PROVERBS

James D. Martin

OLD TESTAMENT GUIDES

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General Editor
R.N. Whybray

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James D. Martin

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To

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Contents

Acknowledgments		7
Abbreviations		9
Select List of Commentaries		10
1.	Wisdom Literature in Ancient Israel	13
2.	Proverbs 1–9	33
3.	Two 'Solomonic' Collections of Proverbs	51
4.	Appendices to the 'Solomonic' Collections	72
5.	The Feminine in the Book of Proverbs	82
6.	Wisdom and Theology	91
Index of References		100
Index of Authors		105

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It has been a privilege, if not slightly daunting at times, to have had two doyens of Proverbs scholarship at my elbow as I wrote. The one is, of course, Norman Whybray himself, who has been generous with his guidance and advice as the book has progressed but who has never sought to impose his own ideas of how it should look. The other is William McKane who taught me Hebrew as a student in Glasgow and who has been a friend and colleague ever since. I have been aware of his presence in Proverbs studies and have benefited greatly from his work, but I have rather deliberately not sought his advice. I only hope that he is not too displeased with the result of his scholarly influence, even if I have not always agreed with him.

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still extremely grateful. They welcomed me into their community—both faculty and the then student body—and it is to them that I dedicate this volume.

James D. Martin
University of St Andrews
September 1994

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ANET	J.B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 3rd edn, 1969).
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur ZAW
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQMS	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Monograph Series
DSB	Daily Study Bible
FOTL	The Forms of Old Testament Literature
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	*Interpretation*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JSOTSup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Supplement Series
NCB	New Century Bible
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OTL	Old Testament Library
SB	Sources bibliques
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
TBC	Torch Bible Commentaries
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	*Vetus Testamentum*, Supplements
ZB	Zürcher Bibelkommentare

Select List of Commentaries

The book of Proverbs has not been particularly well served with commentaries in English, and there are many gaps still remaining in the standard series. With one exception, I have not gone back beyond 1960 in this list. I begin with two very short commentaries in one-volume Bible Commentaries:

T.P. McCreesh, 'Proverbs', in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. R.E. Brown et al.; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), pp. 453-61. This is *a very* brief commentary but possibly useful as a 'starter'.

J.C. Rylaarsdam, 'The Proverbs', in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (ed. M. Black and H.H. Rowley; London: Nelson, 1962), pp. 444-57. This is also brief, but rather more detailed than McCreesh.

There are four longer but still fairly compact commentaries, each characteristic of its respective series:

K.T. Aitken, *Proverbs* (DSB; St Andrew Press, 1986). This series is intended essentially for private Bible study with a devotional slant, but this volume, like the others in the series, is based on sound scholarship.

E. Jones, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes: Introduction and Commentary* (TBC; London: SCM Press, 1961). This short commentary, though now somewhat dated, may still prove useful to students. It comments on the RSV translation with frequent reference to the AV.

D. Kidner, *Proverbs* (TOTC; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1966). This series is written from a conservative point of view. This particular commentary has a fairly old feel to it and comments on the AV.

R.N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). An excellent little commentary within the limits of the series in which it is published. It comments on the NEB translation, but with reference to other translations as required.

There are four commentaries in more major series:

C.H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899) (with later

reprints). This is a classic, firmly in the ICC tradition, with ample reference to the Versions. It deals with the Hebrew text but can be used easily by non-Hebraists. It does, in many respects, however, show its age.

R.B.Y. Scott, *Proverbs: Ecclesiastes; Introduction, Translation and Notes* (AB, 18; New York: Doubleday, 1965). As was the pattern in the earlier AB volumes, this volume contains an introduction followed by a new translation and fairly minimal notes, chapter by chapter.

W. McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1970). The first part of this work contains an in-depth analysis of non-Israelite wisdom texts, especially those from Egypt. The second part consists of a new translation followed by a detailed commentary. This is the most exhaustive commentary on Proverbs in English to date.

R.N. Whybray, *Proverbs* (NCB; Marshall Pickering, 1994). This, the most recent commentary in English, is, like the others in this series, 'based on the Revised Standard Version', but 'is concerned primarily with the elucidation of the Hebrew text of Proverbs'. It is full and detailed and the fruit of a lifetime's scholarship.

The following are the major commentaries in foreign language series:

A. Barucq, *Le Livre des Proverbes* (SB; Paris: Gabalda, 1964). This is a sound French Roman Catholic series with translation, textual notes and commentary.

B. Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos* (HAT, 16; 2nd edn, 1963). This is a reliable standard German series with translation, textual notes and a commentary. This second edition has taken advantage of the great progress in scholarship since the first edition of 1937.

A. Meinhold, *Die Sprüche* (2 vols.; ZB; Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1991). This Swiss Protestant series is intended for the church and contains an introduction, translation and fairly brief commentary.

O. Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos (Proverbia)* (BKAT, 17; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984). An excellent detailed and balanced commentary in the major German-language series with excellent bibliographies, translation, detailed textual notes and full commentary. The standard work in German.

H. Ringgren, *Sprüche* (ATD 16/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 3rd rev. edn, 1980). The nature of this series concentrates on translation (with minimal textual notes) and a commentary of a 'theological' nature.

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1

WISDOM LITERATURE IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

What is 'Wisdom Literature'?

THE WORDING OF THE TITLE of this first chapter can be regarded as descriptive in the main of three books of the Old Testament and of one which is contained in the Apocrypha: Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes constitute the former category and Ecclesiasticus (or The Wisdom of Ben Sira) the latter. There is another book in the Apocrypha which, by its very name, is also part of Jewish 'wisdom literature': the Wisdom of Solomon. However, unlike the other four books, it never existed in a Hebrew original; it is a book in the Greek language written by a Greek-speaking Jew in the context of the Jewish community of Alexandria in Egypt. It was not written in 'ancient Israel' and will therefore be left out of account here.

The book of Proverbs—the main subject of this study guide—comprises principally two types of material. We find a series of more or less sustained 'discourses' in chs. 1–9, while the remainder of the book contains for the most part single 'proverb-type' sentences with no apparent coherence in the way in which they have been gathered together. To Proverbs, its structures and its problems, we shall return in Chapters 2–5 of this book.

The book of Job is a wide-ranging poetic dialogue between Job and a series of friends, with a number of sections which do not appear to fit the plan of the book (e.g. the poem on 'wisdom' in ch. 28; the speeches of Elihu in chs. 32–37; the

fact that there are two speeches of Yahweh 38.1–40.2 and 40.6–41.34, each with a response from Job 40.3-5 and 42.1-6), all set within a prose framework (chs. 1–2; 42.7-17) usually thought to be an old folk-tale. Two main problems are dealt with by the book. The first is that of the suffering of the innocent, with Job, who feels that he is completely innocent of any wrong-doing, asking why he is being made to suffer in the way he is. This is a question which occurs in a number of passages in the immediately pre-exilic prophet Jeremiah (e.g. 15.10-21; 18.19-23; 20.7-18). It is raised also in a critique of the proverb 'Parents have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge' by both Jeremiah (31.29-30) and his almost exact contemporary Ezekiel (18.1-2). The other, more significant problem with which the book of Job deals is the question of theodicy, that is, given the existence of evil and injustice in the world, how God himself can be thought of as just. These are the basic questions with which Job struggles, and the only answer is in the questions hurled at *him* by God in his final speeches, questions which emphasize the great gulf that exists between Creator and creature and underline the impossibility of the latter's questioning of the former. The book of Job, its content, structure and themes are dealt with in the volume in this series by J.H. Eaton (1985).

The book of Ecclesiastes is a strange one. Its author—often known by his Hebrew 'name', Qoheleth—appears to be a sceptic who questions the value of human toil and the acquiring of wisdom or wealth or anything else which might seem to enhance life since all, be they wise or fool, rich or poor, come to the same end in death. All of life for Qoheleth is 'vanity' ('utter futility' [REB]). A number of passages in the book remind us that even though we follow Qoheleth's advice to enjoy life to the full, we nevertheless come under God's judgment. Such passages have sometimes been thought to have been added by a later writer or editor in an attempt to make Qoheleth's view of life more orthodoxly 'religious' and so secure its place in the canon. Again, this book and its problems have been discussed in the corresponding volume in this series by R.N. Whybray (1989).

The books of Job and Ecclesiastes have sometimes been thought to have arisen against a background of 'crisis' which

affected the whole 'wisdom' ethos in the ancient Near East, a time when the traditional responses to life which the wisdom movement gave were beginning to be profoundly questioned. The traditional 'wisdom' responses are what are purveyed by Job's three friends. The author of the book, through the mouth of Job, subjects these views to intense questioning. Qoheleth, in his turn, makes a different criticism of traditional wisdom by suggesting that none of it matters anyway, since all of life is futile. The exile was the great historical watershed which made Israel question so much of what she had, in the monarchical period, been largely happy to accept. It is certain that both Job and Ecclesiastes are post-exilic works, though it is difficult, given the nature of these two books, to be very precise as to their dating. Some have seen a Hellenistic influence in Ecclesiastes, but even though Qoheleth himself took Jewish ideas and thought modes as his point of departure, it is still fairly clear that the society from which he wrote was of the Ptolemaic period, that is the third century BCE. The book of Job is probably—though no more than probably—a little earlier than that.

The fourth wisdom book which is implied by this chapter's title, Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of Joshua Ben Sira (or 'of Jesus son of Sirach', to give his name its Greek form) can be dated more precisely. It was translated from Hebrew into Greek by the author's grandson, and he, as he himself tells us in the preface to his translation, settled in Egypt in 132 BCE, 'the 38th year of the reign of King Euergetes', who reigned as co-ruler with Ptolemy VI between 170–164 and as sole ruler, with the title 'Ptolemy VII Physkon Euergetes' from 146–117. Working back from that date, it is usually calculated that Ben Sira himself lived somewhere between 250 and 175 BCE and that his book was originally produced in Hebrew c. 180. For long the Hebrew was believed to have been lost, but at the end of the nineteenth century mediæval manuscripts containing sections of the Hebrew text were found in the lumber room of a Cairo synagogue. Subsequent discoveries of other fragments over the years mean that we now have about two-thirds of the book in its original language.

Ben Sira is a much more orthodox book than either Job or

Ecclesiastes. It restates the traditional Jewish doctrine of retribution and is essentially conservative in its thinking. It is almost certainly its comparatively late date that has denied it a place in the Hebrew Bible. It covers a wide range of topics and has developed the single-line proverb that is characteristic of much of the book of Proverbs into a short paragraph or even essay. But just as the collection of these sentences in Proverbs seems to lack coherence, so there is no obvious pattern to Ben Sira's collection either. Two things we find in Ben Sira which are almost entirely absent from earlier wisdom literature. One is that he gives a place to priesthood, temple and religious observance, culminating in a great eulogy of the High Priest Simon (Simon II son of Jochanan ['Onias' according to the Greek version], 219–196 BCE) in 50.1-24. The second is that, to some extent at least, he acknowledges the significance of Israel's history in his great 'Hymn to the Fathers' in chs. 44–49 (50). We also find here a more personal note than in any of the other wisdom books. This personal note appears at the end of the book both in the 'signature' that we find in 50.27-29 and in the 'advertisement' for Ben Sira's school in 51.23-30.

For a number of reasons—sometimes similarity of content or of ideas, sometimes commonality of language and vocabulary—other parts of the Old Testament have been regarded as having been open to the influence of the wisdom tradition. The most thorough study of this question, concentrating on the linguistic evidence, has been done by Whybray. After a careful analysis of the distribution of the root *ḥkm* ('wise') in the Hebrew Bible other than in the three wisdom books Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, he was able to argue that in the following fairly extensive sections of the Old Testament the influence of what he calls 'the intellectual tradition' of ancient Israel may be detected:

1. The Joseph Story (Gen. 37–50)
2. The Introduction to Deuteronomy (Deut. 1–4)
3. The Succession Narrative (2 Sam. 9-20; 1 Kgs 1–2)
4. The History of Solomon (1 Kgs 3–11)
5. Isaiah of Jerusalem (Isa. 1–39)
6. Jeremiah
7. Daniel

To these he adds a number of smaller sections, as well as about a dozen Psalms. This selection is made on the basis of the occurrence of 'wisdom vocabulary' in these sections, but that is not, of course, to say that what might be called a 'wisdom ethos'—if such can be determined on the basis of three such disparate books as Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes—pervades every corner of the sections pinpointed. Only detailed exegesis of the passages singled out on the 'vocabulary' basis will reveal how much—or how little—of what is generally referred to as 'wisdom' can be detected in them.

What is 'Wisdom'?

I have spoken about those literary works from ancient Israel which are commonly designated as 'wisdom literature', but I have not as yet attempted to define what is meant by the term 'wisdom' in that context. It might be helpful to look at a range of definitions that have been proffered by a number of different scholars.

> Experiential knowledge...the understanding of the world and of life, and not least...the understanding of reality (von Rad 1972).
>
> The ability to get on in the world, to adapt oneself to circumstances, to deal with difficult situations...an intellectual quality which provides the key to happiness and success, to 'life' in its widest sense...a superior degree of intelligence, natural or acquired, which confers 'life' (Whybray 1974).
>
> The effort to discover order in human life (Murphy 1978).
>
> The lessons and insights of experience on the basis of human conduct (Murphy 1981).
>
> Formally, wisdom consists of proverbial sentence or instruction, debate, intellectual reflection; thematically wisdom comprises self-evident intuitions about mastering life for human betterment, groping after life's secrets with regard to innocent suffering, grappling with finitude, a quest for truth concealed in the created world and manifested in Dame Wisdom. When a marriage between form and content exists, there is wisdom literature (Crenshaw 1982).

