ways. Thus a well-known but negative type is utilized to create a new, original and positive type: Wisdom is, in a sense, the Foreign Woman's daughter (Brenner, 1985: 44).

Camp has taken the most extreme position in her suggestion that in Woman Wisdom and the Evil Woman,

The female imagery does not, then, simply mediate between the human and the divine, ... or only between human life and death, but also united divinity with death. In the connection of this imagery both to Yhwh and Sheol, the full range of human experience of anomaly is incorporated, not only that of the material and social world, but that of the spirit as well (Camp, 1988: 29, emp. hers).

She is suggesting that these two women of Proverbs present a literary unity, differentiated in name only. The results of these encounters with women who outwardly seem so similar are vitally different. But this difference is not found in their description, only through Solomon's editorializing.

<sup>273</sup> Camp presents the relationship between Woman Wisdom and the various Evil Woman as a pedagogical dialectic (1985:116-117, though she has changed her position, cf. 1989:28-29). Woman Wisdom represents good establishment values and the Evil Woman represent bad "chaotic forces that threaten the shalom of individual and society" (1985: 120). McKane identifies the evil of the Evil Woman in 2:16-19, as her spurning of the conventions of the society in which they live (1970: 186).

Newsome, building on Camp's understanding of the woman as both presenting an idealization of the good and bad in society, and McKane's understanding of the evil women as a crystallization of the threat to the establishment, reads these women as patriarchal symbols which provide the boundaries for the patriarchal world (1989: 145-146). Citing the work of Kristeva and Moi, who draw attention to the symbolic use of women within patriarchy to define both the inside and outside boundaries of patriarchal society, Newsome argues that Prov. 1-9's use of women is similar:

Wisdom's self-presentation as a divine figure in chapter 8 not only serves to anchor wisdom discourse in the transcendent realm. It also positions her as the counterpart of the strange woman. One in the gate of Sheol, the other the gate of Heaven.

Together they define and secure the boundaries of the symbolic order of patriarchal wisdom (1989:157).

Moi's examples of liminal women who define western patriarchy, Lilith and the Whore of Babylon, on the one hand, and Virgins and the Mother of God, on the other, raise questions of Newsome's adaptation of this symbolic description to Proverbs. Moi's liminal examples are hardly apt to be confused. There is nothing similar in behaviour or setting between the Whore of Babylon and the Mother of God. It is precisely because they are easily distinguished that they provide the opposite boundaries for patriarchal culture. One distinguishing feature of these boundary women is their sexuality. Women who control their own sex, Lilith and the Whore of Babylon, define the evil for patriarchal society. Virgins, on the other hand, present a-sexual symbols, safe havens for patriarchal hopes and desires.

The presentation of Woman Wisdom and the Evil Woman in Proverbs cannot be distinguished on the basis of sexuality. Both women are presented as sexually active, and equally solicitous of young men. There is little effort expended by Prov. 1-9 to distinguish these women by description (they are

distinguished by “editorializing”), so little effort that their confused identities seem an integral aspect of their characterizations. Woman Wisdom is hardly presented as sexually passive to the advances of young men. Quite the opposite, they are passive to her advances. The “father’s” encouragement of the “son” to “seek,” “get,” and “find” wisdom, when measured by the descriptions of the actual encounters between Wisdom and these young men, is bravado. It is Wisdom who searches out and finds these young men; she calls them to a marriage feast in the house she has built. These bold sexual advances of Woman Wisdom challenge Newsome’s assertion that Wisdom is a safe haven for patriarchy. She is not presented in the non-threatening manner that such symbolic women as Virgins and the Mother of God are. The two women of Proverbs are clearly contrasted, but the contrast is hardly clear. As it stands, the introduction deconstructs any clear notion of distinction between good instructors and evil instructors in comparison to previous introductions to Instruction.

Camp, sympathetic to those who take Woman Wisdom and the Evil Woman as boundary images “used by men to support their own place of power in the social structure and the view of reality that supports it,” nevertheless suggests an alternative. “The trickster paradigm opens yet a third possibility: a positive valuation of women’s power as anti-structural, regenerative because of its liminality” (1988: 33). Both women pose a threat to society, but one threat may net positive results. Camp is right to see both women as destabilizing forces.

<sup>274</sup> Is it even possible to see these women as merely symbolic of life decisions and not real flesh and blood choices for the son? How old do we imagine the “son” Solomon addresses to be? Prov. 1:2-6 could be cited to argue that Proverbs addresses all men, young and old. In light of all the advice concerning marriage and marital fidelity, repeated warnings against becoming embroiled with evil women (who all behave as if they are single), suggestions that the “son” is still routinely disciplined (3:11-12), and the lack any advice concerning the professional world, suggest that the son is young and single, rather than old. If Solomon is addressing a son of marriageable age, is advice concerning marriage simply metaphorical? It is very hard to distinguish when Solomon is speaking in symbolic language and when he is not. For example, in Solomon’s imperative speech of 3:25-32, he is offering advice about concrete life situations. When Solomon is talking about the choice of marriage partners, is it simply the abstract relationship between the son and instruction which is addressed or could it be advice about marriage itself? It might even be suggested that the primary emphasis of the introduction is on marriage and on how the son can attain wisdom through such a marriage. If the stress of the last few verses of chs. 1-9 in any way sums up the Introduction (invitations to two different marriage banquets) such may well be the case. (This theme of correct marriage--that is marriage to Women Wisdom--as being the way to acquire wisdom is re-echoed in the closing passage of the book. The mother of King Lemuel laments her son’s descent into foolishness and tries to impress upon him the importance of marrying the right woman so that he can save himself and his kingdom. The final acrostic poem where she describes this woman of worth echoes the protective aspects and benefits obtained by wedding Woman Wisdom that are found in passages of 1-9.) The persistence of the metaphor of marrying Wisdom proves confusing. Its as if Proverb’s message (to males, that is) is to marry a wise woman, literally. The tangle between the symbolic presentation of the woman (their abstract names) and their possibility as actual choices for marriage must confuse the son as it does the reader. Solomon never indicates that he will accompany his son into the public realm where these choices will be made, though he does send his son out there with direct incitements to “Get Wisdom” (4:5b) and rhetorical encouragements to find Wisdom.

<sup>275</sup> Camp does not give herself credit for moving in a quite different direction from Aletti. Aletti noted that the main vehicle for confusion (and resolution) between the presentations of the two women was their similar speech. This, he argued, expresses the sages immense evaluation of language. However, Camp’s insights here are in the opposite direction. The confusion of speech between the two women, does not suggest that attentiveness to speech can provide decisive results, but stresses that speech, as appearance, and as setting, provides no certain reference point. This is not to suggest that the sage throws up his hands and says, “All is vanity.” The paradoxical nature of wisdom does not discount its study, but stresses the importance of attentiveness to a spectrum of details. Those aspects which distinguished the two women were at times their speech (e.g. the food they offered in 9:5, 17), their clothes (the Evil Woman’s dress is described in 7:10, the dress of Woman Wisdom is not mentioned), their marriage status (Woman Wisdom is always single, the Evil Woman is sometimes married), their mention of the cult, and their promises for the future, etc. However, the wrong choice is easily made.



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<sup>276</sup> Differences which can be attributed to observations of the women are that the Evil Woman are sometimes married (2:17; 5:29; 6:25 [Since the contrast here is between the *zona* and the married woman ('*eset 'is*) the *zona* is "envisaged as married" (McKane, 1970: 329)], 7:19), whereas Woman Wisdom is never described as married. But the Evil Women are also described as hiding this fact (2:17; 7:19). Another difference is that Wisdom invites men to marriage (the marriage banquet of Prov. 9), while the Evil Woman never suggests that they desire a long-term relationship with young men. In the narrative of Prov. 7, the understanding the woman communicates is that her pleasure with the young man is to last, at most, until her husband returns in two weeks. The outward appearance of Evil Woman is noticeably seductive (6:25; 7:10) whereas no comment is made on the dress of Wisdom. The woman of Prov. 7:14, mentions her fulfilment of cultic obligations; Wisdom mentions no cultic obligations. Finally the food offered by the two women in Prov. 9 is different; Wisdom offers wine, the Evil Woman offers water, "stolen water." Are these differences substantial?

Of course the greatest difference between the women is found in Wisdom's narration of her roots in Prov. 8:22-30, but these details are not "observable" being words. If one looks at the trajectory of Prov. 1-9 as a whole to evaluate the clarity of Solomon's description of Wisdom, one sees Woman Wisdom's confusion with the Evil Woman reaching a peak in the nearly identical presentations of the two women in Prov. 9. After the ultimate description of Wisdom's distinctiveness in her proclamation of her divine roots in Prov. 8, we have the final characterization of her on earth in all but identical description to the Evil Woman. Yet Solomon boldly incites his son to seek Wisdom out for instruction.

<sup>277</sup> The "Evil" woman is called different names: אֵשֶׁה זָנָה, זֹנָה, זֹנָה, זֹנָה, זֹנָה, זֹנָה. These are all easily distinguished from the names given to Woman Wisdom: חֲכָמָה and חֲכָמוֹת. The Evil Woman always provides the same threat to the son: sexual entanglement. Whether or not these different names suggest different "evil" women is not important to our study (see Yee for the strength of the case for understanding all the descriptions of Evil Woman to apply to one figure; 1989:54).

<sup>278</sup> See Whybray (1965:79 note 3), N.C. Habel, "Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9," *Interp* 26 [1972], pp. 141-143), and Ringgren (1947:106). Habel is particularly helpful in pointing out Solomon's stress on marriage.

<sup>279</sup> Whybray, 1965: 77. Camp also understands marriage to be the suggestion here (1985:93).

<sup>280</sup> McKane, 1970: 306. McKane bases his argument against an erotic understanding for this passage by interpreting "embrace" (4:8, אֶמְצְאָה) to mean the embrace of teacher and student (1970: 306). Camp counters this understanding because when אֶמְצְאָה appears in the piel, as it does in Prov. 5:20, and Song of Songs 2:6; 8:3, it "always refers to erotic embrace" (1985: 94). Camp as well notes the similar marriage terminology of Prov. 5:15-19 and its charge to call Wisdom *sister*. She observes that in many places in Songs the words of sister and bride are used interchangeably and believes that this is the best understanding here (cf. Songs 4:9f., 12; 5:1; Camp, 1985:94, 307 n.17).

<sup>281</sup> See G. Boström, *Proverbia Studien: die Weisheit und das fremde Weib in Spr 1-9* (Lunds Universitets Arsskrift, N.F., Avd. 1, Bd. 30, No. 3; 1935], pp. 155f., and Ringgren, 1947: 106.

<sup>282</sup> Understanding this as metaphor (marriage between instructor and son) does not overshadow the observation that even as metaphor it is unique in ANE Instruction and offers little insight into instruction as we know it from ANE tradition. I question whether the encouragement to the son to marry his instructor is simply metaphor. The reader does not understand the relationship between the father, as instructor, and his son as metaphor. That is usually understood as representing real historical tradition. Solomon is telling his son that he, as his father, cannot provide instruction; instead the son should search out a woman instructor. Is the reader to understand that Solomon is discounting the *real* event of a father instructing his son, substituting a woman in his stead, as metaphorical? If so, the frustration of the son must be immense. Not only has his father told him that he cannot receive instruction from him, but instead, the son should turn to some symbolic woman. I think what Solomon encourages is similar to what king Lemuel's mother encourages in Prov. 30. While the names they call women who embody divine wisdom are fictional (Woman Wisdom and the Competent Wife), they understand that there are many women who exhibit their characteristics (cf. Prov. 30:29). Solomon does not imply that there is a woman called Woman Wisdom whom the son can

find, but he may think that there are women who could instruct his son.

<sup>283</sup> Of course, Solomon cannot really mean that his son can actually find Woman Wisdom outside walking around and available to him for marriage. Nevertheless, we must note that Solomon is resolute in the use of this metaphor. There is something about the character he describes to his son as Woman Wisdom and the type of relationship he encourages with her which so captures his experience of wisdom that he loses himself in his own metaphor. Not only does Solomon's voice as Solomon disappear behind the character of Woman Wisdom after Prov. 7, but the abstract concept of wisdom disappears into the marriageable woman called Woman Wisdom. As Camp has pointed out, Woman Wisdom provides more than a convenient metaphor.

If one wished to personalize a feminine-gender noun, one has presumably little choice but to understand it as female. There is a stronger case to be made for the intentionality of the female imagery, however, if one reads the poem [Prov. 1:20ff.] within the larger literary context of the first nine chapters of Proverbs. Here, in several instances where a third person account is given (4:6-9; 7:4; 9:1-3), Wisdom is clearly painted in a female form that is refracted onto the poems in 1:20-33; 3:13-18, and 8:1-36. Thus it is of no consequence whether or not the authors of chapters 1 and 8 were in any sense 'forced' into the creation of a female figure by the gender of the noun *hokma* (*hokmot*). Both their own willingness to personalize *hokma* in the first place, and the subsequent interpretive editing that placed all of these poems together, direct our attention to the female attribute of Wisdom.

Whatever any individual author may have experienced, it seems clear from the concentration of female images in Prov. 1-9 that the editor's thought was 'nourished by the supposed analogy' and intended readers to be also (Camp, 1985:73-74, 303 n. 10).

As I have commented above, the Solomonic tradition from I Kings and Proverbs presents Solomon as unable to pass wisdom on. So the creation of some character other than Solomon was necessary, but as Camp repeatedly asks, "Why was that character Woman Wisdom?"

<sup>284</sup> That the trajectory of this Instruction is away from the father-son form and towards the woman-son form is affirmed by the epilogue where the son Lemuel is instructed by his mother.

<sup>285</sup> McKane 1970: 344-345.

<sup>286</sup> Since this is the only Hebrew Instruction which survives, it is difficult to make any assertions about whether Proverbs inverted Israelite tradition. One could suggest that the dominant understanding of instruction followed the Egyptian model and Proverbs meant to challenge that practice. (Instruction could have been limited to the royal court and Proverbs responded by arguing that royalty does not possess wisdom.) Or Proverbs could present the Israelite practice within the overall structure of Egyptian Instruction, showing the different Israelite understanding.

<sup>287</sup> I Kings 4:33 [MT 5:13] excepted. These verses (I Kings 4:31-34), as I argued in chapter two, are presented as an addendum to other expressions of divine wisdom in Solomon's life. The association of divine wisdom with knowledge of creation was strong (see Job 28, 38-41) and so comment along the lines of I Kings 4:33 is expected. Nevertheless, Solomon's expression of divine wisdom developed principally in the social realm. Daniel's expression of divine wisdom, while much reduced from that of Solomon, developed likewise. Daniel's gift of divine wisdom concerned interpretation that had insight into, and ramifications for, social and political problems. Further support of the social expression of divine wisdom is found in Wisdom's words in Prov. 8:14-16. Woman Wisdom proclaims that it is only by her counsel that kings and princes rule. (In fact, Woman Wisdom never mentions her knowledge of creation or the natural world. She does not say, for instance, "By me the farmer plants and the breeder selects.")

Interestingly, the association of divine wisdom with society as expressed in *Gilgamesh* is opposed to creation. The character of Enkidu is presented as an ignorant (according to the arts of civilization) Tarzan-like figure with extensive knowledge of animals and creation who is given wisdom, subsequently called divine (in II, iv, 34), which readies him for society (Lang, 1986:128). The divine wisdom the harlot imparts in Enkidu civilizes him, as well as removing him from his roots in the wild.

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Enkidu loses his knowledge of nature as he gains knowledge about civilization.

When we read Woman Wisdom's instruction in Prov. 10-30, we will notice that she too wishes to prepare her listeners for society (see chapter four).

<sup>288</sup> Westermann, 1977:137.

<sup>289</sup> See the discussion in chapter two on this translation of 'amon.

<sup>290</sup> McKane does not see a change in location for Woman Wisdom here. He arrives at this conclusion based on his translation of 'amon as confidant (1970: 358). He understands these two verses as the confidence which Woman Wisdom and the creator share. His translation of 30-31 is:

'I was beside him as his confidant,  
I gave him pleasure daily,  
jesting before him continually;  
jesting about his created world,  
and the pleasure I got from human beings.'

McKane argues that the setting of vv. 30-31 is in the divine realm. But McKane's setting of these verses is totally derived from his translation of 'amon: Wisdom and the creator *must* have confidence to share. I however want to emphasize the change in setting from:

וְאֶהְיֶה אֶצְלוֹ , וְאֶהְיֶה . . . מְשֻׁקֶת לְפָנָיו

to

מְשֻׁקֶת בְּחַבְלֵי אֶרֶצוֹ וְשִׁעְשַׁעִי אֶת-בְּנֵי אָדָם

Lang points this out:

It is not without significance *where* the divine child plays. Her playground is the earth, the place inhabited by men and women (1986: 79).

Camp also sees a progression here: through the playful childhood of 8:30, "adolescent' separation from her mother to be with the human children in whom she delights (8:31), and eventual residence on earth with her beloved (8:34-36)" (Camp, 1985: 84). Camp agrees with Gilbert's attentiveness to the parallelism between "before him" and "with the sons of man" and its consequent suggestion that Wisdom is the bond or mediator between the realms (M. Gilbert, "Le discours de la Sagesse en Proverbes 8" in *La Sagesse de l'Ancien Testament* [ed. M. Gilbert, Paris: Leuven University Press, 1979], pp. 202-218; p. 215).

<sup>291</sup> Lang 1986: 79 and Boström, L., *The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs* (Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament series 29; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990), p. 55.

<sup>292</sup> The union between the divine and human in Genesis is sexual/procreative. Though not explicitly stated in v. 31, implicitly there is strong suggestion of a possible sexual union when Woman Wisdom delights in those men which seek her out. If the introduction to Proverbs had presented Wisdom on earth, yet aloof, Wisdom would still be alienated from humanity. However, as we read, Wisdom left the divine realm to be intimate with humanity (read males). 8:34-35 supports the erotic overtones to the encounter between Wisdom and men (see discussion below in text).

<sup>293</sup> Von Rad (1972: 168) and Camp (1985: 101) both argue that this verse speaks of the erotic overtones of the relationship which is encouraged between the sons of men and Woman Wisdom.