That last definition begins and ends with the literature which gives expression to these attempts on Israel's part at finding meaning in life and discovering the means of achieving success and happiness in that life. The 'forms'

which that definition describes are those of the books of Proverbs ('proverbial sentence or instruction'), Job ('debate') and Ecclesiastes ('intellectual reflection'). And when the forms of the first part of the definition and the themes of the second come together, the result is those books to which the name 'wisdom literature' is usually given. It is possible, as some writers have done, to be more specific in the definition of wisdom and to distinguish, for example, different *loci* where these attempts at finding meaning in life take place. These differences of place result in differences of emphases and of styles in presenting the results, and scholars have spoken of 'clan (or 'family') wisdom', of 'court wisdom', of 'theological wisdom'. I shall return to these categories later, but for the moment it is perhaps adequate to keep to a fairly broad concept of what is meant by wisdom in terms such as those that have been indicated in our selection of definitions above.

The Origin and Location of Wisdom in Israel

There is at the moment—or has been until recently—a commonly received scholarly consensus about the origins of wisdom and its arrival and indigenization in Israel. It runs broadly as follows. 'Wisdom' was taken over by Israel in the main from Egypt, where a body of instructional literature existed in the context of an educational system, the purpose of which was the training of young men for office in the state and at the royal court. The content of these Egyptian works is echoed in the Old Testament 'wisdom literature'. The Egyptian literature and its educational context were adopted and adapted at the beginning of the monarchical period of Israel's history, at the latest in the reign of Solomon (c. 961–922), when a complex bureaucratic system was set up particularly for fiscal purposes to collect the taxes that were to pay for Solomon's lavish lifestyle. The Egyptian educational system was transferred to Israel and there, too, budding civil servants were trained in schools which, in the first instance, were established in the context of the royal court but which soon transferred to other urban centres and through which a high degree of literacy became generally

available. The teachers in these schools were known as 'the wise men' (the *ḥ^{a}kāmîm*), and it was from their midst that there emerged, first of all, the collectors and editors of the material now contained in the book of Proverbs, in due course also the authors of Job and Ecclesiastes, and finally the headmaster of a school in the Jerusalem of the early second century BCE whose name was Joshua ben Sira.

In the last few years, however, many aspects of this scenario have been challenged. In spite of the undoubted similarities between the Egyptian instructional literature—and to a lesser extent a similar type of literature from Mesopotamia—and Israelite wisdom literature, is the former likely to have been borrowed quite so faithfully at that particular point in history and at these particular stages in the relative development of the two monarchies concerned? If the court were the original Israelite setting for such instruction, why are there so few traces of such a setting and of such a purpose—the training of bureaucrats and courtiers—in the surviving Israelite literature? If schools were so widespread, why is there virtually no trace of their existence, no explicit reference to them in the Old Testament? Was there in fact a body of professional teachers and writers in ancient Israel to whom the title 'wise men' was or would be given? In almost every respect, then, this 'commonly accepted' scenario for the emergence and transmission of the wisdom material in the Old Testament has been challenged. Let us look at these challenges in turn and try to assess what alternative explanations have been given.

The Foreign / International Origin of 'Wisdom'?

The impetus for an examination of this aspect of Israelite wisdom was given by the publication, in facsimile in 1923, of *The Instruction of Amenemope*, with further studies and translations over the following three years. It was immediately realized that the Egyptian work bears a very strong resemblance to Prov. 22.17–24.22. There has been debate over which was dependent on which and over whether the Proverbs text depended directly on Amenemope or whether both depended on a common 'older source'. The majority of scholars to date probably accept the dependence of Proverbs on Amenemope, but some have recently expressed serious

doubts about this (for a discussion see Whybray, *Composition*, pp. 132ff.). But even when the majority view of the Proverbs dependence is accepted, such dependence is clear only as far through the Proverbs section as 23.11. More importantly, however, this realization of an interrelationship between Amenemope and Prov. 22.17ff. led to a growing awareness on the part of scholars that ancient Israel's wisdom literature was not an isolated phenomenon but part of a wider, international scene with the other major cultures of the ancient Near East also providing examples—many of them quite sophisticated—of similar intellectual concerns and of comparable literary expressions of them. The similarities are most marked between Israel and Egypt, but comparisons have been made also with literature from Mesopotamia. The most detailed recent examination of these broader connections is found in the extensive 'Introduction' to W. McKane's commentary on Proverbs (1970), though his discussion is oriented mainly in terms of form and of the relationship between this foreign 'Instruction' literature and Proverbs 1–9.

It has become abundantly clear over the years that quite striking similarities exist between the Israelite wisdom literature and the corresponding literatures of Egypt and Mesopotamia, but apart from the relationship between Prov. 22.17–24.22 and the *Instruction of Amenemope*, it is unlikely that there was direct borrowing as such. Even if it were clear that the Israelite writers were aware of these Egyptian and Mesopotamian works, there remains the question of the date of such awareness and of its 'transference'—if this is how it is to be described—to Israel. The nature of the material in Proverbs makes it virtually impossible to date. It cannot, therefore, be determined when an awareness of Egyptian and Mesopotamian literature of this type emerged in Israel, nor is it easy to decide on the nature or the extent of the influence which it might then have had on the Israelite writers.

A Court Connection?

It has been generally assumed that knowledge of Egyptian instructional literature in particular became common currency in Israel with the advent of the monarchy and

especially with the setting up of the fairly complex bureaucracy which is often thought to be implied in the Solomonic establishment (1 Kgs 1–11). At that period, it has been argued, the need for the training of bureaucrats was met by the adoption of the techniques developed over the centuries in Egypt and found in literary form in these examples of the Instruction literature, of which *Amenemope* is but one example. In these Egyptian works instruction is given by a teacher to a pupil, mostly by a father to the son who is about to succeed him in office. The context is almost always that of the royal court and the persons involved the monarch (or a high official) and his son.

When we look at Israelite wisdom literature, however—and we are here concentrating primarily on Proverbs since Job and Ecclesiastes (not to mention Ben Sira) are clearly post-exilic works—there is virtually no material which might even originally have applied to the training of young men for positions at court or in a state bureaucracy. The only passages which deal in any very consistent way with kings are Prov. 16.10, 12-15 and 25.2-7. Only 31.1-9 can be compared explicitly with the Egyptian instructional material. Here is a passage which contains instructions to a (newly crowned?) king, though in this instance the advice is given by the king's mother. We have no idea, however, of the identity of King Lemuel. The REB, on the basis of a widely accepted alteration in the punctuation of the Hebrew text, describes him as being 'of Massa'. The proper name Massa occurs in Gen. 25.14 as one of the sons of Ishmael, and this may suggest some kind of north Arabian tribal location for this king. At any rate, he is certainly not Israelite, so this passage is not evidence that such instructional advice had become indigenized in Israel. The 'father–son' relationship is fairly widely present in Proverbs 1–9. This is usually taken as a figure for 'teacher–pupil' and assumed to arise from a school context. This last is another of the 'scholarly consensus' assumptions to which we shall return shortly. The kind of education provided in the book of Proverbs—and the same is true of both Ecclesiates and Ben Sira—is not, however, education for life at court or for a post in the ancient Israelite civil service but for life in general. Its aim is to tell the young men whom it

addresses how best to make a success of their life, especially in terms of their moral integrity, their standing in the community, their achievement of wealth and happiness. None of that is relevant exclusively to life at court or in the state bureaucracy, but primarily to life in the broadest sense, and to life for what we might call the upper- or middle-class male.

It does not, in any case, necessarily follow that proverbs about the king or the court have to stem from the milieu of king or court. An examination of collections of proverbs from African tribal communities makes it clear that such proverbs can be and are produced by people who are not themselves part of the court situation. A comparison with royal and court proverbs in Proverbs 10–29 shows that the perspective of such proverbs is that of the common man, of the people, and that it is improbable that such proverbs arose in the context of the court itself. Not only, then, is there no trace in Proverbs of the supposed 'training-for-life-at-court' origins of the wisdom movement, but what references there are to a royal or court context almost certainly do not originate in that context (Golka 1993).

Again a recent socio-archaeological study of the question of 'scribes and schools in monarchic Judah'—a study to which we shall return shortly from that specific point of view—has come up with a rather startling hypothesis about the beginnings of the state in Judah. The author has examined archaeological reports and studies from a wide range of sites in Judah, including Jerusalem, from three aspects: settlement patterns; the occurrence or otherwise of public buildings as evidence for the extent of centralized control of individual lives; the extent of the occurrence of luxury items as evidence for the wealth and prosperity of the community in question. On the evidence which he has examined he reaches the following conclusion:

> There is little evidence that Judah began to function as a state at all prior to the tremendous increases in population, building, production, centralization and specialization which began to appear in the 8th century...The levels of production and population were just too small in 10th century Judah to support the presence of a full-scale state; they seem more appropriate to a chiefdom...Judah was a small state in the 8th–7th centuries, but not before (Jamieson-Drake 1991: 138-39).

If Jamieson-Drake's analysis is correct, it would seem to suggest that there was no elaborate bureaucratic system immediately requiring trained officials in the early stages of the emergence of Israel to statehood. Here, then, we have another argument against the concept that wisdom in Israel emerged out of a need for skilled administrators.

If we compare the sociological system in tenth century Israel with the chronologically corresponding system in Egypt, we can see that the two states were quite unlike each other. By the time of David and Solomon, the Egyptian Empire had entered on its last period, a period of decline. The glories of the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms had passed. Israel, on the other hand, was only just in the earliest stages of the process of emerging as a state. If what we have noted a moment ago is correct, the sociological term appropriate to her situation is that of chiefdom. The latter is an evolutionary stage in societies between tribalism and kingship, when individual 'chiefly' figures emerge as leaders of varied non-egalitarian social groups (Martin 1989: 112-13 and references there). Only gradually do nations normally progress through that stage to the next one, that of full statehood. One of the difficulties of envisaging, as scholars have done, the period of the judges and of Saul as the 'chiefdom' stage in Israel's development, with the period from David onwards being that of the 'kingship/statehood' stage, is that the chiefdom stage would then, from the sociological point of view, be unusually, almost uniquely, foreshortened. On the evidence of this latest study, full statehood would not have been reached in the case of Judah until the eighth century. The biblical text, of course, presents a picture of full statehood having been established in the tenth century. This would be a reading back to an earlier stage of what, on archaeological evidence, does not seem to have happened until about two centuries later. The most that could be said about Solomon on Jamieson-Drake's hypothesis is that he can be credited with a setting in motion of the constitutional forces that led to a fully developed bureaucratic state by no earlier than the eighth century. But even if we were to adhere to the version of events as presented by the biblical text—as opposed to that suggested by the

socio-archaeological approach—Israel was in an embryonic position in the tenth century, while Egypt had already entered on her period of final decline. It is sociologically improbable that institutions which had developed over a long period in the Egyptian context would have transferred or have been susceptible of being transferred to a state in what, even on the basis of the biblical narrative, was an embryonic condition. Although states develop at different rates in differing contexts, this general point should caution us about an easy assumption of a transfer of institutions from a long established state to an embryonic one. Initially, however, it seems likely in any case that Israel, as she progressed from tribalism through chiefdom to kingship did not embrace a constitutional position radically different from what had gone before, but that the whole developmental process is to be regarded as a continuum, with monarchy, in its earlier phases at least, not an alien institution but a gradually evolving outgrowth of the chiefdom which not only preceded it but may well have endured for much longer than has generally been thought.

Schools in Monarchic Judah?

The monograph to which we have just been referring has, as its specific aim, the development of a model on a socio-archaeological basis which might provide a more secure answer to the question as to the existence or otherwise in monarchic Judah of schools, in the context of which 'wisdom' was supposedly transmitted and where what eventually blossomed into the 'wisdom literature' began to take root. Jamieson-Drake is not, of course, the only scholar to tackle this problem; it has been well argued before him. Instead of beginning, as scholars in the past have invariably tended to do, with the written biblical or even with epigraphic texts and asking whether archaeology can 'confirm' what can be deduced from such texts, the author, Jamieson-Drake, constructs his model on the basis of archaeology in tandem with sociology. We have already noted the three aspects which he examines in detail and have observed his conclusions about the extended period of chiefdom before a definitive establishment of statehood in the eighth century with its zenith in the seventh and its disappearance in the sixth. This eventual

disappearance is determined not only by external factors (Babylonian conquest) but also by internal ones, in the sense that the state had become so centralized in Jerusalem that on the latter's collapse in 586 BCE there was no other urban centre sufficiently capable of assuming control and ensuring subsequent continuity of the state. The result was the disappearance of the state of Judah as a political force.

Inscribed artefacts from the sites included in Jamieson-Drake's examination certainly reveal literacy in eighth/ seventh century Judah, but only in Jerusalem and in sites which were administratively and/or economically dependent on Jerusalem. If training in administrative skills—literacy and numeracy in particular—was provided, the likelihood is that such training was given in Jerusalem and only in Jerusalem. There is no archaeological evidence to suggest that it was provided generally or in what might be called 'schools'. Indeed, if we pass to the sociological mode of thought for a moment, the nature of the early state in Judah corresponds in the Egyptian context not to the contemporary post-New Kingdom decline but to the correspondingly early Egyptian state, namely the Old Kingdom of the third millenium BCE, somewhere between the twenty-eighth and the twenty-third centuries. In that context there were no schools; training to enable young men to take their place in society was on a 'family' basis, where an experienced official would take a young man into his home as a kind of apprentice and provide him with the essential training. Such pupils were known in that context as 'sons', even though they may not have been the physical children of the 'master' statesman. It is even possible that the more elementary instruction in basic reading and writing in the Egyptian Old Kingdom was also carried out on this basis. In Proverbs, especially in chs. 1–9, the young pupil is addressed by the instructor as 'my son'. This is usually understood as referring to the teacher–pupil relationship in a school situation, but it may be that in Judah, as in the Egyptian Old Kingdom, this instruction was provided in a domestic rather than a public context. This is also suggested by the two references—not many, to be sure, but they *are* there—to the *mother*'s 'teaching' in Proverbs 1–9 (1.8; 6.20).