<sup>294</sup> Lichtenstein points out that while the invitation to their respective banquets is balanced symmetrically, the order of their food presentation is reversed. "While Wisdom proffers elaborately prepared *food* and *wine* (9:5), Folly speaks of her "stolen" *water* and "furtive" *food* (9:17)" (1982: 205). This disruption in symmetry highlights this distinction between the women. It is only by their meals that they are distinguished, not by their dress, location, or use of words. Also when the Evil Woman calls the young men to partake of "stolen water," she reflects back to an earlier image in 5:15. In the passage from chapter 5, the young man is admonished to "drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well" so that in v. 18, he can rejoice in the wife of his youth. The Evil Woman is tempting the son away from the wife of his youth in Prov. 5, and from the wife of Wisdom in Prov. 9. The feast of Woman Folly receives as additional editorial comment "But he [Folly's guest] does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol." Woman Wisdom receives no

such editorializing, but her comments on her own feast--the opposite of the editorial on Folly's feast--are allowed to stand: "leave simpleness and live" (9:6).

<sup>295</sup> The meals each woman offers are preludes to intimacy.

<sup>296</sup> In part two, it was difficult to understand why Solomon encouraged his son to marry Wisdom. In the context of stressing the intimacy of divine wisdom with creation an explanation for this choice of imagery may be found.

<sup>297</sup> "Hokmot" found also in Ps. 49:4, Prov. 9:1; 24:7; and if repointed in Prov. 14:1 and 24:3.

<sup>298</sup> The personalization of wisdom in this passage has been argued by McKane (1970: 295) and Whybray (1965: 79). For Camp, the personalization of wisdom here in 3:13-18, which is outside of chs. 1 and 8, demonstrates the strong association of wisdom with women which the writers held (1984: 74).

<sup>299</sup> There are only six places in the OT where a comparison with coral is made, and all but one concern wisdom: Job 28:18, Prov. 3:15, 20:15, 30:10, and Lam. 4:7.

<sup>300</sup> Whybray argues that the tradition of comparing wisdom to **דָּוָר יָקָר** (he cites Job 28) has always been to say that wisdom is "a rare commodity." He cites Westermann in support (Whybray, 1965: 88-89, n. 8). However, for Westermann as we have seen, the radical thesis of Job 28, is that wisdom is unavailable to creation. Wisdom is not a rare, but a non-existent commodity in Job 28. Whybray's interpretation of Prov. 3:15, that wisdom is compared to a rare commodity is correct, but this comparison is not the same as that made in Job 28:18.

<sup>301</sup> In Prov. 20:15, "There is gold, and abundance of costly stones (**דָּוָר יָקָר**);/ but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel." The comparison emphasizes the precious nature of wisdom--gold and coral are common, only wisdom is precious--not its unavailability. This is also the meaning of "For wisdom is better than jewels (**דָּוָר יָקָר**),/and all that you may desire cannot compare with her" (Prov. 8:11). In Prov. 31:10, we find an interesting use of the comparison with coral.

A good wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels [**דָּוָר יָקָר**].

This, even more than 3:15, is an allusion back to Job 28. It echoes both the question of Wisdom's location 'Where is wisdom to be found?' and Job's comparison with coral. The acrostic poem that ends Proverbs, of which 31:10 is a part, answers the question with a positive affirmation. "Thus, the opening line of the poem does not necessarily indicate an unattainable ideal, but a very extraordinary individual whose significance and value is worth grasping" (McCreesh, 1985: 37). The good wife is found when this behaviour is being exhibited. The good wife is rare, yet available to one who searches.

<sup>302</sup> Wisdom's role in just rule is reemphasized in Prov. 31:4-9. The mother of King Lemuel chastises him for abdicating his rightful duty (31:6, 8-9) for a life of wine and women (31:3-5).

<sup>303</sup> This is a concise description of Wisdom's history expressed in Prov. 8 except that it attributes to God the dispatch of Wisdom to earth. This is not found in Prov. 8. In Proverbs, Woman Wisdom acts of her own accord. It is she who delights with the sons of men; she is not told or otherwise compelled to do so.

<sup>304</sup> As I showed in chapter two, Prov. 1-9 recalls aspects of the Solomonic narrative from I Kings. For example, the association of divine wisdom with wealth, honour, and long life, Solomon's openness contrasted with his inability to personally provide divine wisdom, and a demonstration of Woman Wisdom's possession of divine wisdom being the table she sets, all recall Solomon's experience of divine wisdom.

<sup>305</sup> It is interesting that God exhibits no control over WW in the divine sphere. We are familiar from occurrences in life and fiction of the irritation which a child's playful nature may have on the parent when they have *work to do*, and the resulting discipline or banishment of the child from the parent's presence in order to be rid of the disturbance. Yet Prov. 8 presents God (the parent)

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embarking on his most important task, creation, with Woman Wisdom at her frolicking best, with no reprimand from God to Wisdom. Wisdom in the divine realm is presented with surprising freedom.

<sup>306</sup> I do not consider God or the son to be characters of the magnitude of Solomon and WW. God does not receive attention commensurate with either of these characters. The son, the subject of the introduction, is not held in similar esteem by the narrative. The narrative does not present the credentials of the son, or provide his name.

<sup>307</sup> Elizabeth Harvey, "Ventriloquizing Sappho: Ovid Donne, and the Erotics of the Feminine Voice," *Criticism* 31 (1989), pp. 115-138, p. 117.

<sup>308</sup> Carol Newsome, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. Peggy L. Day, Minneapolis: Fortress Press), pp. 142-160.

<sup>309</sup> It must also be pointed out with respect to Wisdom's audience that her potential confusion with prostitution would limit her appeal to certain levels of society. If anything, a woman of prostitution attracts liminal people. For example, Judah approaches Tamar as he is travelling (Gen. 38), the foreign spies find their way to Rahab (Jos. 2), and Samson makes his way to a prostitute as a foreigner in Gaza (Judg. 11). Thus it would be extreme to suggest that Wisdom had an appeal restricted to travellers; nevertheless, her confusion with prostitutes would imply that her audience could be compromising themselves in some way, or also be liminal.

<sup>310</sup> See Newsome (1989). For the corollary assumption, that narratives which describe independent woman characters arise out of non-patriarchal societies see Phyllis Bird's historical recreation of the compositional context of the Eve Story, "Images of Women in the Old Testament", in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Tradition*, Ed. R.R. Ruether [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974], pp. 41-88) and Camp's discussion of the post-exilic date of Proverbs (1985: 250-254, 256ff.).

That WW is presented as divine is not an important point for this issue. Patriarchy has positive divine female symbols, which being virginal, show how men like their women in heaven and on earth.

<sup>311</sup> That WW is presented as divine is not an important point when examining this issue. Patriarchy has divine female symbols, which being virginal, show how men like their women.

<sup>312</sup> God does not send Wisdom to men, Wisdom descends to be with men because she wants to. This aspect of Wisdom's independence is not found in the book of Wisdom (9:10). There the writer tells God to send Wisdom forth. In the book of Wisdom we have men (the writer and God) deciding the fate of Woman Wisdom. In Proverbs Woman Wisdom determines her own fate.

## Chapter 4

### Wisdom Teachings From Over the Feast Table

The collection of sentence proverbs presented in Prov. 10-29 compares formally to the second part of the ANE Instructions' three-part structure, instruction. Proverbs' introduction has set up Prov. 10-29 as the instruction which Woman Wisdom offers to those gathered at her meal.<sup>313</sup> The claim that Prov. 10-29 is composed of instruction may seem to be contradicted on a formal level by the presence of verses which reflect on instruction rather than offer instruction itself, since this is a characteristic of the narrative frame and not instruction. For example, Prov. 22:17-21 talks about instruction rather than presenting instruction, therefore this passage differs from the preceding or following verses (see also, Prov. 10:17; 13:1, 18; 15:5, 32-33; 22:17-21; 23:12-13, 19; 24:23; 25:1; 27:11). However, as I have noted with respect to the instruction of *Amenemhet*, *Merikare*, and *Satire of the Trades*, instructions are not necessarily pure instruction.<sup>314</sup> Therefore this aspect of Proverbs' instruction poses no formal problem with comparison to ANE Instruction.

Another aspect of the Instruction also covered in chapter one was that for many Instructions there was little integration between the narrative frame and the instruction. One needs only to remember the singular introductions of *Ankhsheshonqy* and *Ahikar* to be reminded of how little integration there was in those Instructions between the narrative frame and the instruction. On the other hand, *Merikare*, *Amenemhet*, *ANY*, *Lansing* and *Satire of the Trades* showed great integration between the narrative frame and the instruction. In all cases integration (or lack of integration) was measured by the consistency with which the instruction recalled the setting or themes of the introduction.<sup>315</sup> So whereas the introductions and epilogues addressed a specific audience (or person), the audience addressed by the instruction can differ. It follows that the question of the integration between Proverbs' formal parts is similarly answered by surveying the instruction to see if the audience they address consistently recalls that of the introduction.

#### *4. Woman Wisdom's Instruction*

For example, is the social location of Woman Wisdom (on the boundaries of society) and the audience she addresses there, also the audience of the instruction? As we will see, only a portion of the instruction of Proverbs recalls the setting of the introduction.

In this chapter I will present instruction which addresses an audience similar to that which Woman Wisdom addressed in Proverbs' introduction. Proverbs' introduction, in choosing Woman Wisdom as its instructor, makes a statement about where divine wisdom is found, and where divine wisdom is best expressed, in society. The proverbs presented below are addressed to: a rural audience, a city audience, people with little material goods, people who are consumers not sellers, people with such low social standing that they are tossed by the whims of the king's emotions, people outside organized religion, and people outside the legal system. The fact that proverbs can be found which address a different audience than the one just proposed is not surprising. It was noted in chapter one that many times the instruction of ANE Instruction addressed an audience other than that suggested by the introduction (see chart on p. 35). However, I prioritize the audience Woman Wisdom addresses in the introduction because I wish to provide an integrated reading of the Book of Proverbs. The proverbs I single out below are those the characterization of Woman Wisdom in Prov. 1-9 draws the reader's attention to.<sup>316</sup>

#### **The Social Location of the Audience of Proverbs' Instruction**

In the following discussion I will argue that Proverbs' instruction not only addressed a liminal audience, but that the instruction which it offered entrenched their liminality. The proverbs I will present show no inclination for upward mobility. The liminal audience Woman Wisdom came to reach, was given instruction how best to function given their liminality. One can of course take a Machiavellian view on this and say that this instruction was provided to help the poor be happy being poor, thus quelling social destabilization so deleterious to business and to establishment rule; but one must remember that these proverbs are not benign towards those in power or those who participate in formal society; they

are, instead, critical of these people. While these proverbs will not suggest that violent revolution against organized business, the formal legal system, established religion, or the royal court is the answer, they do instruct in self-reliance which recommends to its audience an independence from formal society. The instruction which Woman Wisdom provides instructs people that it is better to live outside society's formal structure than to work within it.

### *A.) Wealth*

In Wisdom's instruction below, she stresses the evil nature of wealth and riches. She tells her audience of the uselessness of striving after wealth and encourages them to be satisfied with modest possessions. There is no indication that her audience should accept their present modest situation as a temporary condition. Instead, Wisdom argues that those of modest standing have a life which is better than that of the wealthy, because their ears have not been dulled to the cry of the poor.

**Wisdom associates wealth with wickedness and injustice.**

**Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit,  
but righteousness delivers from death (10:2).**

**A gracious woman gets honor,  
and violent men get riches (11:16).**

**The people curse him who holds back grain,  
but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it (11:26).**

**He who is greedy for unjust gain makes trouble for his household,  
but he who hates bribes will live (15:27).**

**An inheritance gotten hastily in the beginning  
will in the end not be blessed (20:21).**

**The getting of treasures by a lying tongue  
is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death (21:6).**

**He who oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth,  
or gives to the rich, will only come to want (22:16).**

**Do not rob the poor, because he is poor,  
or crush the afflicted at the gate;  
for the Lord will plead their cause  
and despoil of life those who despoil them (22:22-23).<sup>317</sup>**

**Why should a fool have a price in his hand to buy wisdom,  
when he has no mind? (17:16).**



A faithful man will abound with blessings,  
but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished (28:20).

In 11:16 there is the suggestion that one can have either honor or riches, but not both. In 11:26, 22:16, and 22-23, the suggestion is that the accumulation of wealth afflicts the poor. In 17:16 the wealthy may have an abundance of money but they do not have wisdom. The comparison in these verses is between the evil of wealth and the good of moderate means.

What Wisdom counts as true wealth is contrasted to what is normally assumed as wealth:

The tongue of the righteous is choice silver;  
the mind of the wicked is of little worth (10:20)

Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,  
but righteousness delivers from death (11:4).

He who trusts in his riches will wither,  
but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.

One man pretends to be rich, yet has nothing;  
another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth (13:7).

Better is a little with the fear of the Lord  
than great treasure and trouble with it (15:16)

There is gold, and abundance of costly stones;  
but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel (20:15).

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,  
and favor is better than silver or gold (22:1)

A word fitly spoken  
is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.  
Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold  
is a wise reproof to a listening ear (25:11-12).

The poor or those of moderate means are told that the wisdom they currently possess, or can possess, is of greater real value than the wealth of other people. This instruction acknowledges that riches hold temptation; yet, it dissuades its audience from succumbing to this temptation by arguing that their wisdom is true wealth (cf. 28:11).

Wisdom argues further that wealth does not have any intrinsic or ultimate value:

Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit,  
but righteousness delivers from death (10:2).

A wicked man earns deceptive wages,  
but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward.  
He who is steadfast in righteousness will live,  
but he who pursues evil will die (11:18-19).

A miserly man hastens after wealth,  
and does not know that want will come upon him (28:22).

Moreover, wealth brings with it disease into one's household:

Better a dinner of herbs where love is  
than a fatted ox and hatred with it (15:17).

Better is a dry morsel with quiet  
than a house full of feasting with strife (17:1).

A greedy man stirs up strife,  
but he who trusts in the Lord will be enriched (28:25)

There is something intrinsically better about the life of those of modest means; the Lord is on their side (cf. 15:25). Wisdom has her listeners recall their modest dinners of love and harmony, and rhetorically asks if they wish to give these things up.

Wisdom instructs that one is to avoid associations with the wealthy, those who are immune to hard times, and those who luxuriate in leisure. Wisdom does not want her audience to keep society with the rich.

It is better to be of lowly spirit with the poor  
than to divide the spoil with the proud (16:19).

He who mocks the poor insults his Maker;  
he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished (17:5).

He who loves pleasure will be a poor man;  
he who loves wine and oil will not be rich (20:17).

Be not among winebibbers,  
or among gluttonous eaters of meat;  
for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty,  
and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags (23:20; cf. 23:29ff.).

Instead, one is to be generous to the poor and find company among them:

It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor  
than to divide the spoil with the proud (16:19).

These proverbs state that wealth has many undesirable characteristics. It is usually acquired in an unjust manner, caters to misplaced pride, causes division within society (usually with the wealthy distancing themselves from the poor), and leads to strife within wealthy households; thus Wisdom tells her listeners that a

modest life is to be preferred.

### *B.) Generosity*

These proverbs encourage generosity to the poor. Woman Wisdom tells her audience that it is wrong to live in rich society because this would place them at a distance from the poor, rendering them ignorant of their need:

He who despises his neighbor is a sinner,  
but happy is he who is kind to the poor (14:21).

He who oppressed a poor man insults his Maker,  
but he who is kind to the needy honors him (14:31).

He who gives to the poor will not want,  
but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse (28:27).

A righteous man knows the rights of the poor;  
a wicked man does not understand such knowledge (29:7).

One man gives freely, yet grows all the richer;  
another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want (11:24).

A liberal man will be enriched,  
and one who waters will himself be watered (11:25).

He who has a bountiful eye will be blessed,  
for he shares his bread with the poor (22:9).

In her discussion of the wealthy, Wisdom pointed out how the quest after wealth leads to further oppression of the poor (22:6, 16). Since Wisdom considers care extended to the poor and oppressed to be a priority (as these verses show) we may have one clue as to why Wisdom chose the audience she did. People on the street, to Wisdom's way of thinking, would be more attuned to the cry of the poor and be receptive of her message than people spending time feasting within the walls of their houses.

### *C.) Good Balances are God's: Criticism of Business*

The verses which follow express scepticism towards business, the symbol of business being the scales. When business people behave justly, Wisdom ascribes their just behaviour to God (God has taken over their scales; 16:11). When business people behave with injustice, they do so because this is expected behaviour. In neither case does the business person receive positive comment.

A false balance is an abomination to the Lord,  
but a just weight is his delight (11:1).

A just balance and scales are the Lord's,  
all the weights in the bag are his (16:11).

Diverse weights and diverse measures  
are both alike an abomination to the Lord (20:10).

“It is bad, it is bad,” says the buyer;  
but when he goes away, then he boasts (20:14).<sup>318</sup>

Diverse weights are an abomination to the Lord,  
and false scales are not good (20:23).

The audience of this instruction are not business people, rather, Wisdom is reminding her audience of the abuses of justice by the business community. Wisdom's audience are people easily victimized by merchants.

#### *D.) Criticism of Organized Religion*

There are only a few proverbs which address organized religion. When it is addressed (as it is when sacrifice is mentioned), it is viewed as evil to be avoided:

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,  
but the prayer of the upright is his delight (15:8).<sup>319</sup>

To do righteousness and justice  
is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice (21:3).

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination;  
how much more when he brings it with evil intent (21:27).

The options Wisdom gives listeners to these bad expressions of religiosity are prayer and righteous behaviour. However, why the practice of sacrifice is described as evil is unclear. With the denouncement of business practices in mind, it could be that Woman Wisdom sees the business of providing sacrificial animals as the root evil (cf. Jesus's similar critique of sacrificial business in Matt. 21:12-13). But it is notable that Woman Wisdom never approaches the temple, or the temple mount, in her wanderings around the city and that she encourages religious practice which can be implemented apart from institutional religion (prayer, and righteous and just behaviour). Her aversion to these places seems to extend beyond wicked religious business practices found there.