Into this socio-archaeological model Jamieson-Drake then proceeds to integrate the biblical and epigraphic evidence which has, on the whole, been well rehearsed by earlier scholars. There is no explicit reference to 'schools' in Palestine any earlier than Ben Sira's to his own establishment in second-century BCE Jerusalem (51.23 'the house of instruction'). By this time, too, synagogues were probably beginning to serve as centres of learning, but they are certainly post-exilic phenomena. Our earliest direct evidence for their existence is from the third-century BCE Jewish diaspora. There is no biblical text which makes explicit reference to 'schools', and recourse has to be had to what might be called 'circumstantial' evidence, texts which might be thought to suggest or imply the existence of schools. Both Lemaire (1981: 34-45) and Crenshaw (1985; subsequently cited by Jamieson-Drake 1991: 150-54) list, with somewhat different contents, the biblical evidence most often cited in support of the existence of schools, but the bulk of the passages cited do not, in fact, provide evidence, even circumstantial, for their existence in the monarchical period. Some of them refer to the possible training of specific categories of people: king's sons (e.g. 1 Kgs 12.8; 2 Kgs 10.1-6), priests (1 Sam. 1–3), prophets (2 Kgs 6.1ff; Isa. 8.16; 50.4-6). Many of them simply refer to literacy in general—the ability to read and/or write (Deut. 24.3; Josh. 18.9; Judg. 8.13-17 etc). None of them indicates how such literacy was acquired, and none presupposes the existence of schools of any kind. Even when they refer to monarchical or even pre-monarchical periods, they do so from contexts which are largely of exilic or post-exilic composition. The biblical evidence, then, for 'schools' in monarchic Judah is virtually non-existent. The reference to the proverb-collecting (or 'proverb-editing'?) activities at the time of Hezekiah (late eighth century, the period, interestingly enough, when Jamieson-Drake argues for the first emergence of Judah into statehood) in Prov. 25.1 may be the only reliable hint of scribal activity and therefore, by implication, of scribal training. The latter would most likely be available to and for only an élite few.

The epigraphic material—as cited, for example, by Lemaire (1981: 7-33)—is equally scant. The existence of what

might appear to be exercises in writing incised on a step of the palace-fortress at Lachish seems very poor evidence for the existence of a 'school' there. If a school had existed even inside the palace, the pupils would scarcely have been sent to use as their exercise book one of the building's steps. Not even the most frequently cited example, the Gezer Calendar of the tenth century, can tell us anything more than that it was 'produced by someone learning to write, but it goes several steps beyond the evidence at hand to say that the person was a child, that there were schools, and that literacy was general' (Jamieson-Drake 1991: 157).

A Professional Class of 'Wise Men'?

Let us turn finally to the last of these aspects of the 'scholarly consensus', namely whether there existed in Israel a professional class known as 'the wise men'. There is no doubt but that the government of the state of Judah consisted of a body of men who were regarded as the king's advisers in all kinds of matters: political, financial and judicial. The idea that these 'political' advisers could be described by the technical term 'wise men' is based on Jer. 18.18 where, in the context of attempts to silence Jeremiah, those who are working for that end say:

> There will still be priests to guide us, still wise men to give counsel, still prophets to proclaim the word.

Whatever the precise sense of these words in the context of v. 18—and it is fairly widely agreed that v. 18 is an independent unit—they appear to be referring to three classes of 'professionals', each with their specific area of expertise: priests and *tōrāh* (guidance), wise men and *ʿēṣāh* (counsel), prophets and *dāḇār* (word). Clearly 'priests' and 'prophets' are easily thought of as 'professional' groups, and the assumption is often made that 'wise men' are as well. Indeed, McKane (1965) has built a whole view of wisdom (and, to some extent also, of the book of Proverbs) on the view that there is a radical confrontation between, on the one hand, hard-headed practitioners of statecraft ('the wise men') with their quite pragmatic advice (*ʿēṣāh*) on matters of state and, on the other, the prophets who proclaimed God's word (his *dāḇār*) on these same matters of state and warned

against departing from Yahweh's will and purpose for his people. It seems likely, however, that Jer. 18.18 is to be understood in a broader, more general sense. Whybray (1974: 28) regards it as a numerical saying without a title line (such as, for example, 'Three things shall never perish...'), a saying which is simply quoted in support of an argument for disregarding what Jeremiah is saying ('let us pay no heed to anything he says'). He is, after all, no different from all those other people who never stop talking: priests, prophets and 'wise men'. The last are not professionals any more than the two other categories are *in this context* describing professionals. They are simply a body of 'men of superior intelligence' (which is what the term 'wise' means in the wider Old Testament context), being so described in a rather deprecating way, a body of men who will always be found to have plenty to say on any subject you care to mention!

A number of passages in Isaiah, it is true, use the adjective 'wise' in contexts which some have thought to refer to political statecraft (e.g. 5.21; 10.13; 29.14; 31.1-3). All that such usage proves, however, is that the people so described thought of themselves as possessed of high intelligence. It is precisely that claim that Isaiah is seeking to refute. But though the word 'wise' is sometimes used in this political context in Isaiah, it is never found as a title for counsellors or politicians either in any administrative text or in any historical narrative. The term used of these people in such contexts is 'princes' (*sārīm*). A further examination by Whybray reveals also an absence of evidence which would indicate that the term 'the wise men' was used to describe a group of writers who might be thought to have been the authors of the material known collectively as the 'wisdom literature'. The most that can be said is that the authorial (or editorial) minds which lie behind (closely or distantly as the case may be) the books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of Ben Sira stand in what is best described as an 'intellectual tradition'. Whybray sums it up thus:

> The internal evidence of these three books [Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes] suggests that...there existed an educated class, albeit a small one, of well-to-do citizens who were accustomed to read for edification and pleasure, and that among them there arose from time to time men of literary ability and occasionally of

> genius who provided the literature which satisfied their demand...They constituted a separate 'tradition' only in the sense that they concerned themselves more than the majority of their contemporaries in an intellectual way with the problems of human life (Whybray 1974: 69-70).

The Origin of 'Wisdom'

We have seen the unlikelihood that wisdom is an importation into Israel from Egypt, though that is not to deny—many would consider such a denial to be impossible in the case of Prov. 22.17–24.22—that there has been an Egyptian influence certainly on the form, though in some cases also on the content, of some of the material found in the present book of Proverbs. Such influence is most prevalent in chs. 1–9 (see below Chapter 2), and these chapters are probably to be thought of as among the later stages of the development of the book. Certainly the personification of the figure of wisdom present alongside Yahweh in his creative activity 'long ago' (8.22-31) is a fairly sophisticated concept which would seem to be later than (or certainly independent of) the Priestly creation account in Genesis 1 and well on the way to an even more advanced concept in Ben Sira (Sirach) 24. The earliest material in Proverbs is most probably the individual 'sentences' which we have in 10.1–22.16 and in chs. 25–29, the two major 'Solomonic' collections in the book (see below Chapter 3). The view of their 'earliness' is not based on the older theories that the smallest units are oldest and the longer discourses of chs. 1–9 really amalgamations of smaller units, but simply on the fact that in these individual 'proverbs' we have the distillation of life's experience, the expression in succinct and pithy form of people's reflection on the problems and challenges which they have experienced in life and with which they have learned to cope. What they have thus learned finds its expression in 'proverbs'; and these experiences thus expressed were handed down to the next generation ('my son') and so on down the generations.

A number of scholars in recent years have examined in greater or less detail the proverbs of more modern non-literate peoples. This matter has been surveyed most recently in English by Golka (1993), though he confines his comparison specifically to African tribal societies. His conclusions are

that the 'proverb' is the basic literary form for the expression of 'wisdom'; that proverbs as a genre occur among non-literate peoples; that such proverbs are primarily popular in origin and only at a much later stage in their existence appear in literary contexts. He would argue that such is the case in the African context and is equally so in Israel. Israelite wisdom would therefore basically have sprung from the earliest history of those peoples which subsequently came to form 'Israel'.

There were, as we have seen, no schools as such in which this transmission process took place. It would, rather, have happened in the context of the family, either of the nuclear family or of the extended family. In the latter instance we are approaching what some writers have described as 'clan wisdom' (*Sippenweisheit*). It is in clan wisdom that a number of scholars, such as S. Terrien and H.W. Wolff, have seen, for example, the root and stock of Amos's cultural heritage. Some of the smaller units within Proverbs 10–31 may have varied backgrounds, as we shall see, and they certainly use imagery drawn from different contexts, especially, some of them, the world of nature, even of agriculture. These are, for the most part, of native Israelite provenance, and their first encounter with school or court will have been in the collecting (whatever the sense of the Hebrew verb *ʿtq* [Prov. 25.1] may be; REB 'transcribed') activity at the late eighth-century court of Hezekiah in Jerusalem. Even those parts of Proverbs which may betray, to some extent at least, Egyptian influence (22.17ff.; chs. 1–9) show no evidence of the circumstances or contexts of their supposed Egyptian counterparts but suggest, rather, a family context and inculcate training for life in general with their advice on how to gain happiness and standing in the community and how to keep themselves from the depradations of strong drink and prostitutes. The origins of the two overtly foreign corpuses—the sayings of Agur (30.1-4[?]) and the sayings of King Lemuel (31.1-9)—are completely obscure. They *may* come from the north Arabian context, from an area which seems to have been famed for its 'wisdom' (cf. the reference to 'all the men of the East' in 1 Kgs 4.30 [MT 5.10] and the range of references to 'Edomite' wisdom in the Old Testament, for

example Jer. 49.7; Obad. 8; the origin of Job's friend Eliphaz in the Edomite capital Teman).

The obscurity of origins is not in question by the time we come to the books of Job, Ecclesiastes and Ben Sira. By then the intellectual tradition is firmly established in Israel, as Ben Sira 24.8b-12 makes clear. Indeed, Job and Ecclesiastes, as we have already noted, are sometimes regarded as reactions to the so-called 'crisis of wisdom', the intellectual disturbance felt when men began to question what had long been established as the old certainties about how to cope with life. The traditional views, expressed by Job's three friends, are challenged by the author of the book speaking through the mouth of Job. Qoheleth, with his roots set firmly within Judaism, nevertheless writes out of the context of early Hellenism, as does also, to some extent, Ben Sira. But these late flowerings are from a stock that is almost certainly largely native Israelite and of popular origin.

Further Reading

Brief general outlines of the wisdom books may be found in the standard 'Introductions' to the Old Testament. For example:

O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 470-77 (Proverbs); pp. 454-70 (Job); pp. 491-500 (Ecclesiastes); pp. 595-600 (Ben Sira).

B.S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979), pp. 545-59, 526-44, 580-89.

R. Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (London: SCM Press, 1985), pp. 255-58; 250-55; 265-67.

J.A. Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 3rd edn, 1989), pp. 445-58, 449-57, 462-68, 523-31.

Job and Ecclesiastes have already been covered in this series:

J.H. Eaton, *Job* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985).

R.N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989).

Studies of the presence of wisdom motifs in other parts of the Old Testament may be found in

D.F. Morgan, *Wisdom in the Old Testament Traditions* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981).

R.N. Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament* (BZAW, 135; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974).

General works on the wisdom movement are

G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1972).

J.L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (London: SCM Press, 1982).

The following are review articles on trends in earlier studies:

R.B.Y. Scott, 'The Study of the Wisdom Literature', *Int* 24 (1970), pp. 20-45.
J.L. Crenshaw, 'Prolegomenon', in J.L. Crenshaw (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* (New York: KTAV, 1976), pp. 1-60.
—'The Wisdom Literature', in D.A. Knight and G.M. Tucker (eds.), *The Hebrew Bible and its Modern Interpreters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 369-407.

Translations of Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom literature may be found in *ANET*, pp. 405-40, with discussion of a number of them in McKane, *Proverbs* (1970), pp. 51-208.

The idea of wisdom as statesmanship is expounded in

W. McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men* (London: SCM Press, 1965).

The origins of Israel as a state are discussed in

J.D. Martin, 'Israel as a Tribal Society', in R.E. Clements (ed.), *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 95-117.
K.W. Whitelam, 'Israelite Kingship: The Royal Ideology and its Opponents', in Clements (ed.), *World of Ancient Israel*, pp. 119-39.
D.W. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-Archaeological Approach* (JSOTSup, 109; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), pp. 138-45.

The question of schools in ancient Israel is discussed in

A. Lemaire, *Les Ecoles et la Formation de la Bible dans l'ancien Israël* (OBO, 39; Fribourg: Editions Universitaires, 1981).
F.W. Golka, *The Leopard's Spots* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), pp. 4-15 (previously published as an article in German in 1983).
A. Lemaire, 'Sagesse et Ecoles', *VT* 34 (1984), pp. 270-81.
J.L. Crenshaw, 'Education in Ancient Israel', *JBL* 104 (1985), pp. 601-15.
Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools*.

The 'intellectual tradition' in ancient Israel, as well as many of the other topics covered by this chapter, is discussed in

Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition*.

The 'popular' origins of Israelite wisdom are discussed in

Golka, *The Leopard's Spots*, pp. 16-35 (previously published in German in 1986).

Many of the topics covered in this chapter are dealt with in

S. Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

2

PROVERBS 1–9

The Structure of the Book as a Whole

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS contains a series of titles which appear to delimit a number of different sections into which the book may be divided. They are as follows:

1.1	'The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel'
10.1	'The proverbs of Solomon'
22.17	'Words of wise men' (so on the basis of a widely accepted emendation of the Hebrew text; for more detailed discussion see below, Chapter 4)
24.23	'These too are attributable to wise men'
25.1	'These too are the proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah transcribed'
30.1	'The words of Agur son of Yaqeh'
31.1	'The words of Lemuel, king of Massa, which his mother taught him' (this implies a repunctuation of the Hebrew text)

On the basis of these headings, the book would appear to be divisible into the following sections:

I. 1.1–9.18, though recognizing that the heading in 1.1 is probably intended to serve as the heading for the book as a whole. Since, however, there is a new beginning in 10.1, 9.18 marks the end of a section which, since there are no intervening indications to the contrary, will have begun with 1.2.

II. 10.1–22.16, a collection of single-line proverbs which do not, at least at first sight, appear to be arranged in any logical or coherent order. There is here the

possibility, as we shall see in due course, of subdivision into two sub-sections (a) 10.1–15.33 and (b) 16.1–22.16.

III. 22.17–24.22. Since 22.20 has often been thought to refer to 'thirty [sayings]' (for details see Chapter 4), a number of commentators have, with substantial agreement among themselves, found 30 'proverbs' or 'sayings' in the section down to 24.22, that is, to the point immediately preceding the next heading.

IV. 24.23-34, though this is probably not an entirely independent section. In view of the wording of the heading 'These too...', it looks like an appendix to what immediately precedes it, probably additional to the 'thirty' sayings of that basic collection.

V. 25.1–29.27, a further collection of the same type of single-line proverbs as is found in section II. The title of this collection indicates some kind of collecting or editing activity with regard to this material during the reign of Hezekiah (715–687). As was the case with section II, this collection may be susceptible of subdivision: (a) chs. 25–27 and (b) chs. 28–29.

VI. 30.1-33. If Agur is correctly described as coming from Massa (see below Chapter 4), then both this section and the following one are explicit examples of non-Israelite wisdom in the book of Proverbs. The next heading is in 31.1, but whether the 'words of Agur' in fact continue to the end of ch. 30 is debateable. From v. 15 onwards we seem to be, though not consistently even there, in the context of a group of 'numerical sayings'. Some commentators would regard the Agur material as not reaching beyond v. 4.

VII. 31.1-31. The heading here again probably indicates wisdom material of foreign, north Arabian provenance. In this instance, however, the 'words of Lemuel' reach no further than v. 9, since v. 10 begins a 22-line poem in praise of a model wife, in which each line begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, a literary form known as an acrostic. This last is clearly a separate and independent piece.

Having outlined the structure of the book of Proverbs as a whole, we shall look at these sections individually in more detail. The remainder of this chapter, however, will be concerned only with chs. 1–9.

Proverbs 1–9: A Guided Reading

It is fairly clear from a superficial reading of Proverbs 1–9 that we are not dealing here (as we are, for example, in 10.1–22.16) with a collection of single-line proverbs but with one of longer, more sustained pieces. Some of these are addressed in the second person singular to an individual ('my son') by another individual who often refers to himself in the first person singular ('*my* son', 1.8; '*my* words', 2.1) and who appears to be either a teacher or, perhaps, a parent (cf. 'father' and 'mother' in 1.8). Some are addressed to a more general audience (e.g. 'simple men', 1.22) by a personified wisdom (1.20-33; 8.1-36; cf. also 9.1-6).

The majority of more recent commentators on Proverbs develop to a greater or lesser degree a comparison between a type of literature characteristic of the Egyptian educational system and known as 'Instruction' and the kind of material which we find for the most part in Proverbs 1–9. The form of the 'Instruction' is basically that of the Imperative (command, admonition) followed by a motive clause ('because...') and often also followed by a final or purpose clause ('so that...') expounding the consequence of following the advice proffered by the parent or teacher. 'The Instruction commands and exhorts and gives reasons why its directives should be obeyed' (McKane 1970: 3). Whybray has a more detailed description of the structure of what he calls the 'discourses' of Proverbs 1–9 (1965; 1994), but he too lays emphasis on the authoritative preceptual nature of this material.

The connections between Israelite and non-Israelite wisdom material had been noted in a fairly general way as early as the 1920s, but Whybray was the first in print (1965) to make a detailed study of chs. 1–9 in relation to the Egyptian Instruction literature. He was quickly followed by Christa Kayatz (1966) who was pursuing a broadly similar

kind of approach. While R.B.Y. Scott, whose Anchor Bible commentary on Proverbs and Ecclesiastes appeared in 1965, has a section in his 'General Introduction' which deals with the international aspect of wisdom, he does not go on to develop to any great extent against the international background what he has to say about chs. 1–9. Subsequent commentators have fairly consistently pursued this line of comparison. McKane even goes so far as to say, 'any criticism of Proverbs 1–9 which does not hinge on a comparison with extra-Israelite models of the Instruction is so unbalanced as to have little value' (1970: 279).

After the initial title which is probably intended to refer to the book as a whole, chs. 1–9 are introduced by a prologue in 1.2-7, the aim of which is to explain the purpose of the material which follows. Verses 2, 3, 4 and 6 each begin in Hebrew with 'to + infinitive' expressive of purpose or intention. It has been suggested that v. 5—the odd one out—originally followed v. 6. Verse 7 specifically roots the knowledge/wisdom/instruction of which vv. 2-6 speak in faith in Israel's God Yahweh. Some have thought that this connection with Yahwistic piety did not originally belong in the context of wisdom literature and is a later accommodation to normative Israelite religious belief.

The remainder of ch. 1 comprises two addresses. The first (vv. 8-19) is delivered to an individual ('my son') and warns him against falling into bad company. It includes a verbatim account of the enticements of those who would lead the young man astray (vv. 11-14). Whether this warning is given by a teacher who is thought of as his pupil's 'father' or literally by a parent to a child is an issue that is debated, but the reference to the 'mother's teaching' (v. 8b) might, in this instance at least, more strongly suggest a family context. The second address (vv. 22-33, with introduction in vv. 20-21) is delivered by a personified wisdom, who stands in the town's busiest places to attract an audience of those who have need of her ('simple ones', v. 22) and who might be persuaded to hear and heed what she has to say. The bulk of this address is couched in negative terms of the fate of those who refuse to heed (vv. 24-32); only the final verse is positive in tone. It is also a curious mixture of second person address (vv. 22-27)

and third person reference (vv. 28-33). For a fuller discussion of the personification of wisdom see further Chapter 5 below.

Chapter 2 has a more obvious formal structure than the other chapters in this collection and has been considered by some to be programmatic of the content of chs. 3–7. It can be divided into six stanzas: vv. 1-4 (4 lines); 5-8 (4 lines); 9-11 (3 lines); 12-15 (4 lines); 16-19 (4 lines); 20-22 (3 lines), making two balanced halves of 4 + 4 + 3 lines each. Stanzas 2 and 3 both begin with the same phrase ('then you will understand', vv. 5 and 9), and stanzas 4 and 5 also both begin with the same phrase ('to save you', vv. 12 and 16). Stanzas 1 and 6 form the introduction and conclusion respectively, but, more importantly, the themes treated in stanzas 2-5 are then taken up and developed in subsequent discourses:

Stanza 2: the pupil's relationship with God; cf. 3.1-12.
Stanza 3: the pupil's possession of wisdom; cf. 3.13-24; 4.(1)5-9.
Stanza 4: avoidance of evil; cf. 4.14-19.
Stanza 5: avoidance of the adulteress; cf. 5.1-20; 6.20-35; 7.1-27.

For more detail and alternative views on the structure of this chapter see below pp. 43-44, 46, 49-50.

Chapter 3 contains two addresses to the pupil, both introduced by 'My son': vv. 1-12 and 21-35. (The 'my son' in v. 11 is not, as it so often is, indicative of the beginning of a new section but is, rather, in this instance resumptive. In the Hebrew text it does not, in any case, stand at the beginning of the verse.) The first of these addresses begins in more general terms, advising adherence to the proffered advice but moving on to speak of trust in Yahweh and duties towards him. The second address is again in terms of following wisdom and understanding and thus finding a secure life. Part of it is advice against anti-social behaviour (vv. 27-30), and it ends by painting a contrast between wicked and upright (vv. 31-35). The central section of the chapter, vv. 13-20, is different in tone, beginning not with a command—as so much of this 'instructional' material does—but with 'happy is the man who...'. The fact that v. 13 begins with 'happy' and v. 18 ends with it might suggest that this section ends with v. 18. Verses 19-20, though speaking of wisdom as do vv. 13-18, touch on the idea of 'wisdom' as God's instrument in creation, a topic which will be developed more fully in 8.22-31.

Chapter 4 contains a series of addresses. The first of these (vv. 1-9) is addressed to 'sons' in the plural instead of the more usual 'my son' in the singular. The plural recurs in 5.7 and 7.24 in the mouth of the teacher and in 8.32 in the mouth of personified wisdom without any apparent significance. The passion of the teacher is exemplified in this first address by the repetition of the command above all to acquire wisdom (vv. 5 and 7). In this instance, too, there is an address within an address (vv. 4-9), the teacher thereby passing on what had been taught him by his father. Again the reference to the 'mother' (v. 3) suggests a genuine family context, though the counter-argument, that the plural 'sons' in v. 1 suggests a school rather than a family context, has also been advanced. In vv. 10-19 we find a second address with its usual beginning ('Listen, my son'). Its content is an exposition of the difference between two ways, the 'path of wisdom' (vv. 11-13) and the 'way of evildoers' (vv. 14-17). Verses 18-19 point up the difference in summary fashion using the images of light and darkness. The third address (vv. 20-27; 'my son') in a sense continues the motif of the way (vv. 25-27) but inculcates a degree of single-mindedness as a means to fulness of life (vv. 22-23).

Chapter 5 takes up the theme that was announced in 2.16-19, a theme that recurs several times in chs. 1–9, namely that of the so-called 'foreign woman' (6.20-35; 7.1-27; cf. also 9.13-18). While some have proposed a cultic interpretation for this woman (the image of 'harlotry' is used by the prophets [cf. Hos. 1–3; Jer. 2–3] for Israel's lapses into idolatry, and the cultic prostitution which was a feature of Canaanite fertility cults was a frequent snare to the Israelites), it seems, however, that here, and in the other passages where the woman occurs, she is simply the adulteress (so the REB translation), perhaps even, as is suggested in the Egyptian literature, literally a foreign woman who is 'far away from her husband' (*ANET*: 420a). Verse 3 describes her seductive allure, and the disasters of yielding to her are depicted in vv. 4-14 with a quotation of the words of one who has not heeded his teachers' advice and finds himself 'almost brought to ruin' (vv. 12-14). By contrast, the advice to the pupil is to devote himself to the love of his own wife, and this

is elaborated mainly in terms of water imagery (vv. 15-20). The chapter concludes with a return to the negative aspect of heedlessness, again expressed in terms of ways and paths (vv. 21-33; cf. 4.10-19).

Chapter 6 comprises a collection of four short units (vv. 1-19) before returning to the style of the address ('my son'), again on the theme of adultery (vv. 20-35). Of the four shorter units in vv. 1-19, the first is in the usual address form ('my son'). The unusual feature of these four units is that they deal with quite specific situations or conditions which should be avoided. The first of them (vv. 1-5) warns against extending surety for one's neighbour (v. 1b, 'for a stranger'; the masculine equivalent of the 'foreign woman'?). If one has done so, one should lose no time in extricating oneself from the agreement. In vv. 6-11 the sluggard is pointed to the ant as an example to be followed if he wishes to avoid poverty and want. Thirdly, in vv. 12-15, we have a picture of the habitual mischief maker who brings on himself inevitable calamity, a model to be avoided. Lastly in this group of four, we have in vv. 16-19 what is known as a 'graded numerical saying', a literary form where things to be remembered or, as here, avoided are enumerated by a formula 'x and x + 1'. There is a collection of numerical sayings, though not all of them 'graded', in 30.15-31. In this type of saying, which is found also in other literatures of the ancient Near East, it is the second number ('x + 1') which is determinative of the content of the list that follows. Here in vv. 16-19 various types of anti-social behaviour are categorized as being hateful to Yahweh. Verses 20-35 are again in the form of an address ('my son'), and after an introduction in general terms in vv. 20-23, v. 24 brings us to the topic of the section which is once again adultery. Here the adulteress is specifically one's 'neighbour's wife' (v. 29, possibly also v. 24 according to the LXX). Thieves, by comparison (vv. 30-31), get off lightly if caught; the man who commits adultery destroys his very self (v. 32) and lays himself open to the terrible vengeance of the wronged husband (vv. 34-35).

Chapter 7 agains deals with the theme of adultery and includes a long central section (vv. 6-23) which contains a vivid description of the teacher's observation of an

unsuspecting youth passing by the woman's house, of how the woman, dressed like a prostitute (v. 10), comes out and entices him with cajoling words (vv. 14-20) and of how he follows her unresistingly, unaware that he goes to certain death (vv. 21-23). The chapter begins in the style of the address ('my son'), where the pupil is enjoined to heed his teacher's words so that he may be kept from succumbing to the wiles of the adulteress (vv. 1-5). The address style recurs at the end ('sons', plural), where again the 'ways/path' imagery recurs, and emphasis is laid on the fatal ('Sheol'/'halls of death') attractions of the adulteress (vv. 24-27).