#### *4. Woman Wisdom's Instruction*

##### *E.) Criticism of Institutional Justice*

In these proverbs Woman Wisdom criticizes the legal system's ability to arrive at just decisions. These proverbs present the people who are associated in an official manner with the courts as wicked:

**He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord (17:15).**

**A wicked man accepts a bribe from the bosom to pervert the ways of justice (17:23).**

**To impose a fine on a righteous man is not good; to flog noble men is wrong (17:26).**

**It is not good to be partial to a wicked man, or to deprive a righteous man of justice (18:5).**

**Partiality in judging is not good.  
He who says to the wicked, "you are innocent," will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations;  
but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will be upon them (24:23b-25).**

The people described in all of these proverbs are people who work in some official capacity with the court. In each case, they are people who are responsible for passing judgment on others, and they are always depicted as bad or wicked. Woman Wisdom is telling her audience that the legal system perpetuates systemic evil.

The following verses state further weaknesses of the legal system:

**The poor use entreaties, but the rich answer roughly (18:23).**

**A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who utters lies will not escape (19:5).**

**A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who utters lies will perish (19:9).**

**A worthless witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity (19:28).**

**A man of great wrath will pay the penalty; for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again (19:19).**

It can be asked if Woman Wisdom is pointing out judicial shortcomings in this manner to attempt reform of the legal system. Yet as the remaining verses on this theme make clear, Woman Wisdom makes no attempt to encourage her audience to reform the legal system. Wisdom tells the people she came to instruct to avoid, or

at least minimize, contact with this social institution.

Rescue those who are being taken away to death;  
hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.  
If you say, "Behold, we did not know this,"  
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?  
Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it,  
and will he not requite man  
according to his work? (24:11-12)

These verses almost incite their audience to take arms against the judicial system. However, they do not incite the audience to reform but to rescue those captured by the establishment. When the people respond to Woman Wisdom saying, "Behold, we did not know this," they are voicing their ignorance of the miscarriage of justice and their implicit trust in the legal system. The question of interpretation arises over how the second half of v. 12 is to be read. Does Woman Wisdom's assertion that God weighs the heart and is the true judge imply that there has been a temporary miscarriage of justice here? McKane says that v. 11 is best understood as referring "to those who are innocent and have been unjustly condemned" (1970:401). He goes on to integrate v. 11 with v. 12:

This assumption that the victims who are to be rescued are innocent of the crimes with which they have been charged is perhaps strengthened by the religious character of the arguments by which the imperatives are reinforced (v. 12). This amounts to an appeal to a higher justice which never miscarries nor fails of execution (1970:401-402).

However, McKane, in assuming that Wisdom is addressing a miscarriage of justice, indicates that he understands the audience to read between the lines of Wisdom's instruction and to discern between bad exercise of justice and good. But this is not indicated. Wisdom never hints that there are people who do deserve to die and whom the courts rightly execute. What the appeal in v. 12 argues is that God rightly decides people's fate in all cases, thus rendering earthly courts redundant. Woman Wisdom appeals to higher justice to criticizing all institutional executions of justice. Moreover, it is not clear whose heart God is weighing. Is v. 12b stating that God has insight into the hearts of those under the death penalty or into the hearts of the bystanders? While v. 12b is usually understood as saying that God weighs the hearts of those taken to their death (whom he has found innocent), I suggest that v. 12b is more likely referring to those bystanders who are not rescuing people from the legal system. It is these people that Wisdom is critiquing. Wisdom recalls these people's

words, “Behold we did not know this,” to argue that they may fool themselves with such a statement but they do not fool God (who weighs their hearts). Consequently the rest of v. 12 has as its subject these “innocent” bystanders. To paraphrase v. 12, Wisdom tells these people that God knows they do have reservations about the way justice is executed, but instead of rescuing those who are under its threat, they stand and watch the miscarriage of justice. Wisdom then asks, “Will God not requite you for what you have done?”

The following verses continue to discourage participation in the legal system. The reasons given are that the system will never be to one’s benefit (22:26-28; 25:7c-10) and it is wrong even to expect it to be (24:29).

Be not one of those who give pledges,  
who become surety for debts.  
If you have nothing with which to pay,  
why should your bed be taken from under you?  
Remove not the ancient landmark  
which your fathers have set (22:26-28).

Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause,  
and do not deceive with your lips.  
Do not say, “I will do to him as he has done to me;  
I will pay the man back for what he has done” (24:28-29).

What your eyes have seen  
do not hastily bring into court;  
for what will you do in the end,  
when your neighbor puts you to shame?  
Argue your case with your neighbor himself,  
and do not disclose another’s secret;  
lest he who hears you bring shame upon you,  
and your ill repute have no end (25:7c-10).

While Woman Wisdom discredits the judicial system’s claim to justice, she nevertheless has a very clear understanding of the source of true justice in the world: God (cf. 24:11-12). It is not clear, however, whether or not the following verses place God on the side of the poor or oppressed to redress their abuse by the legal system. At any rate God is presented as arguing the case of the oppressed against their oppressors.

Do not remove an ancient landmark  
or enter the fields of the fatherless;  
for their Redeemer is strong;  
he will plead their cause against you (23:10-11).

Evil men do not understand justice,  
but those who seek the Lord

understand it completely (28:5).

Do not rob the poor, because he is poor,  
or crush the afflicted at the gate;  
for the Lord will plead their cause  
and despoil of life those who despoil them (22:22-23).

When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous,  
but dismay to evildoers (21:15).

Wisdom's message about participation in the legal system is clear: it is to be avoided. If her audience is really concerned with justice the best that they can do is to wait on the Lord to "weigh the heart" of those involved. If, however, they think that they can remain uninvolved with judicial abuses, their hearts will be weighed and found wanting. Woman Wisdom's declaration that God is on the side of the poor in legal disputes in which the rich use the legal system to gain the upper hand, continues her critique of the upper classes.

#### *F.) The Irrational Behaviour of Kings*

Wisdom's comments about the unpredictable behaviour of kings has two purposes. The first is to disenchant her hearers from increasing their involvement in those circles. The second is to reaffirm the views of those who have chosen to distance themselves from royal power structures. In both cases, those who are addressed are not from the circles of royal power, for if they were nobles (people of great power), or people of great riches, the king would not (or could not) endanger their life with such whimsy. In the Succession Narrative we have examples of Israelite kings whose life and rule are threatened by other powerful Israelites. For example, Saul and David are endangered by the whimsy of their own military captains (Abner and Joab and their families). The people who should be most concerned with the whims of kings are not those who wield power, but those of the working class (cf. the story of David's treatment of Uriah, 2 Sam. 11). Such is the warning that Wisdom gives in these proverbs to the lower classes. Beware the king and the circles in which he moves.

Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence  
or stand in the place of the great;  
for it is better to be told, 'Come up here,'  
than to be put lower in the presence of the prince (25:6-7).



Like a roaring lion or a charging bear  
is a wicked ruler over the poor people (28:15).

A king's wrath is like the growling of a lion,  
but his favor is like dew upon the grass (19:12).

The dread wrath of a king is like the growling of a lion;  
he who provokes him to anger forfeits his life (20:2).

My son, fear the Lord and the king,  
and do not disobey either of them;  
for disaster from them will rise suddenly,  
and who knows the ruin that will come from them both? (24:21-22)

A king's wrath is a messenger of death,  
and a wise man will appease it (16:14)

That the king is known to wield such ultimate power guided on occasion by whimsy is warning enough to stay away from his presence. As if that message is not clear enough, Wisdom spells it out in greater detail. If by chance you do come before the king, bide your time wisely until you are again outside his sphere of influence. It is far better, Wisdom continues, to have the wisdom to see the danger inherent in royal circles:

When you sit down to eat with a ruler,  
observe carefully what is before you;  
and put a knife to your throat  
if you are a man given to appetite.  
Do not desire his delicacies,  
for they are deceptive food.  
Do not toil to acquire wealth;  
be wise enough to desist.  
When your eyes light upon it, it is gone;  
for suddenly it takes to itself wings,  
flying like an eagle toward heaven (23:1-5).

Wisdom's audience is warned against entertaining aspirations of entering into the royal circle. Life lived in those circles hangs in a precarious balance. It is far better, Wisdom suggests, to have the wisdom necessary to see through the deception of their display of power and wealth. As she did in her comments on wealth, Wisdom argues that it is better to be one of modest means with satisfaction at that station than to be driven to acquire wealth.

*G.) Wise People Living the Rural Life*

The imagery and themes of the following verses recall a rural setting: fruit of orchards and vineyards, tilling the land, field animals, types of ground (fallow, weed-choked, and fertile), flocks, herds, conditions of pasture and so on. This rural setting may not be significant if one remembers that Solomon describes Woman Wisdom as found both inside and outside the city. She does not seem to favour a rural or urban setting. However, if we examine the words which Wisdom spoke at each of those settings, things are not so clear. In Prov. 1:22ff. Wisdom is found going throughout the city. It is also within the city that she expresses exasperation that her message has not found receptive ears (1:24). In contrast, when Wisdom is described as outside the city (Prov. 8:2ff.), she never mentions that her rural audience has been resistant to her message. Further, it is only with her rural audience that she reveals her true divine nature in 8:22ff. I mentioned in the previous chapter that it was hard to attach any significance to the difference between Wisdom's message to rural listeners and that to urban listeners. Now I think we are in a better position to do so, having examined some of the instruction she does offer. In view of Wisdom's critique of the urban social institutions of business, religion, justice, and royal power circles, it is easy to understand why an urban audience would resist her instruction. On the other hand, as we will see, her praise of the rural life would incline a rural audience to be more receptive to her instruction. For example, the following verses label as evil or wicked, people who inhabit the city dwellings, contrasting them with the righteous who are outside the city.

The house of the wicked will be destroyed,  
but the tent of the upright will flourish (14:11).

The righteous observes the house of the wicked;  
the wicked are cast down to ruin (21:12).

A wise man scales the city of the mighty  
and brings down the stronghold in which they trust (21:22).

The strong tower of the wicked comes to ruin,  
but the root of the righteous stands firm (12:12).

In the following passage Wisdom tells her rural audience that she realizes that the

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riches and royalty found in the city excite their interest, but she instructs them to focus instead on their present situation in the land. The life of the city has only temporal significance; the land is that which will provide life-long security.

**Know well the condition of your flocks,  
and give attention to your herds;  
for riches do not last for ever;  
and does a crown endure to all generations?  
When the grass is gone, and the new growth appears  
and the herbage of the mountains is gathered,  
the lambs will provide your clothing,  
and the goat's the price of a field;  
there will be enough goats milk for your food,  
for the food of your household  
and the maintenance for your maidens (27:23-27).**

In the verses below, Wisdom instructs using the imagery and situations with which her rural audience would be familiar. After having highlighted Wisdom's critique of urban social practices--the unbalanced scale of the business person, the unjust sacrificing, the corrupt judicial system serving the will of the rich and powerful, and the instability of the kings power--we will have a better understanding of Wisdom's positive impression of rural life. Wisdom has a strong prejudice against her urban listeners and in favor of her rural audience.

**A righteous man has regard for the life of his beast,  
but the mercy of the wicked is cruel (12:10).**

**He who tills his land will have plenty of bread,  
but he who follows worthless pursuits has no sense (12:11).**

**From the fruit of his words a man is satisfied with good,  
and the work of a man's hand comes back to him (12:14).**

**The fallow ground of the poor yields much food,  
but it is swept away through injustice (13:23).**

**Where there are no oxen, there is no grain,  
but abundant crops come by the strength of the ox (14:4).**

**A worker's appetite works for him;  
his mouth urges him on (16:26).**

**The sluggard does not plow in the autumn;  
he will seek at harvest and have nothing (20:4).**

**Prepare your work outside,  
get everything ready for you in the field;  
and after that build your house (24:27).**

**I passed by the field of a sluggard,  
by the vineyard of a man without sense . . .  
Then I saw and considered it;**

I looked and received instruction (24:30,32).<sup>320</sup>

He who tills his land will have plenty of bread,  
but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty (28:19)

This last verse introduces a contrast which Wisdom refers to a few times: work of the hands and work of the mind (עֲלֵי). Understood in context with Wisdom's prejudice against city life, Wisdom is attaching value to manual labour which she feels is lacking in more intellectual pursuits (cf. 12:4; 15:26; and 16:1, 9, 26-27).

#### *H.) Instruction to Overlook Personal Offence*

While much of Wisdom's instruction has been warnings away from institutional evil (the lifestyle of the rich, the business practices of merchants, organized religion, the legal system, and the royal court), Wisdom has encouraged her audience to right the wrongs of the institutional evil she has described. Though the rich have become isolated from the needs of the poor (22:7-9, 16), Wisdom encourages her followers to be generous to the poor and to keep company among them on a personal level (16:19; 28:6). Likewise, in the verses below, Wisdom inspires her followers to overlook personal offence. Problems which her listeners may be tempted to take to court should be handled between the persons involved, which is to say, outside the formal legal system (25:7c-10). Wisdom is fully aware of the evil nature of the offences others may have inflicted on her audience; yet, she attempts to persuade them to overlook these things. The issue is not whether one has been wronged, but whether one has the wisdom to overlook the evil done them in order to uphold harmony with these people. Wisdom persuades her audience to overlook the evil of daily life (which they would have every right to expose or to object against) in order that personal relations are upheld:

Hatred stirs up strife,  
but love covers all offences (10:12).

He who forgives an offence seeks love,  
but he who repeats a matter alienates a friend (17:9).

The beginning of strife is like letting out water;  
so quit before the quarrel breaks out (17:14).

Good sense makes a man slow to anger,  
and it is his glory to overlook an offence (19:11).

It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife;  
but every fool will be quarreling (20:3).

Do not say, "I will repay evil";  
wait for the Lord, and he will help you (20:22).

A fool gives full vent to his anger,  
but a wise man quietly holds it back (29:11).

Wisdom is maintaining patience and self-control on the part of her audience even in the face of wrong. The result of this behaviour is that friendships between people are not threatened. This seems misguided advice on her part; surely wise people should act justly to put down or challenge evil where they find it. Yet Wisdom sustains that judgment rightly remains with God (20:22). Enforcement of justice should only be exercised by God.

Even in smaller less serious personal encounters, where an overt wrong has not been done, Wisdom encourages her listeners to overlook anything which could cause a breach between people:

He who belittles his neighbor lacks sense,  
but a man of understanding remains silent (11:12).

He who goes about as a tale bearer reveals secrets,  
but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing hidden (11:12).

The vexation of a fool is known at once,  
but the prudent man ignores an insult (12:16).

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts,  
but the tongue of the wise brings healing (12:18).

Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause,  
and do not deceive with your lips.  
Do not say, "I will do to him as he has done to me;  
I will pay the man back for what he has done" (24:28-29).

Wisdom's instruction considers relationships between people to be the greatest good, even to the point of ignoring evil. Where social institutions have been a source of division among people, Wisdom encourages her audience to work as individuals to reunite one with another. It is notable that while Wisdom criticizes present institutions, she does not offer instruction on how to reform them or on how to create a new system immune from evil. Wisdom's understanding of social institutions is that they isolate people from each other, thus breaking society apart.

Her instruction tells people how to behave to counteract that isolation: behave as individual to individual. In this manner society is pieced back together.

### *Summary*

The reading I have just given of Wisdom's instruction, using some of the instructions of the proverb collection to make my case, is quite different from the establishment-affirming, socially conservative message which is usually found in the proverb collection.<sup>321</sup> Prov. 10-29 is usually claimed to be a source book for *old* wisdom (whatever that might mean). I am also fully aware that the proverbs I have gathered to explicate Wisdom's instruction are contradicted by other proverbs. This characteristic of the proverb collection--that the collection contains proverbs which state opposite views--is nothing new. The contradictory messages of the proverb collection has been an accepted part of its meaning. Interpreters of the collection have been willing to let this characteristic exist, incorporating it with the attitude that this characteristic expresses full cognizance of the ambiguity which is part of life. Things just are not black and white. I could address the objection to my reading--that other proverbs say different things--by arguing that, at most, such an objection would place this reading alongside the other possible readings of Proverbs' instruction. But I wish to go further and recall that the proverb collection is not presented in isolation. I have argued in the previous chapter that Proverbs' introduction says things about instruction and divine wisdom which should influence our reading of Woman Wisdom's instruction. In this chapter I have read the proverb collection under the influence of the characterization given Wisdom in Proverbs' introduction. The proverbs I have presented here are those I feel Proverbs' introduction flags for attention.

The proverb collection read under Wisdom's influence presents her instruction in opposition to the systemic evil expressed in the urban institutions of the wealthy class: the scales of the business class, the sacrifices of organized religion, the crime of institutional justice, and the frivolous exercise of power by royalty. The one aspect of the evil of systemic injustice which Wisdom finds most reprehensible is

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the rift it establishes in society. The ears of the rich are closed to the cries of the poor. The shopper is abused by the dishonest scales of the merchant. The sacrifice at the temple is connected with injustice in the streets. The courts are run by the wealthy to their advantage, taking what little the widow or the oppressed person has. Royalty, on the one hand, entices and tempts the common person with its riches and feasts, but on the other hand treats the common person with disdain, sometimes taking their life. Instead of being tempted to enter into these urban social institutions, Wisdom tells her audience of the advantages of a rural setting.

Wisdom is not isolationist, however; she positively encourages her listeners to bridge the rifts caused by urban institutional evil. Where the ears of the wealthy are closed to the cries of the poor, Wisdom says to find your company among the poor, providing them with what they need. When a neighbour returns from the market without enough food for the family (because s/he has been cheated by dishonest scales), Wisdom says to pick up the slack. Because sacrifice causes injustice, Wisdom says, do righteousness and justice in the streets (this is what pleases God). Where the courts are taking people to their death, Wisdom says, rescue them from their fate. When institutional justice is dividing society into those that use the courts to abuse, and those abused, Wisdom says, make sure that you stay away from court by refusing to stand up for your rights. Wisdom tells her listeners to overlook the personal evil of their neighbour so that harmony can be built on a personal level. Wisdom's message to her listeners is to be the social glue which brings people together. When society's institutions break society apart into the haves and the have-nots, the followers of Wisdom are to glue society back together, person by person. When society's institutions alienate one segment of society, Wisdom's followers are to behave inclusively.