Chapter 8 returns to a motif which has featured already in 1.20-33, namely a speech by a personified wisdom (see further Chapter 5 below). Again, as in 1.20-21, this female figure appears in public places, at the crossroads and at the city gates, to invite the 'simpletons' (v. 5; cf. 1.22) to listen to what she has to say. The value of wisdom is greater than gold, silver or jewels (vv. 10-11), and this picks up a theme already adumbrated in 3.14-15. Verses 15-16, with their concept of the role of wisdom in successful government and administration of justice, point to what has often been regarded as the context of the original function in Israel of the ideas which find their eventual expression in the wisdom literature (see above Chapter 1, pp. 18-19). The innovatory aspect of this chapter, however, comes in vv. 22-31 where wisdom describes herself as created in the first of Yahweh's creative acts (vv. 22-26) and afterwards being a participant alongside Yahweh in the continuing creative process (vv. 27-31). There is debate as to whether wisdom here is simply a vivid personification of one of Yahweh's attributes, developing an idea already referred to in 3.19-20, or whether there lies behind this passage a memory of a goddess, dating from a polytheistic period in Israel's past (see below Chapter 5, pp. 85-87). There is also—lying somewhere between these two points of view on these few verses—a theologizing aspect of wisdom here which finds further expression and development in Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 24, where wisdom is finally detached from its international context, indigenized in Israel and identified with Torah or Law (Sir. 24.1-23). This is a

road which also leads, by other routes, to the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel (Jn 1.1-3; see below Chapter 5, pp. 87-89). The chapter ends with wisdom again urging her listeners ('sons', plural, v. 32) to heed what she has to say. The contrast between those who accept her and those who reject her is expressed in terms of 'life' and 'death' (vv. 35-36).

Chapter 9 presents two contrasting invitations. The first is proffered by wisdom, who has built her house and has invited guests ('the simple', v. 4) to an inaugural banquet (vv. 1-6). The other is proffered by the foolish woman ('The Lady Stupidity' in REB; more usually 'Dame Folly', v. 13) who, like the adulteress in 7.10-23 and like wisdom herself, appears in public places ('the highest part of the town', v. 14; cf. v. 3 and 8.2) and addresses her invitation to her banquet to the same audience ('simpletons', v. 16, the identical word in Hebrew to that used in v. 4). Folly's invitation is not left to stand on its own; a warning is added to the effect that acceptance of her invitation has inevitable, fatal consequences (v. 18). The two invitations (vv. 1-6, 13-18) are separated by a little section of general advice. Verses 7-9 have a common theme of how differently rebuke is accepted by the scoffer on the one hand and the wise on the other. Verses 10-12 may have been intended to spell out the consequences of accepting wisdom's invitation in much the same way as v. 18 comments on the consequences of accepting folly's invitation, but if so, the text is not in its original form. Verse 11 implies that wisdom is still the speaker ('by me...'), whereas she is spoken of in the third person in v. 10, and v. 12 would be a not very forceful conclusion.

The Structure of Proverbs 1–9 and its Relationship to Ancient Egyptian Instruction Literature

Whybray (1965) was the first to make a detailed comparison between Proverbs 1–9 and that literary genre known in ancient Egypt and described as 'Instruction'. This last is a descriptive title for a series of works, ranging in date from c. 2400 BCE to somewhere in the fifth or fourth centuries BCE, which are in the form of an instruction from a teacher to a pupil—indeed often from a father to a son—where the

teacher provides guidance for the pupil on the basis both of his own experience and of the knowledge which he himself has received from the preceding generation. The gist of the content of these works is to fit the pupil for the assumption of high office in the administration of the country, sometimes even of kingship itself.

Whybray begins his study, however, with a literary critical examination of Proverbs 1–9, on the basis of which he concludes not only that there is more than one concept of wisdom to be found in these chapters—a human wisdom which the teacher passes on to his pupil and a personified divine wisdom which appeals directly to men—but also that what were originally fairly short passages have been expanded at later stages in their transmission. Primarily on the basis of the latter conclusion, Whybray posits as the basis of Proverbs 1–9 what he calls a 'Book of Ten Discourses'. He categorizes this as an instructional handbook for use in the classroom and addressed to young men who are being educated for adult life. He admits differences between the Egyptian instructions and his 'Book of Ten Discourses' but argues that comparison is inevitable, most notably with the *Instruction of Amenemope*—though it has to be said that the influence of this text is most marked not on Proverbs 1–9 but on 22.17–24.22. Although the only extant complete text of Amenemope is fairly late (possibly seventh/sixth century BCE), recently discovered fragments enable us to date the book fairly precisely to c. 1100 BCE.

Although there are areas where the Egyptian instructions and the Israelite 'Discourses' are pursuing similar goals—the concept of order in life, the role of God in that order and in relationship to man, and the ideal of the man who will live a life of conformity to the order and practise self-control in all that he does—even what Whybray regards as the basic material in Proverbs 1–9 is presented in *Israelite* terms, and there has been no slavish borrowing.

In his 1965 book Whybray holds that the basic ideas and aims of both Egyptian instructions and Hebrew discourses are the same and were written for use in scribal schools, an institution which the Israelites had borrowed from the Egyptians together with their curriculum. In a later work

(1974), however, he has argued that the school *qua* institution had probably never existed in Israel and that education had probably been of a more private nature and certainly had nothing to do with professional training for belonging to a class of 'wise men'. In a still later work he indicates that the material on Proverbs 1–9 'represents more recent thinking and some modification of my earlier views' (1994: 7). Nevertheless, he adheres to his earlier analysis of the material in Proverbs 1–9 and of its relationship to the corresponding Egyptian literature. His 'modification' concerns primarily the context for which and in which the 'Discourses' were written and used. This is still educational material even though he would now believe that that education was essentially family centred or, at most, privately conducted in a mainly one-to-one relationship of teacher and pupil.

Whybray then goes on to argue (1965) that this compact 'Book of the Ten Discourses' (with a Preface in 1.1-5) was subsequently expanded to its present form of chs. 1–9 in two stages. In the basic 'Discourse' the teacher made exclusive demands for the value and importance of what he had to say. In ch. 2, to take but one example, that basic discourse is found in vv. 1, 9, 16-19, a grouping which is paralleled almost exactly in 5.1-8, a passage where the original shape of the discourse is the more clearly visible since additions to it have been made for the most part at the end. In the first stage of development there have been groups of sayings attached which identify the purely human teaching contained in the Discourses, and for which such strong claims were made, with 'wisdom'. In the context of ch. 2, this development has taken place with the addition to the basic discourse of vv. 2-4 and 10-15. Mostly these additions have been inserted into the basic Discourse (in ch. 2 after v. 1 and v. 9) and even sometimes grammatically attached to it. Verses 2-4 of ch. 2 use 'the device of adding additional, parallel protases and apodoses to the simple conditional sentence' of v. 1, while vv. 10-15 have been appended to v. 9 'by means of an explanatory clause beginning with "for"' (1965: 41). In Whybray's view this first development took place already in the pre-exilic period.

The second stage of development was of a more theological

nature and is to be located in the post-exilic period. In this group of passages, the 'wisdom' which was identified with the human teacher's demands and claims is now regarded as Yahweh's wisdom and is claimed to have been associated with Yahweh from the beginning of time. That is the nature and intention of 2.5-8, where it is unequivocally stated (v. 6) that 'it is the Lord who bestows wisdom'. Wisdom is now 'the fear of Yahweh', that is 'the practice of the religion of Yahweh in all its aspects'. All of the passages which form this second stage of supplementation are directly appended (with one exception, 1.7) to passages which belong to the first developmental stage. It is clear from that, Whybray argues, that their purpose is to supplement and modify the view that was expressed in that earlier stage of expansion.

Whybray's main argument for his literary analysis and subsequent dissection of Proverbs 1–9 is that the chapter as a whole (again taking ch. 2 as our example) is 'extremely repetitive', with 'the same thought...often wearisomely repeated' (1965: 40-41). Whether this constitutes sufficient grounds for such literary dissection may be questioned. Part of the basis, too, for his approach to the diffuse nature of Proverbs 1–9 is that he regards the Egyptian Instructions, which he uses as his paradigms, as models of succinctness and conciseness. But the Egyptian texts are not always as concise as he envisages them to be, and, in any case, even where there is an element of apparent reinterpretation in a text, this is not necessarily evidence for a later addition to a more concise original. Whybray, of course, appeals primarily to 5.1-8, which he regards as a model discourse, 'a concise and satisfactory unit'; but it might be argued that even there v. 2—while it does not contain the precise term 'wisdom', it does include two synonyms for 'wisdom', namely 'discretion' (*mezimmōt*) and 'knowledge' (*da'at*)—may already betray a development along the lines of Whybray's first, pre-exilic stage. His literary and form-critical analysis of the text of Proverbs 1–9 may have been influenced by decisions he had felt himself already led to by observations of different types of content within these chapters.

McKane has a different approach to the nature and composition of Proverbs 1–9 and brings to it two main contri-

butions. The first is the view which he worked out in a study contemporary with but completely independent of that of Whybray (1965). McKane finds in the Old Testament a conflict between the 'counsel' of the wise man and the 'word' of the prophet. The 'wise man' has an essentially political role and functions in a context of statesmanship. In that world—the world of what scholars have referred to as 'old wisdom'—there is no place for Yahwistic piety, and, in McKane's view, it is only at a later stage that the great prophets took over the wisdom vocabulary and reinterpreted it in Yahwistic terms. McKane brings this judgment to bear on the present form of Proverbs 1–9, and he sees there an original core which bears no trace of Yahwistic piety. Those elements in Proverbs 1–9 which speak of Yahweh and introduce ethical terminology such as the 'righteous/wicked' contrast and such concepts as 'justice' and 'equity' are later additions to that basic core.

The other contribution which McKane brings to the study of Proverbs 1–9 is a thorough examination of the Egyptian Instruction literature, and this is given an extensive treatment at the beginning of his commentary (1970: 51-150). Here McKane is concerned not only with the content of the Instructions but above all with their form that is characterized by imperatives and motivations which he finds extensively represented in what he believes to be the oldest stratum in Proverbs 1–9, and which he describes there too as 'Instruction'. The content of the Instruction in Israel is no longer training for statecraft as it was in Egypt, though McKane would accept that such material may initially have arrived in Israel to serve that precise purpose. In the Israelite context, however, instruction is for the young men of the community to enable them to live successful and rounded lives in that community. Most of the material in Proverbs 1–9 which has the *form* of the Instruction (imperatives, motive clauses, conditional clauses) inculcates hard-headed wisdom but contains nothing that is characteristically Yahwistic or even Israelite. Some of it, however, has been coloured by Yahwistic piety, and some of it is concerned with anti-social behaviour. It is only gradually that this original, quite mundane wisdom of the Instruction

genre becomes the servant of Yahwistic piety and one of the means by which the latter is inculcated.

The antithesis which McKane finds between 'old wisdom' and the ethos of Yahwistic piety is not so marked in Proverbs 1–9 as it is in the sentence literature of chs. 10ff., and to that I shall return in the next chapter. His analysis in chs. 1–9 is more in terms of form and grammar, and it is the imperative that for him is *the* characteristic of the genre of 'Instruction'. In ch. 2—to keep to the same example as we have used in looking at Whybray's analysis above—McKane has to admit that the imperative is absent completely. To that extent he hesitates to refer to this chapter as 'Instruction' in the fullest sense, but nevertheless, because of the structure of the chapter with 'if...then...' clauses followed by 'for...' and 'so that...' clauses, he feels that ch. 2 is 'related to the Instruction' and that in spite of 'a loss of compactness and precision over against the Instruction', the chapter does provide an example of 'formal development based on the Instruction'. What has happened is that the more formal, precise style of the Instruction has, in the chapter as a whole, been replaced by 'the more diffuse rambling style of preaching'. In that way McKane accommodates the 'Yahwistic piety' element which he discerns in the book of Proverbs to that of the 'old wisdom' aspect of the pure Instruction, but he does so by suggesting that this chapter is, at the end of the day, the product of those who have adapted 'the vocabulary of wisdom' to a 'frame of religious commitment and its derivative morality' (1970: 277-81).

So, while McKane succeeds to some extent in fusing his two opposing elements—'old wisdom'/'Yahwistic piety'—in the context of ch. 2, he really does so by subordinating the former to the latter, with the chapter as a whole emanating from the hands of the Yahwists. I shall have more to say about this dichotomy when we look at the sentence literature and shall see in that context that McKane's elaborate scheme has been imposed on material which may not need such complexity for comprehension.

The very different analyses of Proverbs 1–9 by Whybray and McKane do not, of course, exhaust the possibilities, and almost everyone who has written on the book of Proverbs as

a whole or on chs. 1–9 in particular has his or her own view of the structure of these opening chapters of the book. Scott (1965), for example, also sees 'Ten Discourses' in these chapters, but Scott's 'Discourses' are not identical with Whybray's 'Book of the Ten Discourses'; they are longer and more sustained pieces on the whole, with ch. 2, for example, figuring in its entirety as Scott's 'Second Discourse'. There are elements in chs. 1–9 which Scott believes stand outside the discourses proper, and these are classed either as 'poems' (e.g. 1.1-33 and 8.1-36) or as 'expanded proverbs' (e.g. 6.6-11 and 9.7-9).