Wisdom's instruction to bring alienated parts of society together is in line with her history from Prov. 8. The crowning point of that poem was Wisdom's expression of the joy she had with the creator and that same joy she brought to the sons of man. What Wisdom has done cosmologically (uniting the divine and human realm) is her message to people: unite one with another.

When Solomon tells his son to leave his privileged position, his access to the king/father, his family, and the royal court; to search out and find a single woman on the street (who behaves like a prostitute) who wanders inside and outside the city calling to everyone (not just the son); to learn about divine wisdom, the reader is provided clues about what to expect from divine instruction. As I have shown in this chapter, these clues about the nature of divine wisdom are characteristics found in Woman Wisdom's instruction. Wisdom is not impressed with royalty and is concerned with the common people; she is institutionally unaligned and suspicious that her message will not be well received by an urban audience. Wisdom tells her listeners that divine wisdom is not found within urban social institutions, but is found wherever justice is exercised, wherever the poor are heard, wherever the rights of the oppressed are upheld, wherever generosity is being exhibited, wherever personal rights are sacrificed for personal harmony, wherever evil judicial practices are being challenged, and throughout the countryside.

Woman Wisdom holds as fundamentally flawed the expressions of institutional society she cites. The reason that they receive no praise, or a more even-handed treatment by Woman Wisdom, is that she did not feel they deserved such treatment. The people Woman Wisdom came to instruct, those found on the streets, those who have been abused by the scales in the markets, those who have felt intimidated by sacrificial practice, those who knew themselves to be unable to obtain justice from the institutional court system, and those most apt to feel the effects of a fickle ruler; among these people Woman Wisdom searches for listeners. These people have an affinity for her instruction of divine wisdom.

Proverbs' epilogue in Prov. 31 serves to remind us how hard it is for the wealthy or those of royalty to appropriate Wisdom's message. Lemuel, a king, ignores the cries of the poor because of his drunkenness and feasting (cf. 29:7 and 31:5). Lemuel also "pervert[s] the rights of all the afflicted" (31:5). Lemuel's behaviour attests to the validity of Wisdom's assessment of the wealthy, she knows they will have a difficult time appropriating divine instruction.



## ENDNOTES

<sup>313</sup> In contrast with the highly organized instruction of *Ptahhotep*, *Amenemope*, and to a lesser extent *ANY*, Proverbs instruction is presented in an informal manner.

<sup>314</sup> Reference to the narrative frame occurs within these instructions (see discussion of these Instructions in chapter one). However, these transitions from instruction to the narrative frame are not a sufficient indication of a change of form because of their short length. They may be nothing more than a reminder that in the genre Instruction, a narrative frame lies behind the instruction. For example, in the instruction of *Amenemhet* and *Merikare*, every time the first person pronoun is used, the reader is reminded that the instructor is speaking. Nevertheless, the first person pronoun does not indicate introductory or concluding material, but instruction gleaned from these kings' personal lives. In *Satire of the Trades* there are a few lines within the instruction (eg. at line 9.4) in which Dua-khety speaks in such a way that the reader recalls the setting of a father and his son together on a boat journeying to scribal school. After a short digression from instruction in these lines, the instruction resumes. The fact that the reader of Proverbs' instruction is likewise reminded of the narrative frame in some verses, is insufficient to differentiate this material from instruction.

<sup>315</sup> When the instruction of *Satire of the Trades* denigrates trades other than that of the scribe, or instructs in correct behaviour at school, the reader is reminded that this instruction is being given, on a boat by a father to his son who is journeying to scribal school. When Amenemhet presents instruction about giving too much trust to courtiers, or about correct behaviour of a king, the reader is reminded that the instructor of this Instruction is a pharaoh, assassinated by his courtiers (who is speaking to his son the new pharaoh). However, this is not to say that all the instruction recalls the introductory setting--it clearly does not. In *Ahikar* and *Anksheshonqy*, the instruction is addressed to farmers, scribes, the rich, and the poor, audiences foreign to that suggested by their introductions. So in some Instructions, the audience addressed by the instruction comes from all levels of society and is not restricted to the audience addressed by the introduction.

<sup>316</sup> Crenshaw asserts that there is no integration between Woman Wisdom and the following instruction when he says,

The picture of Dame Wisdom as architect of an unusual banquet hall and her special role prior to creation *find no point of contact* with the sayings of the other collections (*Old Testament Story and Faith: A Literary and Theological Introduction* [Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992], p. 322, emphasis mine).

I wish to question this assertion. As we will see, there are plenty of points of contact between WW and the instruction.

<sup>317</sup> Does the instruction not to "crush the afflicted at the gate" suggest that one works within a formal institution of society? No, the suggestion is stronger than the reformation of one's behaviour at these institutional settings, because v. 23 argues that the Lord will rightly act in these situations. The audience of this instruction is to avoid all action at the gate so that the Lord can act.

<sup>318</sup> This verse is not advocating a change of behaviour in the buyer, but describing "buyers." This is similar to proverbs about evil or lazy people. These people are not the intended audience for these proverbs but their lives are held up as an example to avoid. Such is the case here. This is instruction not to "buyers," but to remind Wisdom's audience of their susceptibility to the abuse of merchants.

<sup>319</sup> The contrast here is between an overt display of religiosity and private piousness.

<sup>320</sup> While this is hardly a positive comment about some rural inhabitants, it is nevertheless realistic. Wisdom is asking her rural audience to look around themselves and receive instruction from observing their own world.

<sup>321</sup> See Whybray's similar understanding in "Poverty, Wealth, and Point of View in Proverbs," *ExpTim* 100 (1989), pp. 332-336.

## Chapter 5

### Where is Wisdom to be found? The Competent Wife as the Incarnation of Wisdom

At the end of chapter three I presented my reading of the introductory narrative of Proverbs. I suggested that Woman Wisdom descends from heaven to be with the sons of men, inviting them to a meal she has prepared and her instruction following the meal. Prov. 10-29 is set up by this narrative frame to be the instruction that Woman Wisdom delivers. In the summary of ANE Instruction in chapter one, I discussed how in the narrative framework of Instruction, the introduction raises questions in the reader's mind which are not answered until the narrative frame resumes in the epilogue. With respect to Proverbs' narrative framework, when Woman Wisdom invites people to a meal and offers them instruction, the readers of Proverbs (like readers of ANE Instruction) await the response to Woman Wisdom's instruction. Given the reader's anticipation of finding out how Woman Wisdom's instruction will be received, I ask: Who could the men Agur and Lemuel (of the last two chapters of Proverbs) be? I suggest we are meant to understand that these men were present at Woman Wisdom's instruction and are voicing their response to that instruction.<sup>322</sup> Agur responds first (Prov. 30) to Woman Wisdom's instruction by denying her authority. King Lemuel provides the second response (Prov. 31) to Woman Wisdom's instruction by choosing to associate with other women. In both cases aspects of the narrative initiated in the introduction is concluded; the instruction has been offered and the response to that instruction is presented. In this chapter I will argue that the final two chapters of Proverbs are formally epilogue, and are not to be understood as continuation of the instruction.

It is surprising, in light of the stress of Proverbs' introduction on Wisdom's availability to the sons of men that the two epilogues which respond to Proverbs' instruction, do so negatively.<sup>323</sup> In the first, Agur claims instruction is impossible, because wisdom resides with God unavailable to him. In the second, Lemuel's lack of wise behaviour in his kingly office implies that instruction has had little impact on

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him. As Lichtheim says of the epilogue to *ANY*, “By making the son disinclined to learn and obey, the author of the work introduced a new dimension into the concept of didactic literature: the thought that instruction might fail to have an impact” (AEL, II, p. 135). Does Proverbs end on a similar negative note? Is the instruction of divine wisdom in the end impossible? Is it possible for anyone to incorporate divine wisdom? Was the descent of Wisdom in Prov. 8 a deception, with instruction and wisdom remaining unavailable to creation?

#### *The First Response to Instruction: Philosophical Objection*<sup>324</sup>

The textual and interpretive problems of the first verse of chapter 30 are legion. The differences between translations of v. 1b are sufficient to impress this fact:

The man says to Ithiel,  
to Ithiel and Ucal (RSV).

This is the great man’s very word:  
I am weary, O God,  
I am weary and worn out (NEB).

God is not with me, God is not with me,  
and I am helpless (TEV).

There is no God, and I can [not know anything] (AB).

There is no God, and I am exhausted (McKane, 1970: 258).

Though many different contexts have been suggested for these passages (and 1b can probably never be resolved with certainty) no scholar has integrated Agur’s words into the narrative framework initiated by the introduction.<sup>325</sup> I have argued that the stress of Proverbs’ introduction is its assertion that divine wisdom is on earth and that it is knowable. I will argue below that the words of Agur challenge that assertion.

First I wish to point out how Agur’s words recall the tradition of divine wisdom found outside of Proverbs (cf. part one, chapter two). I have already called attention to the similarity between Agur’s words (v. 2) the words Jeremiah chooses (Jer. 10:14) concerning the human condition. For both men, to be human means to

be stupid, רָעָה, without the creative wisdom possessed by God.<sup>326</sup> Divine wisdom is unavailable to humanity.

The rhetorical questions of v. 4 recall other biblical passages: Is. 40:12-14, and especially Job 15 and 38. In Isaiah, the questions concern the mechanics and responsibility of creation and ask, Who could know these things?, expecting the answer: “Only God the creator.”<sup>327</sup> In the context of Isaiah, these questions state that God alone has divine wisdom. Agur is stating that he is not the creator God, therefore neither he nor anyone else on earth possesses divine wisdom.

The question of v. 4, “Who has ascended to heaven and come down?,” is reminiscent of the story of the First Man as recalled in Job 15. For example, when Eliphaz questions Job,

Are you the First Man that was born?  
or were you brought forth before the hills?  
Have you listened in the council of God?  
And do you limit wisdom to yourself? (Job 15:7-8)

he is expressing the familiar tradition of a “First Man” who had access to divine wisdom because he lived in the divine realm prior to creation. Eliphaz rhetorically tells Job that since he is not this First Man, he possesses human wisdom like the rest of the men present. Eliphaz continues to emphasize this saying,

Both the gray-haired and the aged are among us,  
older than your father (15:10).

Job cannot even claim that he is the son of this privileged “First Man,” since there are those present who saw Job’s father born. Eliphaz may believe there was a special “First Man” who possessed special knowledge (irony could be read into vv. 7-8), but his point is that this man did not pass on divine wisdom to humanity. Agur concurs with Eliphaz,

Who has ascended to heaven and come down?  
...  
What is his name, and what is his son’s name?  
Surely you know!

If one claims that divine wisdom is found on earth they must “prove” it by explaining how it got on earth.

Once the connection between v. 4 and the First Man tradition is seen, an

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interpretation for the previous verse is suggested. In v. 3, “wisdom” and “knowledge of the Holy one” are in parallel. Many interpreters have understood this to voice Agur’s lack of theological knowledge. If, however, Agur is recalling the First Man tradition in these verses, it is not correct to define “wisdom” as knowledge about God. In that tradition, the First Man, because he sat in on the council of the gods, overheard divine wisdom. What Agur is disputing in this verse is the presence of divine knowledge on earth, not the presence of the knowledge of God. To paraphrase v. 3, Agur says: I do not have possession of divine wisdom because I do not have knowledge of the gods’ council; that is, I am not the First Man.

The questions about creation in v. 4 also reflect the discussion God and Job had in Job 38. In that passage God asks Job why he talks as if he knows something when he really is without wisdom (38:2). As proof that Job does not have knowledge, God questions him concerning the events of creation. Agur asks rhetorically in v. 4, Who does know the wisdom of creation? The answer is clear, not one person knows these things. Agur, like God in Job 28, questions any human claim of divine wisdom. Divine wisdom is not accessible to humans.

In the context of the wisdom tradition outside of Proverbs, vv. 5-6 are a chastisement of the instructor by Agur. The instructor’s claim to present wisdom unmediated by God is viewed by Agur as a sacrilege. Compare v. 5,

Every word of God proves true;  
he is a shield to those who take refuge in him (Prov. 30:5),<sup>328</sup>

with:

For the Lord gives wisdom;  
from his mouth come knowledge and  
understanding;  
he stores up sound wisdom for the upright;  
he is a shield to those who walk in integrity . . . (Prov. 2:6-7);

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and do not rely on your own insight,  
In all your ways acknowledge him . . . (Prov. 3:5-6a);

and,

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7a).

Agur is a conservative, to the point of being reactionary, within the wisdom

tradition. He is faulting the instructor (Woman Wisdom) for assuming a role only God exercises. He is in full agreement with these statements of the Proverbs' introduction which acknowledge that God controls the access to wisdom. Agur is a man steeped in the biblical tradition which states that divine wisdom is unavailable independently of God. Agur responds to any and all human instruction as speculation, and hence pure blasphemy.<sup>329</sup>

Do not add to his words,  
lest he rebuke you,  
and you be found a liar (30:6).

“Those who substitute their own words for God's word will be subject to correction and be proved liars” (McKane 1970: 649).<sup>330</sup>

Care must be taken here not to interpret these words of Agur's theologically. All the clues the words of Agur provide about its context place it with the wisdom tradition which denies divine wisdom's availability to humanity apart from God. The issue for Agur is the possibility of Woman Wisdom's *instruction* providing divine knowledge. Any theological allusions serve that discussion, not vice-versa.<sup>331</sup>

The “prayer” of Agur in vv. 7-9 expresses Agur's humble attitude towards God and God's gifts, wisdom being one. He, almost boastfully, does not want a special life, or more than is needed to cover the basic necessities (an allusion to Solomon's prayer?). To seek more than basic necessities carries the temptation of forgetting the mediation of God in all areas of existence.

Agur's views on the human condition, human wisdom, and the availability of divine knowledge to humanity, resonate with the tradition of divine wisdom wherein divine wisdom is unavailable to creation. Leaving aside the problematic first verse, v. 2, as I have shown, states Agur's understanding of the human condition; humanity does not possess divine wisdom. The recollection of the unavailability of divine wisdom is Agur's response to the instruction of Prov. 10-29 and Woman Wisdom's claim to bring divine wisdom to creation. To Woman Wisdom Agur says, “Since I do not believe that you can pass on divine wisdom, in your eyes I must be too stupid to even be a man, without the divine wisdom you claim is available to humans.”

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McKane does not suggest a biblical context for these verses, but his interpretation, especially of vv. 3-4, supports my assertion of the context in which Agur's words should be understood. McKane says of Agur's words in vv. 3-4 that:

**He has never been able to penetrate this domain of knowledge in which others seem to move with great familiarity and assurance. . . . It is the cry of one who has searched to the furthest limits of his powers and has found nothing; for whom God, as he says in v. 4, is wrapped in a mystery which no human mind can penetrate. . . . The verse [v. 4] is more impressive if it is a comment from Agur himself on the inaccessibility of God to human enquiry. The knowledge of God which is taught with such confidence and ranks as wisdom has no empirical basis; it is empty speculation and vain imagining. If any man has been up to heaven where God is and has come down again to report what he found, he deserves to be listened to, but there is no such wisdom teacher (1970: 647).**

McKane's observations, while similar to my interpretation, never acknowledge the biblical wisdom tradition which occasioned Agur's words.

The sayings of the remainder of the chapter are difficult to integrate with this understanding of the first few verses of Agur's response. The sayings could be understood as presenting instruction, instruction which Agur has just argued is impossible. The similarity of numerical form may have had a significance which is lost; Massa may have been known for its numerical structure. Numerical, as well as the acrostic form of the next chapter, may be devices to communicate exhaustiveness. These sayings could be a response of Woman Wisdom addressed to Agur along the lines of "Can you, Agur, deny that there is instruction in these words?" But there is no reason to suggest that Woman Wisdom speaks again after Prov. 9, and I understand all the words of Prov. 30 to be presented as Agur's.

It could be that Agur is stating in these sayings the common-sense limit of all that is known.<sup>332</sup> In this reading Agur is continuing his response to Woman Wisdom's assertion that divine wisdom is on earth, stating that this is the totality of human knowledge, and that it is common human knowledge. That so many of the verses speak of the plain observations from nature supports this. Agur points to the earth to argue that this knowledge is all that is humanly possible. In this sense Agur continues to taunt Woman Wisdom who insists that divine wisdom has descended from heaven by pointing out that all that is known emanated from the earth: plants and animals. This is the best way to understand these verses. These sayings are

different from any found in Prov. 10-29 and are Agur's declaration of what form and content instruction should have.

The reader of Proverbs can see the futility of Agur's objections to Woman Wisdom's instruction, just as the reader of the epilogue to *ANY* saw the responses of Khonshotep to Any's instruction as immature. The reader of the Instruction of *ANY* understands that instruction is not beyond apprehension as Khonshotep claims. Any instructs in basic behaviour: one should treat one's mother with honour, returning to her, care commensurate with the care she extended, and honour God and fulfil cultic responsibilities. In the epilogue, Any tells his son that even animals and foreigners can be instructed thus; there is nothing esoteric in it.<sup>333</sup> The reader of Proverbs knows that Agur's objections to claims of the human possession of wisdom are no longer valid. Solomon has reported the descent of Wisdom to his son and stressed her availability on earth. Wisdom and instruction are humanly possible.

#### *Another Response to Instruction: Ignorance*

The last chapter of Proverbs, chapter 31, is traditionally divided into two unrelated parts, vv. 1-9 and vv. 10-31.<sup>334</sup> The first part is claimed to be an Instruction closest in form to the Egyptian Instruction, were it not offered by a woman.<sup>335</sup> The second part, the acrostic poem, is so singular in structure that most assume this structure indicates independence from the "instruction" offered king Lemuel by his mother. However, while the form of the chapter does indeed change at v. 10, there is no reason to assume that the speaker or context has changed. The superscription of Prov. 31:1 applies to all the material which follows. Similar to words of Agur, on my understanding, the words of Lemuel's mother (Queen mother) extend to the end of the chapter.<sup>336</sup> Proverbs was not shy in its use of superscriptions and if the acrostic poem was meant to be understood differently from the words of the Queen mother, no doubt a superscription would have been provided.

Another formal argument for the unity of the chapter is to note that all of



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Prov. 31 is composed of third-person description. In vv. 2-9, the errant behaviour of Lemuel is described. In vv. 10-31, the behaviour of the 'good wife' is described. On this reading the difference in form would be attributed to the difference in description. The description of Lemuel's behaviour is a description of his actual behaviour. Verse 2's "What, my son? What, son of my womb? What, son of my vows?" communicates the personal nature of the Queen mother's description of Lemuel. The personal nature of the Queen mother's description of Lemuel's life argues against a highly stylized presentation. The Queen mother, as the depth of her anguish expressed in v. 2 shows, is desperately concerned with communicating with her son, not impressing him with her oratory. Her language in vv. 2-9 is personal, drawing on Lemuel's history. However, when she describes the 'good wife', she is not necessarily talking about a woman known to Lemuel and herself, but about all that makes a good wife the salvation of her husband.<sup>337</sup> Since this description does not pertain to a particular person, but to good wives in general, the description lends itself to creative formulation. The acrostic form, because it communicates exhaustive description, is well suited to its use by the Queen mother, in telling her son all (from A to Z) about the value of a good wife to her husband. In addition to these formal reasons for understanding Prov. 31 as a unity, there are the conceptual reasons as well. The primary conceptual reason arguing for unity is how the Queen mother balances Lemuel's bad behaviour with the good behaviour of the Competent Wife. Lemuel's foolish behaviour, as the Queen mother states, will be offset by the wisdom of the Competent Wife.

#### *Proverbs 31:1-9: The Behaviour of Lemuel*

Lemuel is identified as king of Massa in the first verse. He may even come from the same country as Agur of Prov. 30:1. As we are to see, Lemuel, as Agur, has difficulty with instruction; whether or not this is attributed to their country of origin is not clear.

The king's mother begins,

What, my son?  
What, son of my womb?  
What, son of my vows?<sup>338</sup>

and we are reminded that one aspect of motherhood in the biblical record is its role as advocate, for at least, the male child. Rebecca (Gen. 25), the mother of Moses (Ex. 2), the wife of Manoah (Judg. 13), and Hanna (1 Sam. 1), are all responsible for the special life one of their sons is called to. All these women play a decisive role in the life of their sons. The Queen mother's emotional expression shares in this aspect of the responsibilities of motherhood. These exclamations express the Queen mother's exasperation, or shock, at the man Lemuel has become. Verses 3-9 elucidate that behaviour of Lemuel's which his mother finds shocking. In v. 3, Lemuel is warned to stay away from those women who will lead to his downfall. The association Lemuel has with these 'destroyers of kings' is sexual.<sup>339</sup> The women of v. 3a are specified (parallelism of greater precision) in v. 3b as "those who destroy kings."<sup>340</sup> The Queen mother's warning is not against all women (after all she will shortly suggest a woman who can save the king), but those women who use their sexuality to destroy men.<sup>341</sup>

In v. 4, Lemuel is warned away from wine and strong drink. While the language is veiled, the actual reality is not. Lemuel's problem with strong drink is severe, since Lemuel forgets his own decrees and acts unjustly towards the afflicted (v. 5). In Lemuel's drunkenness, the rights of his citizens are being overlooked. The Queen mother bemoans her son, the drunken Lemuel.

After Lemuel is warned against his behaviour with certain women and drunkenness in vv. 3-5, he is encouraged to new behaviour. The section vv. 6-9 responds to Lemuel's misuse of alcohol spelled out in vv. 4-5. Lemuel has not only been giving alcohol to the wrong person, himself rather than the afflicted, but has--because of his wrongful consumption of alcohol--perverted justice. In vv. 6-7, Lemuel is told who is deserving of strong drink: those who are perishing, in bitter distress, in poverty and misery. For these people the forgetfulness brought on by wine is a blessing. Verses 8 and 9 begin with the phrase "Open your mouth,"

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suggestive of legal vocabulary (McKane 1970: 410-411). Lemuel is told that he is responsible for the administration of righteousness and justice in the kingdom.<sup>342</sup> This reflects back on his drunkenness in which he forgets how he has spoken (his decrees in v. 5). The type of subjects to receive Lemuel's advocacy are the dumb, the desolate, the poor, and needy. He is to speak for them.

Does the criticism that Lemuel has chosen the wrong woman, echo any other part of Proverbs? More than anything else it recalls Proverbs' introduction. The warning against Evil Woman is clearly echoed throughout the first nine chapters of Proverbs (cf. 29:3). Proverbs' introduction stressed the importance of finding the right woman in order to receive instruction. The first aspect of Lemuel's behaviour recalled is his choice of the wrong women. To cast Lemuel's unwise behaviour as a result of his wrong choice of women unifies this epilogue with Proverbs' introduction.<sup>343</sup> The echoes of Proverbs' introduction in the criticism leveled by the Queen mother at Lemuel's behaviour, suggest Lemuel's inability to appropriate the instruction of Proverbs (because he has not chosen the right woman). A son at the end of instruction who has chosen the wrong woman, has lost any chance he had of receiving correct instruction.

The Queen mother's other criticisms of Lemuel recall some of the instruction. Lemuel's failure to uphold the rights of the poor (31:5) recalls Wisdom's comments on how the powerful abuse their office (22:22-23; 29:7). Furthermore, Lemuel's descent into drunkenness recalls Wisdom's warning about too much drink in 23:29ff. It is clear that this epilogue responds to the introduction and the instruction. In both cases, Lemuel responds by ignorance.

Lemuel has lost the vision for justice (if he ever had it). He, in his drunken binges, is deaf to the "cry of pity" (vv. 3-5). The Queen mother, realizing that he will never leave "wine, women, and song," hopes to strike a compromise, or at least moderate her son's irresponsible and reckless living. She has clear goals for Lemuel's behaviour (31:8, 9), but she has realized, these goals exceed his reach (as long as he associates with the wrong women). Therefore she gives her son not a

blessing in the poem of vv. 10-31--realizing the hope of his own integrity--but a resigned exhortation to “marry rich.” She speaks this poem with the exasperation of a mother realizing her worst dreams; her son is bereft of redeeming qualities, and all her child-rearing has come to naught. Her son has been seduced by the pursuits in life which run contrary to wisdom; these pursuits leave no time for those people who should claim his attention, the poor and defenceless. In a last effort to “cure” him of his degenerateness, she paints a rosy picture of his future if he can only “marry into wisdom.” She thinks: perhaps wisdom will rub off on him?

The final poem is the Queen mother’s last plea for her son, that he find a good wife. The “husband” in the poem is her best hope for Lemuel’s future. As vv. 20-21 show, the Competent Wife will embody those goals of wisdom the Queen mother would have desired her son to embody. The picture she paints of this wise wife is subtle, and full of biting irony directed her degenerate son’s way. In spite of this, she wishes Lemuel to find not just any woman able to save him, but the most excellent of those available (v. 26).

### *Proverbs 31:10-31: The Behaviour of the Competent Wife*

I understand the Queen mother to present the Competent Wife as a woman able to save Lemuel from his foolish and bad behaviour, and before we examine the connection between the bad behaviour of Lemuel and the good behaviour of the Competent Wife it is necessary to examine the plausibility of the Queen mother’s request that Lemuel find such a woman. Does she really think such a woman exists, or has she ceased to dialogue with Lemuel, letting her mind wander?

The structure of the question “A good wife who can find?” is reminiscent of the questions in Job 28:12, 20, which ask “Where can wisdom be found?” Job 28, as I have argued above, recounts the fruitless search for wisdom in creation and answers those questions by asserting that Wisdom is not in creation, but with God. How is this question to be answered here? I think the question expects a positive answer on four counts. The context of this question locates it as a part of the Queen

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mother's attempt to modify Lemuel's life. To suggest that the Queen mother, who is so distraught with her son's behaviour, is telling her son to search for a non-existent woman is meaningless. Second, the acrostic form of the poem suggests that the picture being painted is exhaustive. It is illogical to hold that the poem expects a negative answer to its opening question and then goes on to provide an exhaustive A to Z list of behaviour for a woman who does not exist. Third, in the two other places a Competent Wife is mentioned, the title has currency. "A Competent Wife" (אִשָּׁת־חַיִל) occurs three times in the OT: Prov. 12:4, 31:10, and Ruth 3:11. In Ruth 3:11, Boaz tells Ruth that he will do what she asks, because she is known around town by the men as a woman of worth (אִשָּׁת־חַיִל). For Boaz this title given to Ruth provides reliable insight into her character. Likewise the Competent Wife who crowns her husband in Prov. 12:4a, is as real as the woman who brings shame in v. 4b. Finally, the most conclusive argument for the expectation of a positive answer to this question comes from the verse itself.<sup>344</sup>

A good wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels (פְּנִינִים, 31:10).

The word translated 'jewels' is *peninim* and its use within Proverbs is sufficient to argue that the Competent Wife is no idealization beyond grasp; she may actually be found. *Peninim* is used as a comparison six times in the OT, and five of those times with reference to wisdom.<sup>345</sup> Comparison with coral has only two interpretations within the wisdom tradition. Either the comparison means that wisdom is like coral, a special rarity (its use in Proverbs); or it means that wisdom is so special it is more special than rare coral; it is not even available (its use in Job 28). The message of Job 28--that Wisdom is different from even a most rare substance, not in its rarity, but because Wisdom is not available in creation--is the only time such a comparison with *peninim* is used to argue unavailability. The remaining comparisons with *peninim* are found in Proverbs, and they all differ from the use of the comparison in Job 28. In Prov. 3:15 and 8:11, the comparison argues for wisdom's availability--albeit rare availability. This transformation of the meaning of the comparison of wisdom with coral is carried throughout Proverbs a conscious contrast with Job 28.

The parallels between the question and the comparison with *peninim* from Job 28, are both acknowledged in 31:10.<sup>346</sup> The acrostic poem is not presenting the Competent Wife as an unobtainable ideal, but as an available woman found on earth. She is rare, but she can be found.<sup>347</sup> The unavailability of wisdom in Job 28 is challenged by the availability of Wisdom in Prov. 1-9 and the Competent Wife of the poem in 31. Both sections of Proverbs assert that wisdom is on earth, available to those who search. “Thus, the opening line of the poem does not necessarily indicate an unattainable ideal, but a very extraordinary individual whose significance and value is worth grasping” (McCreech, 1985: 37). (From the start of her poem, the good wife is presented as substitute for wisdom in all but name.) Arguing that the Competent Wife is not meant to be seen as an unavailable ideal begs the question, Who is the Competent Wife?

#### **A.) A Woman Able to Save Lemuel**

The Queen mother presents two types of women which Lemuel can choose between: women who sap his strength (חיל; 31:3a) and women who have strength to give (אשת-חיל; 31:10).<sup>348</sup> The Competent Wife is the Queen mother’s hope for her son. The Queen mother wants the best for her son, degenerate though he is. She wants Lemuel to stop giving his “strength” to women who destroy him, and to find a woman who will give her strength to him and build him up.

Lichtenstein (1982) has noted the verbal links between the Queen mother’s two speeches furthering the Queen mother’s claim that a Competent Wife is what Lemuel needs. The occurrence of the word pair poor (עני)---needy (אָנְיוֹן) in vv. 9 and 20 is one such instance. Lemuel fails to speak up for these people, but the Competent Wife takes care of them by her generosity. Lemuel is told to “speak up” (פִּתַּח-פִּיךָ) for the justice and right of his subjects instead of remaining quiet and violating their rights. The Competent Wife, if Lemuel will marry such a woman, will “open her mouth” (פִּיָּהּ פִּתְּחָהּ) in wisdom and kindness (חֶסֶד; 31:26). She is able to give people what Lemuel is not. (So the Queen mother not only wants the best

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for her son but society in general.)

There are also lifestyle comparisons. Lemuel is a man of leisure, spending much of his time in drunkenness and away from the affairs of his office. The Competent Wife, on the other hand, is a blaze of activity (vv. 12-21, 27 all begin with a verb). She is never presented at leisure. In most of the verses of the poem, the Competent Wife is doing things for others: husband, household, children, and the poor and needy. The Competent Wife's activity offsets Lemuel's failure to act, holding her household and society together.

From a conceptual standpoint, how does the Queen mother hope to stimulate Lemuel's interest in such a woman? Though Lemuel is no fool, we nevertheless should be interested in how his mother is trying to get him, at least once, to do the right thing. Right at the start, the Queen mother appeals to Lemuel's wanton nature. Lemuel should marry a wise woman because she will be able to support him financially (vv. 10-11). Was she hinting that if he continued in his present lifestyle the family would be broke? Was she hinting that once he was married all ties with the home of his youth were severed? The wise wife will support the lifestyle Lemuel has grown accustomed to by her tireless work. In verse after verse she is up early (v. 15), bearing the fruits of her labour in bodily strength (v. 17), managing her house as well as helping the poor and needy (vv. 15, 20, 21, 27); her labour produces excess (vv. 16, 24), and finally her tireless work laughs at the future (v. 25).

This must be the only possible kind of wife for Lemuel, provided he wishes to live his life as usual. Lemuel's tendency towards leisure and drink, while held in sharp contrast to the behaviour of the Competent Wife, will not be a lifestyle he must necessarily relinquish. The Queen mother describes a woman who will allow Lemuel to drink and forget the laws of rights and justice, because she will fill in responsibly for him. There is also no indication that the Competent Wife will inspire Lemuel to better behaviour; since she has all the "useful" verbs in vv. 10-31 (the husband does not contribute anything of value to their household). At best, as

the poem suggests, she will make her husband redundant by providing economic security (vv. 16, 24), clothing (vv. 13, 19, 21, 22, 24), food (v. 14) and fulfilling household matters (v. 15). Lemuel, fool that he is, can see that such a wife will not cramp his style; marriage may not be so bad after all. It is worth noting that the Queen mother never characterizes the Competent Wife in any erotic manner. Lemuel is attracted to women's sexuality (v.3), and it would seem his mother would capitalize on this.

Let us look at the "husband-who-is-no-fool" in the poem. He is only mentioned in vv. 23, 28-29. In v. 23 he takes his seat at the city gate and gets his due of respect. Contrasted to the blaze of useful activity that is his wife, he pales in comparison. Once the surface is scratched, the portrayal of the husband is seen as quite compromising.<sup>349</sup> The only path he has worn is that between his bed and the city gate. The very proficiency of his wife has made him redundant at home. She is a blaze of activity; she alone runs the house, he is unnecessary. So she dresses him up in her best cloth (even if he insists he must buy his own clothes, she has probably made them as well, v. 24) and lets him go to the gate (out of her way?), where he is given honour commensurate with the colour and quality of his robe.<sup>350</sup> Yet this honour is nothing of his doing: he is honoured solely because his wife is such a skillful weaver and dyer of clothes (vv. 13, 19, 22). In the last mention of the husband-who-is-no-fool we find him singing his wife's praises at the city gate (vv. 28-29; he is not one to bite the hand that feeds him). Yet even here the poet sticks in the knife and slowly turns it. What possible conclusion could the reader have for such verbosity when one has read a few verses prior that the wisdom of the wife is demonstrated in her scarce words (v. 26)? In the catalogue of Competent Wife activities, speech does not receive much emphasis. A paraphrase of v. 26 could be: "When she opens her mouth, she does so wisely." The converse side to the husband's lack of work must be his propensity to talk, inasmuch as the Competent Wife's activity leaves her little time to talk.

The wealth provided by the Competent Wife is a major part of her attraction



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(vv. 14, 18).

The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will have no lack of gain;  
She does him good, and not harm,  
all the days of her life (vv. 11-12).

Her husband will live off her wealth. She buys the field and she plants it with her earnings (v. 16). She generates income selling the clothes she makes to the merchants (v. 24). All commerce and farming result from her hands. Her husband is well provided for.

Everywhere this husband goes his wife is there first, seeming to prop up his ego, providing him the means to live in the manner to which he is accustomed. (Surely he is, as well as the clothes he wears [vv. 13, 24], aspects of the “her works” which sing her praises at the city gates [v. 28].) In fact it is precisely because the Competent Wife can reconstruct her husband that the Queen mother knows she can redeem Lemuel.

Who is the husband of this most Competent Wife? He is trusting, and dependent on her support (v. 11). He is a man of leisure, congregating with other men of leisure at the city gate (v. 23), where he tells those men gathered how good he has it (v. 28). The style of life Lemuel has adopted, his mother says, will not have to change. Though Lemuel’s lifestyle is destructive while he remains single, should he marry, its bad effect will be nullified.<sup>351</sup>

### **B.) The Competent Wife: Woman Wisdom Married**

Who is this Competent Wife, that she can bring about so much good? The power of this Competent Wife is astonishing: anything she sets her hand to, she succeeds in, even redeeming Lemuel. McCreesh (1985) argues convincingly that the Competent Wife gets her strength of character by being the incarnation of Wisdom.<sup>352</sup> The Competent Wife actualizes in the marriage relationship, the potential for marriage suggested in Proverbs’ introduction with Woman Wisdom.

The poem’s marked concentration of attention on the wife and on all that she does, the development of various themes emphasizing her virtues as well as her practical prudence and ingenuity, and the remarkable similarities between the portrait of the

wife and various descriptions of Wisdom, indicate that the poem in chapter 31 is the book's final, masterful portrait of Wisdom (McCreesh, 1985: 46).