A number of writers structure the chapters round the major themes with which they deal. Plöger in his commentary (1984) sees chs. 4–7 as the core of this section of the book which develops, sometimes in several different ways and located at different points in the present structure, a number of themes which were first adumbrated in the opening chapters of the book, especially those of warning against the wicked and against the 'foreign woman' (1.7–3.35). The section as a whole is rounded off both by a first person speech by a personified wisdom (ch. 8) which balances a similar speech already in 1.20-33 and by a unique chapter (ch. 9) which comprises a narrative with wisdom citations, a chapter which has its own history of development. There are, in addition, a number of places where material unrelated to any of the major themes under discussion has been subsequently inserted: 3.27-35, for example, at the end of the preliminary material and just prior to the central core of chs. 4–7 and 6.1-19, an insertion perhaps occasioned by the final verses of ch. 5 (5.21-23) and serving to highlight, when it comes, the very full treatment of the adulterous woman in ch. 7. This compilation of differing treatments of a small number of major themes certainly accounts for the element of repetition and prolixity which worried Whybray, though it does not necessarily explain why some final editor did not attempt to impose what we would think of as order and cohesion on the final compilation. Barucq, too, centres his treatment of Proverbs 1–9 round the major themes, of which he highlights: (a) paternal warnings against evil companions; (b) warning against the adulterous woman; and

(c) exaltation of wisdom as a treasure of great value. He also admits a number of extraneous elements such as others have already noted (3.27-35 and 6.1-19) and warns against viewing Proverbs 1–9 as a unity, in spite of its form—sustained discourse as opposed to the single-line proverb characteristic of most of the remainder of the book—and of the importance and consistency of the themes which it treats.

An approach similar to yet different from that of Plöger is proposed by Saebø (1985), who again speaks of 'core blocks of tradition', this time of two such blocks: chs. 2–4 (referring to the personal acquiring of wisdom) and chs. 5–7 (a section of ethical advice). This bipartite kernel is framed by the two speeches of personified wisdom in chs. 1 and 8, and these in turn are framed by the opening prologue (1.2-7) and opening admonition (1.8-19) on the one hand and, on the other, by the contrasting allegory of Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly (9.1-6, 13-18) with the intervening admonition of 9.7-12 balancing the opening prologue (1.2-7). These chapters, then, are what Saebø would go so far as to call 'an intentionally formed cyclic composition'.

Such an approach along the lines of a finely balanced structure has been taken much further in the work of Skehan (1971). He suggests that the structure of the book as a whole is analogous to the three sections of the temple of Solomon: chs. 1–9 the 'front elevation of the porch and annex'; 10.1–22.16 the 'side elevation of the nave'; 22.17–31.31 the 'side and rear elevation of the cella' (1971: 27-45 complete with diagrams where the 'columns' of the architectural structure are the units in the book as determined by the numbers of lines in them). This elaborate structure is 'supported' in Skehan's view by the fact that the number of lines in the book as a whole corresponds to the sum of the numerical values of the Hebrew letters in the proper names in the sub-headings of the book's collections: Solomon, David, Israel and Hezekiah. For example, there are 375 proverbs in 10.1–22.16, and that is the numerical value of the letters in the Hebrew form of 'Solomon', whose name stands at the head of that particular collection (*šlmh* = 300 + 30 + 40 + 5 = 375). The 'seven pillars' of Wisdom's house (9.1) are, again, the seven 'columns' of text, each of 22 lines (the

number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet), in chs. 2–7. This elaborate scheme of 'columns' of identical length can be constructed, however, only by dint of deletions and, especially, textual rearrangements, and few scholars have followed Skehan in any detail. But it is, perhaps, worth looking at his approach to ch. 2—the chapter which we looked at in relation to Whybray and McKane above—a chapter which contains precisely 22 lines (1971: 9-10).

The chapter divides into six stanzas: vv. 1-4, 5-8, 9-11, 12-15, 16-19 and 20-22, respectively with the following numbers of lines: 4 + 4 + 3 + 4 + 4 + 3. It thus also clearly divides into two equal parts of three stanzas each. Each stanza in the first part begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*aleph*; in the case of v. 1, the *aleph* comes after the opening summons to attention 'My son'; the last line of the opening stanza, v. 4, also begins with *aleph*), and stanzas 2 and 3 both begin with the identical phrase ('then you will understand', vv. 5 and 9). Each stanza in the second part of the poem begins with the letter which begins the second part of the Hebrew alphabet (*lamed*; the twelfth letter of the alphabet introducing the twelfth line of the poem), and this time it is stanzas 4 and 5 that begin with the identical phrase ('to save you', vv. 12 and 16). Skehan calls this an 'alphabetizing' device, similar to the style of the acrostic in which successive lines or stanzas begin with the successive letters of the alphabet, but in this instance utilizing only those letters which begin each half of the alphabet. It is stanzas 2-5, with their 'paired' introductory formulae, that introduce the four themes that will be treated in the subsequent chapters: the first two speak of what the pupil will gain from his relationship with Yahweh (vv. 5-8) and from his possession of wisdom (vv. 9-11); the second two indicate the dangers from which he will be 'saved' through that relationship and that possession, namely evil ways and companions (vv. 12-15) and evil women (vv. 16-19). It is inconceivable that such a stylistic arrangement has arisen by chance as a result of the process of development envisaged by Whybray. Both Whybray and McKane reject a division of the chapter into strophes or stanzas, but more on the grounds that they fail to see the relevance of titles given to it by a

number of scholars, such as 'The Fivefold Blessing of Wisdom'. The merit of Skehan in this particular instance is that he treats seriously the chapter in the form in which it now exists in the text and expounds it in terms of the very obvious poetic structure which it displays.

While all of these approaches to the structure and relationships of Proverbs 1–9 contain valuable insights, none of them will contain the whole truth about this part of the book, for the compilers of this material, their cultural contexts and their motives for compilation are fundamentally unknown to us. We can only speculate and, each of us, find different reasons why we think that *our* answers to the problems raised account for more of what seem to be the data than those of other scholars. The following further reading will help students to pursue one or other or, indeed, all of these proposals as their interest or curiosity is aroused.

Further Reading

R.N. Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs* (London: SCM Press, 1965).

—*The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament* (1974).

—*The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTSup, 168; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), pp 11-61.

McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men* (1965).

—*Proverbs* (1970).

Plöger, *Sprüche Salomos* (1984).

Scott, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes* (1965).

A. Barucq, 'Proverbes (Livre des)', *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible* 8 (1972), pp. 1395-1476.

P.W. Skehan, *Studies in Israelite Poetry and Wisdom* (CBQMS, 1; Washington, DC, 1971).

M. Saebø, 'From Collections to Book–A New Approach to the History of Tradition and Redaction of the Book of Proverbs', *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Division A: The Period of the Bible, 1985), pp. 99-106.

F.M. Wilson, 'Sacred and Profane? The Yahwistic Redaction of Proverbs Reconsidered', in K.G. Hogland *et al.* (eds.), *The Listening Heart. Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honour of Roland E. Murphy* (JSOTSup, 58; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), pp. 313-33.

3

TWO 'SOLOMONIC' COLLECTION OF PROVERBS

A First Collection: 10.1–22.16

THE SECOND MAJOR BLOCK of material in Proverbs begins in 10.1 with a heading 'the proverbs of Solomon', which is a shorter form of the heading in 1.1. If the expression 'the sayings of the wise men' in 22.17 is a new heading or title as is held by a number of commentators and translators on the basis of the LXX's detachment of it from the rest of that verse (see above, p. 33), this block of material extends as far as 22.16. This block is made up of mostly single-line sentences which are unrelated to each other and do not, on the whole, appear to have been arranged in any coherent order.

This collection of 'sentences', whose limits can be identified by means of the headings found in the text, may not, however, be entirely homogeneous. There is some evidence, for example, that 10.1–22.16 may be a combination of two originally separate collections (10.1–15.33 and 16.1–22.16) with 14.26–16.15 forming a join between the two. The vast majority of the sentences in chs. 10-15 are in the form of what is known as 'antithetic parallelism' (163 out of 183 sentences; the statistics in this paragraph are as cited by Murphy [1981: 64] on the basis of Skladny [1962]; for a discussion of stylistic features in the Solomonic collections see below pp. 56-59), while in 16.1–22.16 the spread of different kinds of parallelism is more even. It has been observed that the shift away from the predominance of antithetic parallelism, so marked in chs. 10–15, occurs with

14.26, with approximately 25 per cent of the sentences from there to the end of ch. 15 lacking this characteristic (11 out of 43 sentences). Some of the other evidence that has been advanced for considering the join to be at this point is perhaps less convincing; for example, the suggestion that since a significantly unusual number of duplications occurs here, the editors' selection was in fact determined by the numerical value of the letters in the Hebrew form of Solomon's name (on this last, see above Chapter 2, p. 48).

What is a 'Proverb'?

When we begin reading the Solomonic collections of 'proverbs', we immediately notice a marked change in style from the material contained in chs. 1–9. No longer do we have either the sustained discourse or the second person address of the Instruction. Instead the single, mostly one-verse sentence is the unit, and the factual observation of people and of nature is couched in the third person. 10.1, for example, after the initial title to the chapter, is simply an observation about relationships within the family:

> A wise child makes a glad father,
> but a foolish child is a mother's grief.

Although this opening verse of the collection may be deliberately picking up the parent–child relationship which was so prevalent—either literally or as a paradigm of the teacher–pupil association—in the educational context of Instruction in chs. 1–9, here no instruction is being given. A simple observation is being made about how the nature of the child is either a joy or a sorrow to its parents. As such it has no intrinsic connection with the other single-verse observations which surround it. The verse which follows (10.2) is simply another, unrelated observation about life:

> Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit,
> but righteousness delivers from death.

The unit in 10.1–22.16, then, is the single-verse 'sentence' or 'proverb', and this is what we think of as characteristic of the book we know as 'Proverbs'. But what *is* a 'proverb'? The Hebrew word *māšāl*, which appears in the various titles in Proverbs (1.1; 10.1; 25.1) and once in the prologue to the book

as a whole (1.6), derives from a root which means 'to be like, to resemble'. There is an identical root which means 'to rule', and some have thought to derive the noun from it and suggest for it the sense 'sovereign saying' or 'word of power'. It would seem, however, that the noun has really almost become a technical term within the wisdom context, referring both to the type of 'popular proverb' and, as we shall see shortly, to what has become a fairly sophisticated literary structure. A derivation from the 'be like, resemble' root might suggest the 'comparison' as the model proverb, and 'comparison'—what we might call a simile or a metaphor—is certainly found in Proverbs, mostly in the collection that begins at 25.1. But not all 'proverbs' in the book are 'comparisons'.

McKane posits a very restrictive definition of the term *māšāl*, restrictive in the sense that on his definition only eleven genuine proverbs corresponding to this definition are to be found in the book. McKane builds his definition of *māšāl* on the kind of material which he finds in the Egyptian work called Onchsheshonqy and then confirms his findings by an analysis of a number of 'popular' proverbs which occur in various non-wisdom contexts in the Hebrew Bible. In the *māšāl*, according to McKane,

> the emphasis is laid on representative potential and openness to interpretation. The 'proverb'...has a representative capacity which can be intuited by future interpreters...Because of its lack of explicitness, its allusiveness or even opaqueness, it does not become an antique, but awaits continually the situation to illumine which it was coined (1970: 22-33 for the general discussion; the specific quotation is from 1970: 414).

One of the sentences in ch. 10 fits this definition and is considered by McKane to be a genuine proverb:

> A child who gathers in summer is prudent,
> but a child who sleeps in harvest brings shame (10.5).

On one level this is primarily telling us something about the duties of sons in a farming context. A son who is lazy at that time of year, when solid work is essential for the survival of the community at large and the well-being of his own family in particular, brings shame on his parents. But the sentence is saying more than that. It is also, on the one hand, about

any child in any context who displays sterling qualities when that is what its parents most require and, on the other, about a child who brings its parents into disgrace by its uselessness and failure at critical junctures. It might also further be making the point that times of testing reveal a person's true character and differentiate good 'sons' from bad ones. In this way the 'proverb' refuses to be limited by its particularity and becomes open to interpretation by its future hearers and users.

Not many of the sentences in the book of Proverbs fit McKane's definition, and he has to concede that when the plural *mešālīm* is used to describe the sentences in the book of Proverbs, the word is being used in a very generalized sense. It is perhaps, then, not very helpful to begin with a very tightly defined sense of a word only to conclude that it does not seem to apply in that sense to the vast majority of the examples in Proverbs. The most general description of the sentences is that they are factual observations about life and society in the broadest sense and are worded, for the most part, in the third person.

Themes and Motifs

One of the major problems perceived on a first approach to what is often known as the 'sentence literature' as represented in the 'Solomonic collections' in the book of Proverbs is the apparently completely haphazard arrangement of the single-verse units. With few exceptions, none of them appears to relate to what immediately precedes or what immediately follows. A more considered examination, however, has led some scholars to suggest that some of these chapters, or some parts of them, appear to have sayings grouped thematically. In ch. 10, for example, a number of verses seem to be dealing with speaking or keeping silent: 10.6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 31, 32. Some 'groupings' are discernible there: three pairs in vv. 10-11, 13-14, 31-32; and a larger section in vv. 18-21. However,this can scarcely be said to be a 'theme' which binds ch. 10 into the form which it now has. Good and bad speech is also a characteristic motif for ch. 12 (vv. 5, 6, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25), where vv. 17-25 (with the exception of vv. 21 and 24) forms a whole

section on the theme of speech. One might even regard 12.13-25 as a broad grouping of sentences by theme, but why does it contain verses which are not on the main theme if there was some kind of editorial intention to group by theme? And when we pass to the following chapter, various different themes are treated: education (vv. 1, 13, 14, 24); poverty and riches (vv. 7, 8, 11, 18, 21, 22); hope and desires (vv. 12, 19); insight and folly (vv. 10, 15, 16); the righteous and the wicked (vv. 2, 5, 6, 9, 25). But these themes are treated in several isolated sentences, and little attempt has been made to group them together.