Wisdom, who the reader last encountered in Prov. 9, inviting men to her wedding feast, has through the passage of time become a wife of distinction.<sup>353</sup> McCreesh argues that the exclusive focus on the wife in Prov. 31 is similar to the almost exclusive focus of Prov. 1-9 on Woman Wisdom (1985: 28). There are no other independent characters. Her husband and children react to her; singing her praises. The world of the acrostic poem revolves as surely around the Competent Wife as the world of the introduction revolved around Wisdom. Wisdom acts in the community to get men to come home. The Competent Wife acts outwardly from her home into the community. Chronologically, the introduction and epilogue fit. Wisdom seeks men to set up house with. The Competent Wife has set up house with a man and moves back from there into the community (McCreesh, 1985: 30). Woman Wisdom/Competent Wife are the two sides of the explication of divine wisdom in Proverbs. The Competent Wife has actualized the relationship Woman Wisdom desired to have with the sons of men.

There are many other ties between these two women. Both women are contrasted with women who diminished men in relation with them. The Competent Wife provides strength to her husband and is contrasted with the women who take strength (31:3). Woman Wisdom can provide life to those sons who seek her out, whereas the Evil Woman provides its opposite, death. Both women respond to the world with laughter, expressing their ease in creation ( $\rho\pi\psi$  in 8:30, 31; and 31:25, with Woman Wisdom responsible for bringing laughter from before God to earth). Both women enrich the men who have a relationship with them (4:6-9; 31:11). Both women are compared with the rare word *peninim* (8:11; 30:10). Both women fail to be noticed for their personal dress, yet they dress up those in relationship with them.<sup>354</sup> Wisdom dresses her man up in pendants and garland crowns (1:9; 3:3, 22; 4:9; 6:21). The Competent Wife dresses her husband, her household, and the town (she sells her clothing to the local merchant: 31:13, 19, 21, 22, 24, 31). Both women though busy in the public sphere, are more at home at home. Wisdom's "purpose"

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expressed in the introduction is to invite men into her home. The Competent Wife, while found in the public realm, seems more at home attending to her household and her other projects. The Competent Wife makes it easy for others to live in the world. She, like Woman Wisdom, is constantly at work in the world, buzzing about busily holding creation together. The Competent Wife is the perfect mediator for creation. She stands between wool and flax and the finished garments (v. 13), between her vineyard and a weed-choked, unproductive field (vv. 16, 17), between light and darkness (v. 18), between the poor and needy and death (v. 20), between cold and warmth (v. 21), between her household and bankruptcy, and between her husband and society. The Competent Wife buffers her family and community from the toil of living in creation, recalling Wisdom's similar role with respect to the sons of men (Prov. 8:31-36).

Piskorowski (1987) suggests further ties between the presentations of the two women. Both women set tasks for their "maids" (נְעֻרֹתֶיהָ, 9:3; 31:15).<sup>355</sup> Their respective houses and household management receive considerable attention. Wisdom goes so far to build her house (9:1). The Competent Wife rises early to attend to household affairs (v. 15), she clothes her household (v. 21), and its worries are never far from her attention (v. 27). Society encounters both women in the gates (1:21; 8:3, 34; 31:23, 31). Woman Wisdom is herself at the gates calling out to people, while the Competent Wife's reputation is at the gate making itself known ("her works praise her in the gates", v. 31). Some ties between the two women are thematic.<sup>356</sup> For example, both have hands which provide life and riches (3:16; 31:13, 16, 19, 20, 31), both provide protection for their "spouses" (4:6-9; 31:11), both are associated with light (4:18-19; 31:18; cf. 14:18, 19), both "keep" their spouses (8:18-21; 31:11), both exert skill associated with creation (8:30; 31:16, 22, 24, 26), generosity is extended by both women (1:23; 9:4-6; 31:20), and both are associated with the fear of the Lord (1:7; 31:30).

The only significant differences between the women based on their characterizations are their sexuality and their association with creation.<sup>357</sup> That the

presentation of Woman Wisdom is overtly sexual is beyond dispute. Her characterization renders her all but indistinguishable from the sexually forward Evil Woman. Equally indisputable is the lack of erotic overtones in the presentation of the Competent Wife.<sup>358</sup> This discrepancy is insignificant when understood within the narrative framework of Proverbs. In this narrative we follow Woman Wisdom from a single woman searching for a husband in the introduction (her sexuality on display), to her later years as a married woman in the epilogue. This is not to say that the hint of eroticism is misplaced with maturity, only that the missions of the two women have changed along with their presentation; the narrative has advanced chronologically.

Woman Wisdom's association with creation legitimated her claim to be the divine wisdom which was with God during creation. The Competent Wife has no similar association. With respect to Woman Wisdom's association with creation, much of the difference centers on the interpretation of **ἰδὲ** (8:30). If Wisdom is at God's side as the master builder, or architect, i.e. a "creator," then her characterization is quite different from that of the Competent Wife. If, however, she was at God's side as a confidant, and observer (argued in chapter two), then Wisdom's "wisdom" is observation of the way things work. This resonates strongly in the Competent Wife who succeeds at all she puts her hand to. The Competent Wife appears to have the created elements--wool, flax (v. 13), vineyards (v. 16), transportation (v. 14), food production (v. 15), spinning (v. 19), weather (v. 21), etc.--well under her control. She appears to have an insight into creation which is special, as if she observed how things were made to work. These women share an ease with creation (they enjoy or laugh at the world) that is unique to their characters.

These differences are not sufficient to challenge the claim that the Competent Wife is Woman Wisdom at a different stage in her life. The Competent Wife, by virtue of her virtue embodies all the promises made of Wisdom by the introduction. The Creator can look down with a pleased eye upon the household of this woman and the effect which divine wisdom is having in the world. Through this

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woman who embodies divine wisdom, and others like her, the human race will continue.

#### *A Reading of the Epilogues to Proverbs*

It would be hard to offer a negative response to Proverbs' instruction not covered in the two responses to instruction offered by the men of Massa. Agur, an older man cites his philosophical and cosmological objections to Woman Wisdom's claim to present divine wisdom: divine wisdom is in heaven and God, and only God, can present the words of wisdom. Agur refuses to acknowledge the descent of Wisdom (or the First Woman<sup>359</sup>) which brought divine instruction to earth. Proverbs' introduction, as we have argued, specifically addresses these objections in 8:22-9:18. Why would Proverbs' epilogue present the words of Agur if they are so obviously "dated"? Because the reader needed to be reminded of the futility of Agur's objections. In recalling divine wisdom's unavailability to creation, Agur is recalling a persuasive biblical tradition which threatens Proverbs' message. That Proverbs recognized the persuasiveness of this argument is seen by the lengths it went to answer this criticism in its introduction (especially Prov. 8). By representing the cosmological assertion that divine wisdom is unavailable to creation and recalling the First Man tradition, Agur's words remind the reader of these persuasive arguments. However, the readers also recall how Woman Wisdom overcame these problems by claiming to be the First Woman, knowing the events of creation, and descending to earth to instruct the sons of men in divine wisdom.

Lemuel, a young man, responds to the instruction with foolish disinterest. His problem with women, which his mother relates, shows that he too has not chosen the woman who will bring him divine wisdom. Why does Proverbs present the Queen mother as repeating Solomon's message on the importance of choosing the right woman? The Queen mother's words remind the reader that divine wisdom resides in certain women, and of their power to take or provide life to men. The advice to choose wisely cannot be ignored.

These responses to instruction by two men from Massa present an intellectual fooled by his intellect and a fool persistent in his foolishness. The height and depth of human character covered in these two men, present the dire prediction that all men between these extremes will respond in a similar way to wisdom. What a pessimistic ending for Proverbs are these claims that men cannot incorporate wisdom.

But Proverbs does not end on this sour note. It ends almost as it started. The acrostic poem announces that divine wisdom is embodied in certain women on earth. Woman Wisdom and the Competent Wife are divine wisdom incarnate. Proverbs' message is that certain women's embodiment of divine wisdom is able to offset the inability of instruction to take hold in men. I do not understand Proverbs' insistence (and consistency) of its presentation of the genders. However, it is beyond dispute that when Proverbs answers the question, "Where is wisdom to be found?", it answers, In women.

*An Integrated Reading of Proverbs; Where is Wisdom to be Found?*

The first chapter of this study identified the overall structure of ANE Instruction which Proverbs shared. We focused on the "narrative framework" which is the material surrounding the instruction. The existence of introductions and epilogues to instruction was attributed to the overall structure of ANE Instruction. This observation explained the present form of Proverbs and its similarity to ANE Instruction, but this observation did little to explain Proverbs' composition. In the second chapter I presented the tradition of divine wisdom, and argued that many themes present in Proverbs' introduction could be explained with reference to the tradition of divine wisdom. In the tradition of divine wisdom outside of Proverbs, the location of divine wisdom was a predominant theme; divine wisdom was in heaven, unavailable to creation. I showed how Proverbs repeatedly referred to that tradition and yet challenged its belief that wisdom was unavailable to creation by stating that divine wisdom was found on earth in Woman Wisdom. I also examined

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the life of Solomon who was a human given the gift of divine wisdom at Gibeon. I showed how Solomon's personal experience of wisdom was also recalled in Proverbs' introduction as well. Proverbs' introduction, by recalling the tradition of divine wisdom present with God unavailable to creation and Solomonic tradition, sought to identify the wisdom it addressed as identical to that known by biblical tradition. Proverbs begins by grounding itself firmly within biblical tradition.

However grounded in tradition Proverbs was, it charted new territory. In Prov. 8, Woman Wisdom says clearly that she is on earth available to the sons of men. Woman Wisdom goes so far to recall the exact comparison used to argue her unavailability to creation (comparison with *peninim*), reinterpreting it to suggest her presence on earth. Solomon presents a model of instruction that is new to ANE tradition. In Proverbs' introduction, Solomon discounts his authority or ability to provide divine wisdom to his son, and directs his son to search out God or a single woman wandering the streets calling out to men. It is under her tutelage, Solomon tells his son, that he will gain divine wisdom and life itself. Commensurate with Woman Wisdom's potential to endow the son with life's necessities, is the difficulty the son will have in finding her: she is indistinguishable from liminal women of society. According to Solomon's description of divine wisdom and his model of her instruction, there is a necessary connection between the difficulty of finding Woman Wisdom and her association with liminal elements of society, to divine wisdom.

I took this aspect of the introduction, that divine wisdom is fundamentally different from biblical and ANE Instructional traditions, to be the lens through which the instruction of Prov. 10-29 was to be read. While it would be unreasonable for every one of the proverbs to reflect this orientation (Prov. 10-29 is after all similar to instruction from ANE Instruction which was not always composed specifically for its context), there were proverbs which did resonate with the anti-traditional/anti-establishment stress of the introduction.

At the beginning of this chapter I showed how the epilogues present two men unable to accept divine wisdom as presented by Woman Wisdom. Agur argues that

Woman Wisdom's instruction goes against tradition (it does), and consequently he cannot accept it. Agur in his misplaced conservatism holds onto tradition and loses his chance to receive divine wisdom. Lemuel does not argue against wisdom so much as ignore it. Divine wisdom has come to earth in the form of Woman Wisdom and Lemuel would rather choose women who diminish his strength. Because Lemuel is so apathetic, it was hard to understand exactly what his objections to divine wisdom were. In any case, the untraditional presentation of Woman Wisdom and her instruction do not appeal to Lemuel. However, his mother will not let him slide into the oblivion of drunkenness and despondency, and she tries once last time to get him to do the right thing. The Queen mother presents Lemuel with a scenario in which he will attain divine wisdom through the back door. She proceeds to describe the type of woman Lemuel should seek, presenting her as a woman who will not threaten Lemuel's lifestyle, but rather, will cultivate it. In addition this woman will offset Lemuel's foolish behaviour as well as proving to be quite an asset to the community. The readers of Proverbs know, even if Lemuel does not, that the woman the Queen mother is describing is Woman Wisdom. She may have changed the name but the woman remains the same. Proverbs ends where it began.

The book of Proverbs takes issue with ANE Instruction and biblical tradition. It argues against the male tradition of Instruction wherein a father instructs his son. It argues against a person of superior office instructing one of inferior office by stating that divine wisdom is present in a woman barely distinguishable from one of dubious virtue. It argues against the non-revelatory nature of Instruction, whether a written tradition or a tradition passed on through the generations. It challenges biblical tradition by claiming that divine wisdom is present on earth. In place of these other claims about instruction Proverbs persists in maintaining that divine wisdom is present on earth, embodied in single or married women who are unaligned with any formal institution. Proverbs is insisting that divine wisdom is found in women on the limits of Israelite society.



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### *Can Wisdom be Found in the Statesman?*

It is widely accepted that there was a class of “wise men” in Israel. While I do not wish to challenge the historical accuracy of such a statement, I do find little in the biblical record to suggest a class of wise “men,” and such a class cannot be supported by the reading of Proverbs I have just given. Notwithstanding my reading of Proverbs, I will present McKane’s reading of Proverbs in which he argues that Proverbs continues the association of wisdom with statecraft found throughout biblical literature. I will examine McKane’s suggestion that statesmen are the class of people who best incorporates biblical wisdom as explicated in Proverbs.

McKane’s assertion that statesmen are the intended audience of biblical wisdom literature is integrated into his total hypothesis for the background of wisdom in Israel. McKane (1970) begins his commentary on Proverbs by pointing out the deficiencies of form-critical analysis, which has seen Proverbs as made up of *meshalim* in various stages of development.<sup>360</sup> Also sensitive to form, McKane asks if it is possible to advance a simpler history. Instead of the development of the one-limbed saying into the two-limbed saying, which in turn is transformed into the multi-limbed saying, McKane argues that the material be divided into two general forms: those sentences which use the imperative form and those which use the indicative. The collection of imperatives he calls Instruction (Prov. 1-9, 22:17-24:22, 31:1-9) with the indicative collection called “wisdom sayings” (1970: 3). Realizing that the instruction passages show care and craft in their development, and needing to account for this final form, McKane suggests that instead of requiring this development to take place within Israel, it seems reasonable, when considering the close parallels between Proverbs 22:17-23:11 and Amenemope, to state that Israel borrowed this form from Egypt (1970: 7ff.).

The similarities between Egypt and Israel do not stop at form for McKane:

It is a reasonable assumption that the Instruction was appropriated by Israel as early as the reign of Solomon, when a class of officials came into existence to serve the new structure of the state, and when there was a consequent need for instruction with the same educational function as it had in Egypt (1970: 8-9).

This educational function was the training of an elite class of officials for civil

service. With these convictions expressed, McKane looks closely at Egyptian Instruction and statesmen for insight into their Israelite counterparts. What follows will be an attempt to organize what McKane surmises about the message of Egyptian instruction to its statesmen.

McKane's understanding of the Egyptian statesman, is just one part of the "political theology" McKane finds throughout the OT.<sup>361</sup> In his commentary on Proverbs, when McKane uses the terms "wise man" or "Old Wisdom" he expects the reader to understand these terms as they were developed in his earlier work, *Prophets and Wise Men*.<sup>362</sup> In that work he defined old wisdom as "primarily a disciplined empiricism engaged with the problems of government and administration" (1964: 53). Old wisdom is that comportment toward things which sees rationality and only rationality at work. Wise men as a class came into existence during the time of Solomon when an elite developed to administer affairs of the state (1964: 9). A better term for "wise man" in an OT context is "statesman."

Life in the public sphere has always been involved in a "great debate which will always have a contemporary relevance" (1964: 9). This debate is represented biblically by prophets versus wise men. McKane casts this debate between the poles of religion and empiricism. His paradigm for this debate is 2 Sam. 16:23,

'And the advice (פִּזְוִי) of Ahithopel which he gave in those days was as if one should ask concerning the word (*dabar*) of God. Thus was all the advice (פִּזְוִי) which Ahithopel gave to both David and Absalom'. Taken at its face value the verse means that there are two parallel and unconnected systems of reliable guidance in matters of state; on the one hand there is פִּזְוִי and on the other there is the *dabar* of God (1965: 55).

This is a division between the empirical and the theological, between facts and revelation.<sup>363</sup> This is a "timeless" division. The statesman's role is "to make policy and challenge the reality of the prophet's claim that it is Yahweh alone who shapes history--that policy and action belong to him alone" (1964: 65). The casting of the statesman as radical empiricist is a presupposition McKane brings to his examination of the texts used to educate such statesmen in Egypt.

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### *Statesman-Politician: The Egyptian Wise Man*

Instruction literature is generally in the form of a father addressing instruction to son. In all the Instruction except Ankhsheshonqy (which is common folk wisdom), the instruction is addressed to students from the class of scribe (or better). This instruction aims at grooming the child into an up-and-coming statesman-politician (S-P). The important interpretive question for McKane, though he never articulates it as such, when looking at this genre is, “What effect will a particular course of behaviour have on the career of an official?”<sup>364</sup>

This interpretive question paired with the father-son dialogue, stresses that instruction should be interpreted on both a personal level (focusing on one’s own career) and on a class level (focusing on the elite). There is much which McKane notes as insensitive or cavalier, but it should be remembered that this instruction is “inside” material, not meant for general consumption. A S-P who worries first about others may be a great person, but he will have a short political career.

McKane warns us in approaching this literature that,

We are not to expect that we shall find a self-effacing or self-abnegating morality which urges that it is better to be obscure and upraised than to win reputation and exercise power; that it is a higher virtue to perform menial tasks for other men than to be at the center of affairs and exercise great influence over their lives. Belief in the virtue of such humility finds no place in a composition whose function is precisely to give authoritative advice to aspiring statesmen on how they can achieve maximum effectiveness and best exercise power (1970: 62-63).

Further “if they acted on the assumption that nations are joined together in a concert of love rather than a struggle for power, they would be out of touch with reality” (1965: 11).

The important point is that the apprentice S-P is self-focused. It is only by self-focus that he is able to advance his career. By paying heed to the instruction, the student is told that he will be able to “advance your cause” (1970: 54, 59), be able to “secure tenure of eminence and power” (1970: 57), and become “effective and successful . . . to become a weighty statesman” (1970: 56). The apprentice must take his future in hand. Instruction provides insight to accomplish such a goal.

The responsibility of S-P as an elite class is great. To run a country or

manage international affairs, many sound political judgments will be necessary which seem to be unethical. S-Ps “have to take the world as they find it and in their approach to its complex reality they do not permit themselves the luxury of religious or ethical assumptions” (1965: 48). S-Ps acting responsively are guided by a “precious piety” which leaves “no questions open, no ends untied and which secured its mathematical precision by detaching itself from the messiness and confusion of men’s lives in the world and by shutting its ears to the still, sad music of humanity” (1970: 19). The governed expect S-P’s make sound judgments, unswayed by temporary conditions which cloud the long-term health of a nation. Detachment is the only way to fulfil this requirement of sound judgment.

Developing this idea of detachment McKane focuses on a thrust in the Instruction by which the apprentice S-P is warned that, to succeed, they must never show themselves. They must juggle amongst a series of masks which are situation-determined, and keep the “real” S-P hidden. “The mind or heart which cannot conceal information, opinions, plans, below the level of articulation until it adjudges the time to be ripe for their disclosure or, perhaps, never to disclose them, serves its owner badly” (1970: 163). The S-P lives in three worlds: the foremost is the private world of aspiration, then the world of the state and relationships with other S-Ps, finally the world of relationships with the governed. The proficiency with which the statesman keeps the first world separated from the rest is commensurate with his stature. For example, in dealing with inferiors, “even if there is no intention of granting the crave of the petition, one should avoid injuring the self-esteem of the petitioner and a good hearing may give him as much satisfaction as the granting of his request” (1970: 54). Likewise in the context of his peers, the apprentice, when faced with a superior, “must mobilize all his resources so as to speak well and effectively” (1970: 54), as this could make or break their career.

Being a S-P demands a super-human felicity of mind. “Super-human” because of the powerful abstraction which allows the proper distance from the merely human, to the level of policy making. This distance from the “world of

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simple problems” to the “world of the bigger picture” (cf.1970: 19).

This detached distance provides the leverage necessary for management. Government is impossible if situations and people cannot be managed according to the goals of a healthy nation. “All the resources of nature exist for the sake of men’s needs, and rulers are appointed for their [people in general] protection and good government” (1970: 68). In the performance of their office a S-P must proceed with utmost sensitivity and “learn to deal with people without hurting them or giving them the impression that they are being managed” (1970: 58). This is just good political sense.

Management on the personal level is also discussed. Instruction is given on how best to manage one’s own career. “Advice is given on how to manage a superior when his mood is bad” (1970: 94) as well as the management of friends. Friends can make or break a career. To choose badly can have disastrous results. The important thing, if one has made a bad choice of a friend, is to take the situation firmly in hand and realize “he [the discovered untrustful friend] is now known for what he is, but the new situation created by this discovery can be managed and a personal relationship maintained” (1970: 55). A S-P must never lose control in any area of his life.

### *Statesman-Politician: Proverbs’ Ideal Wise Person*

Politics and wisdom are inextricably intertwined for McKane. McKane presents the history of their development in Israel clearly. In calling attention to those OT passages which contrast the  $\text{חָכָם}$  of the “wise man” with the word of God proclaimed by the prophet, McKane asks, When would a conflict such as this arise? He suggests that during the time of Solomon, when governmental bureaucracy grew, concurrently a class of political advisers would have had to grow, and their insights were founded on different material from Israel’s religion. “Most [Instruction] inculcate earthy and hard-headed wisdom and have nothing in them that would stamp them as distinctively Israelite, and certainly not as Yahwistic” (1970: 8). The

speed at which Solomon's administration grew, and its requirement for trained officials, created a vacuum which Egyptian Instruction filled. The class of political advisers ("wise men") were able to provide government advice based on their empirical political training. Thus the government had two choices for everyday guidance: Israel's religious tradition and secular political advice.

A question to McKane as to what the ideal wise person for Israel would be, would probably have to be qualified concerning old wisdom ideals and the ideals of Yahwistic reinterpretation (use of "wisdom" by prophets). To limit the discussion to Proverbs' ideal wise person would not eliminate these qualifications, as for McKane Proverbs is a pastiche of "old" and "interpreted" wisdom. Because he understands Egyptian Instruction to have had wide influence on Proverbs' composition he finds the important material in Proverbs to reflect old secular empirical wisdom.

McKane's ascription of the biblical Wisdom books to secular wise men has two justifications. First, the closeness of parts of Proverbs to *Amenemope* makes it clear that, like *Amenemope*, this material from Proverbs is concerned with the education of a scribal class. Second, the  $\text{לְעֵלִי}$  of political advisers had close ties with wisdom.<sup>365</sup> The ascription of  $\text{חָכְמָה}$  to characters in political office, and the close association of wisdom and political vocabulary, argue that wisdom was intended for the political class. McKane does acknowledge that wisdom vocabulary is used by prophets, but he argues that their use reinterprets its original use (This is why he calls political wisdom "old wisdom.")

The ideal wise persons for old wisdom are the secular statesperson McKane described. The ideal wise persons focus on their career above all other concerns. Their survival, with this administration or the next, is the motivating factor behind their decisions. Their concern with wisdom is pragmatic--"how they can achieve maximum effectiveness and best exercise power" (1970: 62-63)--and secular, they can "not permit themselves the luxury of religious or ethical assumptions" (1965: 48). The ideals of wisdom enflashed by such persons are reminiscent of social

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Darwinism--that only the most ruthless or crafty will survive. The cold, distant, manipulative, non-religious wise person, which McKane argues is the old wisdom ideal, is the ideal found in Proverbs.

#### *Proverbs' Wise Person*

I have argued that Proverbs' ideal wise person is first a woman--a composite of Woman Wisdom and the Competent Wife. To compare our suggestion with McKane's ideal of old wisdom, is like comparing apples and oranges. Our presuppositions concerning the biblical tradition of wisdom are so disparate that at first glance there seems little point of contact. However, I wish to proceed as I feel a comparison between the two studies will highlight the different approach to the "wisdom tradition" advanced in this study.

That Proverbs is about wisdom is clear. If we take Proverbs 8-9, as Proverbs most self-reflective passage (as it is usually understood) we read Woman Wisdom talking about her origins and her relationship with God. I argued in my various examinations of those verses that Wisdom's association with God prior to and during creation is of utmost importance for Proverbs' message as it tied Proverbs' wisdom to the tradition of divine wisdom found outside of Proverbs. Even though Proverbs challenged that tradition by stating that divine wisdom was on earth, it still used the language and themes from that other wisdom tradition. Thus Proverbs emphasized that the wisdom it discussed was familiar.

Whybray has noted (1974) that because of the great variety of usage given the vocabulary of wisdom, it is important to match the *contexts* of specific words prior to their explication. The passages I found which represent the tradition of divine wisdom relevant to Proverbs were examined in chapter two of this study. All the passages agreed with at least one of Wisdom's comments about herself, and there was a correlation between the passages to such an extent that I labeled the tradition represented as a "wisdom tradition."

McKane on the other hand has chosen the debate between prophets and wise

men as the context in which to understand Proverbs, and biblical wisdom in general. This seems to be a reasonable place to start an attempt to explicate wisdom outside the book of Proverbs, since there is a clustering of wisdom vocabulary with the  $\text{חָכְמָה}$  of the politicians. Yet the question remains, what is the relationship between the  $\text{חָכְמָה}$  of statesmen and Proverbs? McKane is not clear on this point (assuming as he does that his discussion in *Prophets and Wise Men* can be taken as a proper starting point for an examination of Proverbs). To partly explain why McKane casts Proverbs' wisdom as a political empiricism, one can note that he dismisses the materials of Prov. 10-22:16, 24:23-29:27 for being "wisdom sentences" and therefore outside the instructional materials of Proverbs (1970: vii, 3, 262f.). The material which remains, McKane claims, has close ties to Egyptian Instruction. This merely transfers the question of Proverbs' concern with political empiricism to Egyptian Instruction (which McKane claims is clearly found in Egyptian Instruction). That the main concern of Egyptian Instruction is political, is far from clear (I hinted at the problems of such an assumption in chapter one). Nevertheless, whatever the thrust of Egyptian Instruction, if such a sweeping distillation can be made, it can only have peripheral interpretive value for Proverbs. McKane needs to support his claim that the wisdom Proverbs presents is political. He could do this by examining all the occurrences of  $\text{חָכְמָה}$  in Proverbs and comparing them to the political uses he finds outside Proverbs in the biblical record. Since he finds the contrast between the  $\text{חָכְמָה}$  of the wise men to the word of God particularly suggestive, he could highlight similar contrasts in Proverbs. He could show how the personification of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9 explicates wisdom in a political manner, or how she represents the scribal class, and what of her message is specific to that class. He has not attempted to do any of the above; and as a result, he fails to integrate Proverbs into his biblical context for Proverbs. As I expressed in chapter one of this study, McKane's program of sorting material found in ANE Instruction into "instruction" and "wisdom sayings" seriously challenges any claim he makes about the ethos of that material as a whole.



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Also in chapter two, I called attention to Solomon's unique relationship with divine wisdom, which I Kings 3 expressed. I examined how the narrative which followed Solomon's request at Gibeon explicated divine wisdom and how features of this narrative were recalled by Solomon in Proverbs' introduction. Proverbs recalled how divine wisdom had the added benefit of wealth and long life, and how divine wisdom was manifest in household management skills.

McKane does not explain the presence of Solomon in Proverbs beyond his suitability for fulfilling the literary convention of ANE Instruction (1970: 262). He does cover the narrative of Solomon's reception of divine wisdom, noting the cluster of political vocabulary, but he does not allow the narrative to explicate this vocabulary (1965: 109). He understands Solomon's request to be for political wisdom and assumes that God gives Solomon the wisdom he asks for. I also noted that Solomon asked for political acumen, and guidance in governing his people and yet how the following narrative does not focus exclusively on these things. Solomon's possession of divine wisdom did help him govern, but it manifested itself in other non-political ways as well, his encounter with the queen of Sheba being the most notable.

McKane does not argue how his understanding of Proverbs' wisdom is explicated in Woman Wisdom, or how is she presented as a statesperson-politician.<sup>366</sup> I have argued that Wisdom does not behave in such a way that institutional affiliations may be ascribed to her. She does not play recognizable roles, such as statesperson, scribe, open-air teacher (her outdoor status does argue against association with any institution with a recognizable building, i.e. royal court, scribal school house, or temple mount), prophet, etc. Woman Wisdom is generally presented as a future wife to the son. She is at all junctures--location in setting, personal dress, and desired role as Competent Wife--a liminal figure.

The final contrast between our differing approaches is the movement of wisdom in the tradition. Again this is like comparing apples and oranges, since we are starting in two places with two different notions of wisdom. For McKane "old"

wisdom was secular, and its secularity was gradually revised and brought into Yahwism. In this study the “old” wisdom was so much a part of Yahwism that it became its fault; it needed to be made more universal. The descent of wisdom made God’s wisdom available to all--a movement opposite to that suggested by McKane--from divine control to unmediated secularism.

I hope that I have been clear when I have presented Woman Wisdom and the Competent Wife as Proverbs’ description of ideal wise people. The question “Where is wisdom to be found?” echoes throughout the biblical record and is answered in Proverbs: divine wisdom is embodied in Woman Wisdom and the Competent Wife.

ENDNOTES:

<sup>322</sup> In chapter three I argued that while Solomon privileges only his son with his instruction, he stresses that the instructor Wisdom will not privilege the son in any way. She comes to instruct any who will respond to her invitation. This setting leaves open the possibility that Solomon's son is not the only one who might respond to the instruction of Woman Wisdom.

The response to instruction of more than one person is seen in another ANE Instruction, *Kagemni*.

<sup>323</sup> One possible reason for the dismissal of the instruction by these foreigners (men of Massa or some other foreign place) could be Proverbs' wish to emphasize the preeminence of divine wisdom to the point that it goes over the heads of these foreigners. That divine wisdom goes beyond the wisdom of foreigners was also stated in I Kings 4:30. In I Kings it was Solomon's expression of divine wisdom which exceeded foreign understanding. Nevertheless, I will argue below, that the cosmological reasons Agur uses to discount the instruction, have biblical precedence, showing him to be conversant in the biblical tradition of wisdom and not just an ignorant foreigner.

<sup>324</sup> I understand Agur's words to extend until the next superscription of 31:1. The other superscriptions of Proverbs are also understood in this manner (cf. 1:1; 10:1; 25:1; 31:1). I imagine that when the material was collected which make up Proverbs, these superscriptions were kept alongside the material they were associated with. The role of the material identified by the superscriptions cannot be determined by the superscriptions themselves, but by the use Proverbs made of that material.

<sup>325</sup> For example, the following possible contexts for the words of Agur have been suggested. Scott discusses the words of Agur in his chapter entitled "Wisdom in Revolt: Agur and Qoheleth" (1971: 165ff.). Scott understands vv. 1-9 to be a dialogue between a sceptic and a believer about the existence of God (1971: 165 and 1965: 175-177). However, Scott notes that it is unclear exactly what Agur is being sceptical about (the obscure v. 1b). He sees the passage as a dialogue in three parts: vv. 1-4 forming the sceptic's speech, vv. 5-6 being an answer offered to this sceptic's speech by some orthodox believer, and 7-9 being a statement by the believer wishing that he will never be tempted into error like the sceptic. Scott also finds v. 4 to echo the discussion of Job 38 and Is. 40:12ff. (1971: 167).

Von Rad understands the words of Agur to express the wisdom teacher's great awe at the mysteries of God which will always frustrate attempts at their explanation (1972: 293-294). While the sentence proverbs expressed all that was known, there was still something else the teachers needed to say. "It was part of these teachers' duty, then, to speak not only of what could be known but also of what could not be known . . ." (1972: 293). The words of Agur stress this point.

Murphy understands the words of Agur to restate the biblical theme that wisdom is inaccessible to humanity (1960: 23). He cites comparison with Job 28 and its similar assertion that wisdom is with God unavailable to humanity, as the background to Agur's statement in 30:4. Murphy also sees the contrast between the words of Agur and earlier statements in Proverbs; he says,

This theme of the inaccessibility of wisdom is balanced by an opposite: Wisdom's overtures to man:

Those who love me I also love,  
and those who seek me find me (Prov. 8:17).

Such contrast is typical of Old Testament thought, which moves by extremes (1960: 24).

I agree with Murphy's interpretation that the words of Agur are reminiscent of Job 28 and that their theme is reminiscent of the inaccessibility of wisdom, though surely more can be said for the contrast to the message of Prov. 8 than that it represents contrast typical of Old Testament thought. After all, these opposing points of view occur within the same book.

McKane also understands Agur to stress the limit of human knowledge (1970: 646-647). But McKane goes further than Murphy in suggesting that Agur's words are an ironic response to other claims about knowledge, not simply another biblical statement of the inaccessibility of knowledge.

With a mock ruefulness he observes that others seem to know all about God and to have him completely in their grasp, whereas he, poor fellow, is apparently sub-human,

since for him God is shrouded in mystery. He has never been able to penetrate this domain of knowledge in which others seem to move with great familiarity and assurance (1970: 647).

McKane has seen how these words of Agur are framed as a response, but he leaves his suggestion hanging and does not name Agur's interlocutor. McKane also interprets Agur's concern to be knowledge of the divine, but as I will argue, it is more probable that Agur is commenting on the availability of divine wisdom since his dispute is with Woman Wisdom.

<sup>326</sup> Whybray (1972: 173) suggests comparison between the association of "stupid" and "beast" in Agur's words with Ps. 49:10-12, 73:21-22. The psalmist, in the first passage, is stating that people in their pompous enjoyment of wealth and wisdom, forget their end in death is like a beast's. In the second passage, people are beast-like when they refuse divine counsel, their possession of human wisdom notwithstanding. In both cases, human wisdom is not sufficient to lift people above the level of animals. But this is not what Agur is saying here. He does not say that he is stupid because he has refused some insight into what it is to be human, or the offer of divine wisdom; he is stupid because that is all that is possible for humanity--they do not have the option of the possession of divine wisdom. This is also the stress of Jeremiah (cf. chapter two, pp. 96ff.).

<sup>327</sup> These questions expect either the positive "Yahweh," or the negative "no man". In either case the message is the same, Yahweh is solely responsible for these things (Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66* [London: Oliphants, 1975], p. 53).

<sup>328</sup> McKane (1970: 648), Scott (1965: 177) and Childs (1979: 556) compare Prov. 30:5 to 2 Sam. 22:31, and Ps. 18:31. The words may be the same but the context is wrong since these passages are outside the "wisdom tradition." The "word of God" (within Proverbs) is never a reference to written scripture, as these scholars suggest, but to God's words of wisdom. As I pointed out in chapter three, Proverbs is notably silent in referring to its instruction as a written form in comparison to other ANE Instruction. Agur is referring here to the tradition of wisdom found inside and outside Proverbs which disputed any mediator of wisdom beside God (including the capture of divine wisdom in writing). The passages quoted from Prov. 1-9 illustrate that one must wait upon God for wisdom. Agur's complaint is that Woman Wisdom is presenting her words of wisdom as divine. Agur argues that no one can take God's place. Childs' statement:

It [vv. 5-6] registers the point that the proverbs which originally derived from man's reflection on human experience of the world and society had become understood as divine words to man which functioned as sacred scripture along with the rest of Israel's received traditions (1979: 556).

is exactly the opposite to the meaning of these verses. Wisdom "originally" resided solely with God. The innovation of Proverbs which Agur challenges is Woman Wisdom's assertion that though she was found only with God apart from creation at one time, she is now on earth willing to instruct in divine wisdom. "Who has ascended to heaven and come down?," Agur asks, for only such a person can challenge the tradition which restricts divine wisdom to God. Proverbs 8 proclaims that Wisdom herself has descended from heaven to earth.

<sup>329</sup> This cry of Agur, not to add to the words of the Lord, does not imply as some have suggested, that the biblical tradition has taken literary form and Agur is affirming the sacredness of scripture (cf. McKane's summary 1970: 648). Agur is stressing, as is clear from Prov. 2:6-7, that divine wisdom is expressed verbally in the words of God. False instructors misrepresent their words of wisdom as God's. Any sacred book claiming to present divine wisdom would receive a similar attack.