Perhaps the most obvious example of grouping by theme is to be found in ch. 16. In chs. 10–15 sayings which refer either explicitly or implicitly to Yahweh are comparative rarities: four in ch. 10; two in each of chs. 11 and 12; none in ch. 13; five in ch. 14; and nine, already a much higher percentage, in ch. 15. Sayings about kings appear for the first time in 14.28, 35. In ch. 16, however, we find a group of Yahweh-sayings in vv. 1-9 (with the exception of v. 8), immediately followed by a group of king-sayings in vv. 10-15 (with the exception of v. 11). This last, v. 11, is a Yahweh-saying and may have been deliberately placed after the first king-saying of v. 10 to link together these two groups of sayings. This suggestion would have been more convincing if v. 8 had been a king-saying in the penultimate position in the group of Yahweh-sayings and also been acting as a link between these two groups. But such is not the case!

One could continue through to 22.16 and observe that, while recurring themes are dealt with in these sentences, only occasionally are sentences on like themes grouped into larger (though still comparatively small) units. Even when sentences are thus grouped, the groupings so constituted do not really form 'contexts' which have a determining influence on the meanings of the individual sentences within them. The unit is still, by and large, the single sentence, and it is that which constitutes the significant entity in this whole body of material.

Other Principles of Grouping

It has also been suggested that there has been a conscious attempt on the part of those who gave to 10.1–22.16 its

present shape to arrange the contents according to the stylistic features which characterize the various sentences.

The Hebrew 'sentence' as exemplified in the book of Proverbs—and, indeed, in the poetic books of the Old Testament generally—falls into two parts. These parts are each known as a *hemistich* and together they make up a *colon* (the terminology is that proposed by Watson 1984: 11-15). The hemistichs in Hebrew poetry usually stand to each other in a relationship known as parallelism. Sometimes the two hemistichs are saying the same thing but using varied words or expressions. Note 16.28, for example:

> A perverse person spreads strife,
> and a whisperer separates close friends.

Both hemistichs are making the same point, namely that someone who deliberately spreads gossip ('a perverse person' // 'a whisperer') causes social discord ('spreads strife' // 'separates close friends'). Parallelism of this kind is usually referred to as 'synonymous parallelism'. Sometimes, however, the two hemistichs are saying the opposite of each other, and a contrast is made, with the implicit approval of one of the statements. For example:

> A wise child makes a glad father,
> but a foolish child is a mother's grief (10.1).

Two types of children are contrasted ('wise' // 'foolish'), as are their respective effects on their parents ('a glad father' // 'a mother's grief'). It is obvious that a father's gladness is to be preferred to a mother's grief and that, therefore, it is the wise child who is the desirable offspring. In this situation, where contrast or opposition is made, the parallelism is known as 'antithetic parallelism', the parallelism of antithesis (see above p. 51). Sometimes, again, there is no parallelism as such between the two hemistichs, and the second hemistich simply continues and develops the sense of the first. In 20.20, for example, the second hemistich provides the apodosis to the protasis of the first, and without it the sentence would have been grammatically incomplete:

> If you curse father or mother
> your lamp will go out in utter darkness.

There is no parallelism here at all, and the colon of this type is sometimes known as a 'continuous single sentence'.

It has been observed by scholars that in chs. 10–15 the form of colon which occurs overwhelmingly is that of antithetic parallelism. As we have already noted, those who have examined the statistics tell us that 163 of the 183 colons in these chapters are in antithetic parallelism (see above p. 51). In 16.1–22.16, on the other hand, the distribution in the styles of colon found is much more even, and the shift away from antithetic to synonymous parallelism and other forms of relationship between the hemistichs begins in ch. 14. Again, we are told that of the forty-three colons in 14.26–15.33, eleven lack antithetic parallelism. Once 16.1 is reached the occurrence of antithetic parallelism is much less frequent, and we find synonymous parallelism, lack of parallelism ('single continuous sentence') and even admixtures of the Instruction genre (with second person address) and the wisdom sentence (with third person address). Of the Instruction genre, an example may be found in 16.3, with its imperative and final (result) clause:

> Commit your work to the Lord,
> and your plans will be established.

There are also a number of other varieties of sentence which occur in 16.1–22.16. Sometimes the various elements in a colon are simply placed side by side, often, though not invariably, resulting in a stylistic device known as *chiasmus*. In 16.17, for example, we have four items simply juxtaposed. I give a literal translation, so that the terseness of the Hebrew, without the additional verbs supplied by modern English translations, may be more easily appreciated:

> The highway of the upright—avoidance of evil
> He-who-guards his life—he-who-watches-over his way.

Here, the one 'who watches over his way' (the second element in the second hemstich) is the 'upright' man (the first element in the first hemstich), and the guarding of one's life (the first element in the second hemstich) goes hand in hand with the 'avoidance of evil' (the second element in the first hemstich). The resultant pattern is A : B :: B′ : A′. To find a

better example of this chiastic arrangement we have to go back to 13.12, again initially in a literal translation:

> Hope deferred—sickness of heart
> and a tree of life—desire fulfilled

Here, 'hope deferred' is balanced by 'desire fulfilled', and the two inner elements, corresponding to sickness/health or death/life, also balance each other, resulting again in the pattern A : B :: B′ : A′. The NRSV, to take but one example of a modern translation, makes connections between these elements explicit by supplying verbs but, at the same time, destroys the chiasmus by reversing the order of the elements in the second hemistich (as it does also in 16.17)!

> Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
> but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

There are two types of sentence each of which contains the adjective 'good' (*ṭōb*); the NRSV translates it often as 'right'). The sentences of the first type usually express what is 'not right' (*lō' ṭob*), for example, 18.5:

> To show favour to the wicked is 'not good',
> nor is depriving an innocent man of justice.

A positive form of this type of sentence is expressed by means of 'how good!' (15.23):

> It is a joy to a man to make an apt response,
> and a word in season, 'how good' (it is)!

In the second type of sentence which uses 'good' the word is used in a comparative way (in Hebrew with the preposition *min-*). Sometimes in the second hemistich the sense is conveyed by the Hebrew preposition alone, the adjective 'good' being (in Hebrew) implicit rather than explicit. This is so in the so-called 'better than' saying:

> Better is one slow to anger than a warrior
> and he who controls his temper than he who captures a city (16.32).

In this type of sentence one thing in each hemistich is said to be 'better than' another. In this instance the adjective 'good' occurs in the first hemistich only, but its sense is clearly intended to extend to the second hemistich which, like the

first, also contains the preposition (*min*), the Hebrew way of expressing a comparison. A more sophisticated category of this type of sentence expresses paradox by the means of a pair of contrasting terms:

> Better a dish of vegetables where there is love
> than a fatted ox and hatred with it (15.17).

Here love can transform a dish of vegetables into a highly satisfying feast, while hatred can ruin even the most luscious of spreads. A full study of these sentences and their transformational capabilities has been made by Bryce (1972b).

The majority of these last examples of chiastic juxtaposition and the different types of structure with the adjective 'good' occur in that section of this first Solomonic collection where slackness of form (as opposed to the 'tight' form of antithetic parallelism) becomes more characteristic, namely in 16.1–22.16 (though there is a resurgence of antithetic parallelism in ch. 21). If it is true that there has been an editorial attempt to join two originally independent collections (chs. 10-15; 16.1–22.16), a join which is observable within the broad compass of 14.26–16.15, stylistic features may have been a determining factor in the construction especially of chs. 10–15 with their overwhelming predominance of antithetic parallelism. Such features will not have been so determinative for the structure of 16.1–22.16, where no single stylistic feature is so dominant.

Another method which has sometimes been canvassed as lying behind the structure of larger units in these Solomonic collections is association by means of the so-called catchword principle or by means of alliteration or some other verbal association. The catchword principle has been applied to prophetic literature as one method whereby originally independent prophetic oracles become joined together for ease of remembering in the process of oral transmission. Oracles are more clearly associated where the same word or phrase occurs at or towards the end of one oracle and at or near the beginning of another. An example might well be the occurrence of the phrase 'he shall build the temple of the Lord' in Zechariah 6 in both v. 12 and v. 13. The phrase may originally have belonged to two separate oracles which are now,

by means of the catchword principle, joined together in the collected material pertaining to the prophet Zechariah. A looser example would be the way in which the prose narrative about the encounter between Amos and Amaziah at Bethel in Amos 7.10-15(17) has been inserted where it now stands between the third and fourth of the Amos visions because it contains near its beginning, in the résumé of Amos's preaching that Amaziah sends to the king, the phrase 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword', which is not dissimilar to the phrase in the Yahweh-oracle of the third vision (v. 9), 'I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword'.

Most commentators on Proverbs point to some such occasional occurrences of verbal associations between sentences, but it is Murphy (1981: 63-74) who applies the principle most thoroughly. The difficulty with this approach—particularly as expounded so consistently—is twofold. First, there is a small number of topics which occur reasonably frequently in the book. One is the righteous–wicked antithesis. We are told that these terms serve as the catchwords between 10.24-25 and again within 10.27-32. But the antithesis appears in vv. 2-3, 6-7 and 'righteous' on its own in vv. 20-21. It is difficult to see any pattern when some words or ideas are so all-pervasive. The second problem is related to this first one. The righteous–wicked contrast is found in 10.2-3; 10.6-7; 10.24-25; 10.27-32, but why, if this is a principle which is operative in a mnemotechnic way, does it not simply link *all* of these verses together? And why, if it is largely confined to linking verses in pairs, does it connect v. 2 with v. 3 and v. 6 with v. 7 and not, for example, v. 2 with v. 6 and v. 3 with v. 7? One can observe the phenomenon, but it is difficult to see that the phenomenon, once observed, really serves as a principle forming larger structures discernible in the larger book as we now have it. Alliteration is a phenomenon confined largely within a sentence rather than linking different sentences together and is, in any event, much less widespread than the observable use of catchwords.

Against all these attempts to discover some coherence behind the apparently random sequence of sentences in this first Solomonic collection, it has to be reaffirmed that the unit in this collection is still the single sentence. Even if the

existence of coherent collections could be demonstrated, these collections would be secondary and would not be 'contexts' which would alter the meaning and import of the sentences in any significant way. Commentators, however, have frequently felt the need to arrange these unconnected sentences into topics or themes in order to make it easier for readers of the book of Proverbs to connect sentences which deal with related topics but which are, in the present form of the book, scattered in various different places within it. Of the commentaries written in the last 30 years or so, several have attempted something along these lines (see further reading at the end of this chapter).

A Theological Development?

Another method of grouping the material in this collection has been in terms of a theological development supposedly discerned behind the sentences. This method of classification envisages a development from a more secular type of wisdom as exemplified in the early period to a later, more religious or pietistic kind. In recent years both H.H. Schmid (1966) and Michael Fox (1968) have proposed such a development, the latter more specifically from Egyptian beginnings through a Yahwistic adaptation to a more refined theological stage.

Along the same lines, McKane has proposed for the sentences a similar kind of development. He works this out in detail in the body of his commentary (1970), but the beginnings of his view lie in his earlier work (1965) where he examined the confrontation between hard-headed, political counsellors of state—the 'wise men'—and the prophetic figures who insisted that they alone were the transmitters of the 'word' of Yahweh and that only by listening to that 'word' could effective government be achieved. In this confrontation we find the vocabulary of what is generally referred to as 'old wisdom' being adapted and transformed by the practitioners and advocates of Yahwistic piety. McKane finds these two aspects of wisdom—the 'old wisdom' and the wisdom vocabulary transformed by the language and thought of Yahwistic piety—lying side by side in the sentences of the book of Proverbs. He divides these sentences into three classes, since he sees an intermediary stage between the two aspects just

mentioned. Class A sentences are those which represent 'old wisdom' and 'are concerned with the education of individuals for a successful and harmonious life'. Originally, of course, 'old wisdom', as usually defined, was concerned with training young men for high political office, but there are few traces of such specialized professionalism in Israelite wisdom. Here, then, the concern is for the education of young men for life generally. We find that some sentences betray a concern not so much for the individual as for the community. These McKane classifies as Class B, and they describe, usually in negative terms, 'the harmful effects on the life of the community of various manifestations of anti-social behaviour'. In the third type of sentence, Class C, he finds the main characteristic to be ' the presence of God-language or...other items of vocabulary expressive of a moralism which derives from Yahwistic piety' (1970: 10-22, esp 11-12).

Let us take an example or two from ch. 10, the first chapter of the principal 'Solomonic' collection.

> A slack hand causes poverty,
> but the hand of the diligent makes rich
>
> A child who gathers in summer is prudent,
> but a child who sleeps in harvest brings shame (vv. 4, 5).

Here action is being implicitly commended (only implicitly, for we have left behind the singular imperative which was *the* characteristic of the Instruction literature of chs. 1–9) which is conducive to the well-being and prosperity of persons who undertake such action. The commendation is done simply from the observation of action which profits and action which does not. These are Class A sentences.

In vv. 10-12 we find observation of actions which destroy community life and actions which promote it:

> Whoever winks the eye causes trouble,
> but the one who rebukes boldly makes peace.
> The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,
> but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.
> Hatred stirs up strife,
> but love covers all offences.

Again, by implication, the life-promoting activities are commended: bold rebukes, righteous speech, love. These are Class B sentences.

Verses 2 and 3 introduce specific reference to Yahweh ('the Lord') as well as vocabulary—righteous(ness)/wicked(ness)—which implies an ethic which is essentially derived from Yahwistic piety.

> Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit,
> but righteousness delivers from death.
> The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry,
> but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.

These are Class C sentences.