<sup>330</sup> McKane argues that vv. 5-6 are "corrective comment" addressing Agur's scepticism of the existence of God (1970: 643). His understanding is based on his translation of v. 1b, which casts Agur as an agnostic. Though McKane does not mention it, his interpretation is based on his impulse to take any mention of God in Proverbs as late Yahwistic editorializing, editorializing which is always addressing the "secular" nature of "old" wisdom. McKane makes no attempt to integrate vv. 1-4 with vv. 5-6, because of this impulse.

<sup>331</sup> A ready comparison is the discussion in Job 38. It could be said that God is making a theological point with the litany of questions. But this ignores God's opening comment, "Who is this

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that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" The discussion of Job 38 concerns the matter of who possesses wisdom, not the nature of God in comparison with humanity.

<sup>332</sup> So suggests Derek Kidner, *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1985), p. 52.

<sup>333</sup> Any argues with Khonshotep (in the epilogue in the Instruction of ANY) that his excuses are not sufficient to convince him of the difficulty of incorporating instruction--because even the animals can be taught. Any then catalogues the successful training of animals and repeats his implication: as animals so people.

One teaches the Nubian to speak Egyptian,  
The Syrian and other strangers too.  
Say, "I shall do like all the beasts,"  
Listen and learn what they do (AEL, II, 144).

So what is possible for beasts and foreigners is equally possible for Khonshotep. Any's response addresses Agur's words in v. 2 more so than the objection raised by Khonshotep. Khonshotep nowhere uses as an excuse his closeness to beasts, which would warrant the nature of his father's reply. Agur, on the other hand, plays into Any's hands. McKane's translation of v. 2 shows this,

For I am more a beast than a man,  
and human discernment is not given to me.

<sup>334</sup> For example, see the Table of Contents in McKane (1970), Scott (1965) and Murphy (1981: 49). Though Lichtenstein has argued convincingly for the unity of the chapter based on repeated words, themes, and structure, he has not gone further to explicate the narrative frame on which the poems hang. He has noted the prominent role given by the king mother to women in Lemuel's present and future life (Murray H. Lichtenstein, "Chiasm and Symmetry in Proverbs 31," *CBQ* 44 (1982), pp. 202-211.

<sup>335</sup> Both McKane (1970: 407) and Murphy (1981: 81) find similarities between the Egyptian Instructions *Amenemhet* and *Merikare* and Prov. 31:1-9. Both these Egyptian Instructions concern the advice given by the king-father to the king-son. The instruction concerns the behaviour of the son in the royal office along the lines of social justice. Both McKane and Murphy note the unusual feature of 31, being instruction given by a mother to a son. But it is even more unusual to have the mother instruct the son in a passage presented as foreign. Never in the other non-Israelite instructions of this form is a woman mentioned as instructor. Why does Proverbs present foreign instruction in such a light?

<sup>336</sup> See discussion of this with reference to the words of Agur, note 324, p. 197.

<sup>337</sup> See other general references to these qualities of good women in Prov. 12:4, 18:22, 19:14.

<sup>338</sup> McKane cites I Sam. 1:11 as a possible parallel for "son of my vows." Whether or not King Lemuel's mother was previously barren and so shared a vow with Hannah is not as important as noting that in her vow she must have promised to raise Lemuel in a certain way (as Hannah did), thus the anguish she vents over her son's behaviour.

<sup>339</sup> The lack of parallelism between 'your strength' and 'your ways' suggests that it may be correct for a single consonant to be changed, 'your ways' (*derakeka*) becomes 'your loins' (*yerakeka*). Verse 3 becomes yield not your virility to woman, your loins to the destroyers of kings (see McKane, 1970: 409; Scott 1965: 183).

<sup>340</sup> McKane's suggestion that 'the destroyers of kings' or 'destroyers of counsel' are a general circumlocution for all women, is without basis (1970: 409).

<sup>341</sup> So understood, this warning against the 'evil' women by the king mother is similar to the first nine chapters of Proverbs, where there also are 'good' and 'bad' women distinguished by their 'use' of sexuality. The king mother presents the Capable Wife as a woman to whom Lemuel should give his strength, because she returns strength back to him.

<sup>342</sup> This again stresses Lemuel's lack of wisdom. Wisdom states, "By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just" (Prov. 8:15). Lemuel's behaviour as a king, his abandonment of justice, is his abandonment of Wisdom.

<sup>343</sup> Prov. 31, in its realistic presentation of a mother lamenting the man her son has become after her "vow" casts this chapter in a time sequence subsequent to the introduction. The introduction presented a "son" about to make the choice between women and a parent doing all that is possible to help him choose correctly, the epilogue presents a "son" who has chosen. Because Prov. 31 reflects on the way wisdom is inculcated and recalls the themes of the introduction, it is formally an epilogue and not a continuation of instruction.

<sup>344</sup> Compare with:

He who finds a wife finds a good thing,  
and obtains favor from the Lord (Prov. 18:22).

Finding a wife is a theme of much of the narrative framework. These exhortations are not meaningless; they expect action on the part of the son (see also McKane's comments, 1970: 666).

<sup>345</sup> Job 28:18, Prov. 3:15, 8:11, 20:15, 30:10, and Lam. 4:7.

<sup>346</sup> For Whybray, Prov. 31:10 suggests that the comparison "originally had no connexion with wisdom but was used in ordinary life" (1965: 88). Since all but one of the references to פנינים have been covered here (Lam. 4:7 is the only occurrence of פנינים outside these passages, cf. Even-Shoshan, p. 952), it seems more likely that this comparison with coral only had connection with wisdom. In Prov. 31:10, the good wife is inserted into a verse ripe with connection to wisdom. Though the comparison is made between coral and the wife, the wife is Wisdom in everything but name. She is compared with coral, and her whereabouts is of great concern. The Competent Wife is instruction actualized, the incarnation of wisdom.

<sup>347</sup> The occurrence of the Capable Wife in comparison to coral (a rare comparison all but unique to Wisdom) is sufficient to establish the closeness of her presentation to Wisdom. To have this comparison occur in the same verse as the "Who can find . . . ?" question, undeniably associates the Capable Wife with Woman Wisdom. The comparison with coral in Prov. 20:15 adds further corroboration where none is needed.

There is gold and abundance of costly stones [פנינים ימים]  
but the lips of knowledge [שפת חכמה]  
are a precious jewel (Prov. 20:15).

There is an abundance of rare *peninim* with comparison to "lips of knowledge," wisdom is truly precious (cf. McKane 1970: 538f.). In comparison with

She opens her mouth with wisdom [פיה פתחה בחכמה]

And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue (Prov. 31:26).

one can see that the Capable Wife has the mouth of wisdom which is more precious than *peninim*. Wise lips are a precious jewel, possessed by Wisdom and the Capable Wife.

<sup>348</sup> Cf. Lichtenstein (1982: 202-203) and McCreesh (1985: 40). Note that the Competent Wife is not alone in her virtues; there are many like her in strength (v. 29), and Lemuel must choose among them for the one who exceeds them all (because he exceeds all men in foolishness?).

<sup>349</sup> "The very emphasis of the poem on the woman's many tasks presents us with one of the unusual features of the poem: the husband is left with little or nothing to do!" (McCreesh 1985: 27).

<sup>350</sup> Cf. Is. 3:6 for the importance of clothing to social standing.

<sup>351</sup> There is no small effort expended by commentators to redeem the "value" of the husband's day (cf. McKane 1970: 669 and Whybray 1972: 186). Some suggest that he is acting out a role of "honour" at the gate. "He is well set to exert his influence on the life of the community and make a name for himself as a counselor and a man of weight" (McKane 1970: 669). This is reading far too much between the lines; nothing is said about what the husband is doing at the gate. The only active verb assigned to him there is "sit" (ישב). The husband is known in his sitting at the gate. Outside of

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singing his wife's praises there, nothing is ascribed to him. It is true that much of importance happened at city gates. They are places commonly cited for business and judgment. Proverbs 31 makes no overtures to these "important and necessary" tasks which took place there. The way men are presented at the gate in the poem, as well as the comprehensive way in which the Competent Wife is portrayed as the actual warp and woof of society indicate that the importance of business ascribed to the gate (usually a male society) is being lampooned by Proverbs 31 (at the very least questioned). Within the context of the poem itself, since "Many women have done excellently [לַיָּפִי]" (v. 29a), many having enflashed לַיָּפִי comparable to the Capable Wife, consequently many husbands would seem to be redundant. With nothing of value to do, these husbands gather at the gate, singing the praises of their respective wives (cf. v. 28b).

<sup>352</sup> See also the studies of Anna Piskorowski (*The Significance of Female Imagery in the Book of Proverbs: Wisdom and the Wife Compared* [unpublished Master's thesis; Wilfrid Laurier University, 1987]) and Camp (1985: 90-94), who both understand the Competent Wife as an actualization of Woman Wisdom. Blenkinsopp suggests something similar:

The final section, praising the good wife, is perhaps intended to correspond to the figure of the woman Wisdom presented in the first section. It was quite common in antiquity to round off a work in a way calculated to recall its opening (Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and the Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983], p. 16).

<sup>353</sup> Proverbs' epilogue finishes the narrative started in Proverbs' introduction. It seems fitting that Solomon's description to his son of Woman Wisdom's desire to delight with the sons of men has been realized. One man, out of many, has responded to her advances. Where Solomon presented Woman Wisdom as a single woman walking the streets looking for men who would respond to her, the Queen mother describes Woman Wisdom later in her life as a married woman.

<sup>354</sup> Of the Capable Wife it is said: "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain" (31:30a). Does this apply to the homeliness of the Competent Wife's appearance? (cf. Whybray 1972: 186).

<sup>355</sup> Based on Whybray's comments (1972: 85) on the unusual structure of 31:15, being a three-line verse in a two-line context, which suggests that the last line is a later addition, "and tasks for her maidens." Piskorowski proposes that this effort was extended to bring the portrait of the Capable Wife more in line with the picture of Wisdom in Prov. 1-9 (1987: 20).

<sup>356</sup> Piskorowski, 1987: 30-55.

<sup>357</sup> See also Piskorowski, 1987: 56-64.

<sup>358</sup> Bird comments that Proverbs never portrays "wives" displaying sexual attributes. "She [Competent Wife] is characterized in wholly nonsexual terms as provisioner of home and husband" (Phyllis Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament" in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Tradition* [ed. R.R. Ruether; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974], pp. 41-88; p. 58).

<sup>359</sup> Proverbs it seems goes out of its way to challenge gender assumptions. Not only is divine wisdom a woman, but Woman Wisdom claims the "First Man" is actually the "First Woman."

<sup>360</sup> The view he finds deficient is developed in 1970: 1-3. Briefly stated, traditional form-critical analysis assumes that *mashal* at its earliest stage was a single-limbed saying. Through the natural process of literary development, these one-limbed original sayings received commentary on them (in the form of subordinate clauses and resultant parallelism) as they changed hands, to the point of the high sophistication of Prov. 1-9 (which is the highest form of commentary or largest subordinate clause which comments on wisdom as a whole). Proverbs contains the whole process of this literary development.

<sup>361</sup> That McKane understands this ideology as universal to all peoples and all times is clearly expressed in the introduction to *Prophets and Wise Men* (cf. p. vii).

<sup>362</sup> McKane, 1970: 9, 17, 19, 21.

<sup>363</sup> Cf. McKane, 1970: 20-21. The whole of *Prophets and Wise Men* is concerned with showing the different world-views of prophets and wise men.

<sup>364</sup> McKane, 1970: 53. The official sees any situation in life as something to be used for his goal of career advancement. People and situations are redefined by the official according to personal goals.

<sup>365</sup> See the chapter "Wisdom and Statesmanship" in McKane, 1964: 15-22, where he shows the close association of wisdom vocabulary with issues of statecraft.

<sup>366</sup> Granted, Woman Wisdom is "late," however, we would expect some vestige of the earlier political wisdom to be incorporated into her characterization.



## CONCLUSION

In the first chapter I identified a compositional form, "Instruction," that has not previously received the attention it deserves. Lichtheim was the first to call attention to this three-part form of Egyptian Instruction, wherein the instruction is placed in a narrative context by the introduction and epilogue. In arguing for Proverbs' replication of this macro-form, I have brought to attention a form of biblical wisdom literature that was previously overlooked. While many have identified the form "instruction", this form applies to sentence proverbs in the imperative (using McKane's definition) and is vastly different from the form of Instruction argued for in this study. The oversight of this form for ANE Instruction and Proverbs (consequently the oversight of many constituent parts of Instruction) has led to many erroneous assertions about the ethos of Instruction. When the introductions and epilogues to ANE Instruction have been ignored, how can any comment on their orientation, audience, or world-view be made? A similar problem applies to comments on Proverbs: if Proverbs is not viewed as a compositional whole, any comment on the book's orientation, audience, or world-view is based on only a part of its composition.

In the second chapter I argued that although Proverbs used the form of ANE Instruction, this tradition provided little or no insight into the composition of Proverbs' introduction. (For that matter, I pointed out how the great variety of expression given ANE Instructional form argues against assertions that there was any customary expression of form.) Insight into the composition of Proverbs' introduction is found readily in biblical traditions about divine wisdom. Solomon, a king providing instruction to his son--a narrative frame similar to many Egyptian

Instructions--has particular relevance to biblical tradition. The usual understanding of Solomon's relevance to Proverbs was Solomon's renowned compositional skills (cf. I Kings 4:32 [MT 5:12]). I challenged the relevance of Solomon's compositional skills as an expression of his divine wisdom in the narrative of I Kings, as well as questioning the relevance of this aspect of Solomonic tradition to Proverbs. Solomon was chosen as an instructor for Proverbs because he was one of the few people to experience divine wisdom in the biblical tradition. Solomon's description of wisdom to his son in Proverbs 1-9 recalls Solomon's own experience of divine wisdom recounted in the narrative of I Kings following Gibeon, further strengthening the tie between aspects of Proverbs' introduction and biblical tradition. Additionally, I suggested that Wisdom's meal in Proverbs 9 recalled Solomon's meal with the queen of Sheba; in both cases the meals are convincing evidence that the wisdom they embody is divine.

Solomon's introduction of Woman Wisdom as the real instructor of wisdom recalls another biblical tradition: that of the relationship between God and divine wisdom. The description of Woman Wisdom (especially in Proverbs 8) recalls the association of divine wisdom with God at creation found outside of Proverbs. The recollection of biblical themes by Proverbs' introduction demonstrates Proverbs' intentional integration with biblical literature.

In chapter three I examined the manner in which Proverbs incorporated these traditions and how its transformation of these traditions became the lens through which the instruction was meant to be read. I argued that even though Proverbs displays the form of Instruction and recalls biblical traditions about divine wisdom, it does not adopt these traditions uncritically. Proverbs does not present Solomon as able to pass on wisdom, for, by his own confession, only God and Woman Wisdom can do this. Solomon deconstructs the father-to-son form of Instruction when he urges his son to seek out Woman Wisdom as an instructor. Other assumptions of ANE Instruction are rejected in Proverbs: wisdom and

## *Conclusion*

instruction have divine not human origin, instruction is not restricted to males, the son is not inferior to the instructor, instruction is not a written but an oral tradition, and though instruction is available the instructor is hard to find, and the appropriation of instruction is difficult. Furthermore, suggestions that some authoritative social institution speaks through Proverbs' introduction are discounted because: Wisdom's characterization is closest to the social institution of prostitution, Wisdom is not associated with any special building or place, the relationship the son is encouraged to have with the instructor is sexual, Wisdom does not favour the son's royal status, and the instructor is inferior to the son. Taken together, these changes to the instructional model offer no support that Proverbs' instruction buttressed any formal or establishment faction of society; quite the opposite appears to be the case. To answer the question "Where is wisdom to be found?" with Woman Wisdom, a character who has a liminal existence with respect to society, implies that Proverbs conceives of divine wisdom as having some affinity with the fringes of society. I concluded the chapter by indicating how this characterization of wisdom would influenced our reading of Proverbs' instruction.

In chapter four I focused on proverbs which echoed the liminal characterization of Woman Wisdom. In presenting proverbs which recalled the liminal characterization of wisdom in the introduction, I drew attention to Wisdom's bias against wealth and urban social institutions. The audience these proverbs addressed, like Woman Wisdom, were found on the fringes of society. The instruction which Wisdom offers, affirms people in their life on society's fringe (without any attempt to mainstream them), occasionally giving instruction which subverts established social behaviour. By focusing on proverbs of this sort I did not imply that all proverbs were of this type, or should have been of the same type, only that an introduction such as Proverbs 1-9 flagged these proverbs for attention. It was in the world of Woman Wisdom and *these* proverbs that divine wisdom resided.

The final chapter argued that the last two chapters of Proverbs, 30 and 31,

were formally epilogue, commenting on and reflecting back over instruction. Both responses to instruction were negative. Agur denied the existence of divine wisdom in the world because he held the cosmological view that divine wisdom was unavailable to creation, and therefore no instructor was able to pass it on. Agur's cosmology either refused to accept, or ignored the cosmological assertions of Proverbs' introduction--that divine wisdom was on earth. The words of the Queen mother castigate her son for behaving as if instruction held no meaning for him. Lemuel's response to instruction was to ignore it. Even though Lemuel has chosen to ignore instruction and has, by associating with evil women, behaved in a manner opposite to the incitements of the introduction, the Queen mother still holds the hope that he can attain divine wisdom. The Queen mother's last hope is that he find and marry the Competent Wife. Through this marriage, Lemuel's behaviour which has damaged society is overcome by his wife's good works. In marriage to the Competent Wife, Lemuel's present failure to uphold the rights of the underprivileged is overshadowed by his wife's good deeds.

What the fifth chapter brings is a better understanding of the relationship of the last two chapters of Proverbs to the book as a whole. I argue that in recalling themes of the introduction (*inclusio*), these chapters demonstrate that they belong to the narrative framework which surrounds and comments on the instruction and are not part of the instruction proper. The words of Agur, by recalling the cosmology wherein divine wisdom is in heaven, unavailable to creation, reemphasize Proverbs' challenge to that cosmology. Proverbs' response to the words of Agur was to reemphasize its alternative cosmology through the instruction of the Queen mother. The acrostic poem asserts that divine wisdom is alive on earth and that it takes the form of a woman.

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