McKane carries this analysis right through both Solomonic collections. Sometimes the sentences in the various classes occur in blocks. In ch. 10, for example, there is a little block of Class A in vv. 13-15, a block of Class B in vv. 10-12 and a larger block of Class C in vv. 27-32. Such blockings do not seem to be of significance for McKane, who certainly does not draw attention to them and is openly sceptical of all attempts to find any kind of structure in the present grouping of the sentences. Like any other commentator, he groups sentences even within his broad 'class' division into topics. For example, his discussion of Class A sentences in ch. 10 begins with this observation: 'There is a group of sentences constituted by the antithesis of wise and foolish (vv. 8, 13, 14, 19)'. He does not attach any significance to the word 'group' beyond saying that there are four sentences of the Class A type in ch. 10 which are couched in the form of a wise–foolish antithesis.

However, McKane's analysis depends on an argument about the re-interpretation of the vocabulary of 'old wisdom' in terms of Yahwistic piety and about how words which appear in a positive (or neutral?) sense in 'old wisdom' acquire pejorative connotations. But the range of examples which can be produced to support this argument is comparatively small, too narrow for such far-reaching conclusions to be drawn. Even when we note the difference between the almost identical 13.14 and 14.27,

> The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life,
> so that one may avoid the snares of death (13.14).
> The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life
> so that one may avoid the snares of death (14.27).

where the 'teaching of the wise' corresponds to the 'fear of the Lord', to say that the latter phrase is a 'substitution' for the former is surely not proveable. If the suggestion is that this 'substitution' were being made to the 'old wisdom' material by some unidentifiable group involved in the transmission of the wisdom material generally, one needs to ask a number of questions. Why, for example, was such substitution not more rigorously carried through and why was the so-called 'old wisdom' material allowed to remain alongside the Yahwistically re-interpreted material? To which view—if we really are dealing with contrasting or even opposing views—did the final redactor(s) subscribe? The fact that the various types of sentence survive side by side suggests that not only did the final redactors not see them as opposites, but that they may have existed side by side from the very beginnings of wisdom in Israel. There is, after all, a strong 'religious' current in the Egyptian material—usually regarded as the origins of the so-called 'old wisdom'—even when it is dealing with questions of vocational and professional training, a religious current which need not always be explicit, but which is nevertheless present.

A Second Collection: 25.1–29.27

A similar block of 'sentence' material, again with a new heading, begins in 25.1 and, since 30.1 contains yet another heading, extends to the end of ch. 29. The heading in 25.1 is fuller than that in 10.1, and while this collection is described as being 'also proverbs of Solomon', some kind of contribution has been made to them by 'the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah'. It is not entirely clear who these men were, but the most likely assumption is that they were state or court officials of some kind, possibly of a scribal character. Unfortunately, the verb which describes their activity in relation to the collection is of uncertain meaning. It is used, in the same form as occurs in Prov. 25.1, of Abraham 'moving on' from Shechem to Bethel in his southward progress through Canaan (Gen. 12.8). It is used in Job 9.5 to describe God as the one 'who removes mountains' before they know what is happening to them. In Prov. 25.1 the sense seems to

be that of 'moving' material from one context to another, of transcribing it, though such an activity need not be confined to material already in written form. Material of this kind may have existed also in oral form, and Hezekiah's officials may well have supplied an element of editorial input as well. In the 200 or so years between the end of the eighth century BCE and the end of the sixth there was a great resurgence throughout the ancient Near Eastern world of nationalist and religious fervour. Judah, too, shared in this between the beginning of Hezekiah's reign (715 BCE) and the end of Josiah's (609 BCE), and the transcribing and editorial work of Hezekiah's court officials with regard to the wisdom traditions of the past, whether written or oral, may have been one aspect of this general trend (Hayes and Miller 1977: 437-38).

In chs. 25–29, which together form a smaller 'Solomonic' collection than the one in 10.1–22.16, we also have the fusion of what were probably two originally independent units. Again the distinction between them is on stylistic grounds (see further below, pp. 66-68). In chs. 25–27 there is a great preponderance of images, often drawn from the world of nature and used by way of comparison, though often without the explicit use of the comparative particle 'like/as'. It may well be going too far to describe this section as a kind of 'handbook' for farmers or small-holders to follow in their daily agricultural activities (so, e.g. Skladny), since it contains just as many topics which have no direct relevance for farmers; but there is nevertheless an undeniably agricultural background or flavour to these chapters. In chs. 28–29, on the other hand, we are back in the world of 10.1–22.16, especially the first part of that collection, with the great predominance here too of antithetic parallelism (82 per cent) and the occurrence, in fact, of a number of doublets from the earlier collection.

In contrast to the earlier Solomonic collection there is perhaps greater evidence here, especially in chs. 25–26, of an attempt at 'arrangement' or structure on the part of the compilers. In ch. 25 we find a mixture of 'instruction' (second person address, imperatives) and 'sentence' (third person address) and find that these are often grouped in pairs. The following are obviously so grouped: vv. 4-5, 6-7b, 7c-8c, 9-10,

11-12, 13-14, 16-17, 18-19, 21-22. Also, in 25.2-7 we have a little collection of sentences about the king (cf. 16.1-7, 9). This attempt at arrangement is even more marked in ch. 26 where vv. 1-12 are concerned with the 'fool', vv. 13-16 characterize the lazy person, vv. 20-28 deal with various aspects of speech and are interconnected by the use of catchwords. Chapter 27 does not appear to have any connecting threads running through it, but it concludes with a connected piece in vv. 23-27 urging the reader not to neglect the care of flocks and herds. This acts as a kind of coda to the collection of chs. 25–27.

The main stylistic characteristic of these chapters is the use of comparisons in the form either of similes or of metaphors, most often—and here is one reason why 27.23-27 may be regarded as a coda to the collection—drawn from the world of nature or from a pastoral economy. Sometimes, as we have already observed above, this sub-collection (chs. 25–27) has been regarded as a 'mirror' or *vade mecum* for peasants or farmers, but here, perhaps above all places in the sentence literature, we find a level of literary artistry in the shaping of the comparisons which lifts them above the sphere of the farm labourer.

The comparison can be made by the use of the comparative particle 'as/like' (*ke*) and/or by the use of the adverb 'thus/so' (*kēn*). This structure is found most frequently in ch. 26. For example, in 26.1,

> *Like* snow in summer and *like* rain at harvest,
> *so* inappropriate for a fool is honour.

Here the inappropriateness of the concept of 'honour'—either as an intrinsic quality or as the public recognition of such a quality—applied to someone who is utterly worthless is being compared with the complete absurdity of snow falling in summer or rain between the months of March and October when Palestine is normally completely rain-free. Sometimes we find 'as/like' in the first hemistich with no following 'thus/so' in the second, as, for example, in 26.11,

> Like a dog returning to its vomit,
> a fool reverting to his folly.

In ch. 25, for the most part, the object and the things with which it is compared simply lie side by side in a figure of speech known as *asyndeton* (lit. 'not bound' [together]), producing what is sometimes also referred to as an 'asyndetic arrangement'. For example, in 25.12,

> A gold ring and an ornament of fine gold,
> a wise rebuke to a perceptive ear.

The comparison of a wise rebuke with something of highest value is to be intuited by the juxtaposition, though the NRSV, as in all of these cases, makes it prosaically explicit. Sometimes the two elements are joined by a simple 'and', as in 26.7, where the impotence and lack of power of a proverb uttered by a fool is compared to the powerlessness of a lame man's legs (though in this case the image itself is not entirely clear in the Hebrew; see the commentaries *ad loc*):

> Legs hang limp from a lame man
> *and* a proverb in the mouth of fools.

One of the sentences (25.3) has been described as a 'priamel'. The latter is a type of epigrammatic verse cultivated in fifteenth/sixteenth century Germany, in which a series of parallel statements leads to a climax. Three examples of what is unsearchable are laid side by side; the third of them, the 'mind of kings' is the climactic element:

> Heavens for height and earth for depth,
> and the mind of kings—unsearchable.

Again the EVV have imported 'like' or 'so' into their translations. The original Hebrew depends solely on juxtaposition for its effectiveness.

While the comparison, in its varied forms, characterizes chs. 25–26—as do also both the conscious arrangement by topic on the part of the compiler and the area of rural economy from which the comparisons are drawn—ch. 27 reverts to the single, unconnected sentence as the unit. There is a decrease in the occurrence of the comparison; only vv. 8 and 19 have the comparative particles 'as'/'so' whereas vv. 15, 17, 20 and 21 have simple juxtaposition with 'and'. There is no significant use of antithetic parallelism but a high frequency of occurrence of the instruction (second

person; imperatives). There is also in this chapter, especially in its central section (vv. 11-21), a very high proportion of either whole or partial doublets with other collections: with 27.11, cf. 23.15; with 27.15-16, cf. 19.13; 27.12 = 22.3; 27.13 = 20.16; 27.21a = 17.3a. This might suggest that there was a common stock on which the compilers of the various collections in the present book of Proverbs were able to draw freely. The fact that the final section reverts to the world of nature and pastoral economy leads us to include ch. 27 with chs. 25–26 to form an originally independent collection of sentence material, although in many ways they have little in common.

Two other points are worth noting before we leave chs. 25–27. One is a not very convincing attempt that has been made to link 25.2-27 (regarded as a literary unit dealing first with the king in vv. 2-7 and secondly with 'the wicked') with an Egyptian work which is the instruction for his children provided by Sehetep-ib-Re, the chief treasurer of the Pharaoh towards the end of the nineteenth century BCE. The proponent of this theory wants to regard Proverbs 25 as an independent 'wisdom book', but the verbal and structural parallels are probably too slender for such a confident conclusion (Bryce 1972a). The other interesting point is the virtually complete absence of 'God language' from these chapters. They are among the most 'secular' of the whole book of Proverbs, and McKane can find only one sure example of his Class C material (see above p. 62) at 25.26 (righteous–wicked), with 27.1 as a faintly possible additional candidate whose thought he regards as 'coloured by religious considerations'. But in neither of these two verses is there any specific reference to Yahweh. The righteous–wicked antithesis may not be so specifically dependent on Yahwistic piety as McKane thinks, nor may the precariousness of life as expressed in 27.1.

With chs. 28–29 we are on quite different ground from that of chs. 25–27. From the stylistic point of view, the comparison has virtually disappeared (only two instances in ch. 28—vv. 3 and 15, both relying on simple juxtaposition *without* 'and'—and none in ch. 29, though 29.5 contains a metaphor), and antithetic parallelism, so common especially in the first

part of the earlier Solomonic collection (chs. 10–15), is again the paramount form of the sentence, almost 82 per cent according to Skladny's statistics. Corresponding to this stylistic shift, there is an equally marked shift in content. Although there are only five verses in these two chapters where Yahweh is specifically mentioned (28.5, 25; 29.13, 25, 26), the whole ethos is one which is strongly imbued with religious and moral overtones. Here McKane's Class C predominates, with no examples of Class A at all in ch. 28. McKane draws attention to a remarkable verse (28.13) where the mercy of God is the source of true prosperity. This mercy, however, is available only to those who confess their sins and resolve on amendment of life (1970: 628). One can note especially in this connection that in at least two of the three occurrences of the word *tōrāh* in 28.4 and 9 (and perhaps even in the third in v. 7) as well as in 29.18, the reference is no longer to the 'instruction' (NRSV in every case 'teaching[s]') of the wise man, as is so frequently the case in earlier chapters (1.8; 3.1; 4.2; 6.20; 7.2), but to the 'Law' as the revelation of Yahweh's will for his people.

In this collection, as compared with chs. 25–27, there is a closer resemblance to the kind of sentences gathered in the earlier, larger Solomonic collection (10.1–22.16) and, again, there are a number of sayings with a greater or lesser degree of similarity to sayings from that collection (28.6, cf. 19.1; 28.19, cf. 12.11; 29.13, cf. 22.2). It is perhaps going too far, with Murphy, to say of ch. 29, for example, that 'almost all the sayings are repetitions or variations of proverbs that have appeared previously' (1981: 79, citing with approval the view of Alonso Schökel), but the fact that variants of one kind or another do appear points not only to a common stock from which compilers of different periods and circumstances drew but also to an almost complete lack of concern on the part of these compilers to unify sayings in a thematic way or to standardize the variants in one particular form. It may be in the nature of the educational process that students should be able to consider variant forms of proverbs, each inculcating the same truth. Such groupings as may be discernible in both of the major 'Solomonic' collections have the effect, of course, of removing the single proverb from its original local,

orally transmitted context to serve a more general editorial purpose of providing a body of educational material (Whybray 1994a: pp. 81-83).

There is, nevertheless, an element of thematic unity in these two chapters in that there is a certain concentration on problems associated not only with justice but also with society as a whole, problems which are particularly focused on the situation and circumstances of the poor (for the latter see especially 28.3, 6, 8, 11, 15, 19, 27; 29.7, 13, 14; for the general topic of wealth and poverty in Proverbs, especially in chs. 10–29, see Whybray 1990). Related to such concentration is also a concern with the conduct of kings or rulers (28.2, 3, 15, 16; 29.2, 4, 12, 14, 16, 26). The association of these two topics of concern led Skladny to refer to these two chapters as a 'mirror' or *vade mecum*, this time not for farmers, as was the case with chs. 25–27 but for rulers. If it were possible to carry conviction with such a classification, this would bring this small collection close to the kind of literature—the Egyptian Instruction—from which the whole wisdom movement in Israel is often believed to have taken its origins. But it is doubtful whether the evidence is really sufficiently focused for such a firm conclusion to be drawn.

Further Reading

References are in the order in which the subjects are dealt with in the chapter.

R.E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature* (FOTL, 13; Michigan, 1981).

U. Skladny, *Die ältesten Spruchsammlungen in Israel* (Göttingen, 1962).

McKane, *Proverbs* (1970).

W.G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTSup, 26; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984).

G.E. Bryce, 'Another Wisdom-"Book" in Proverbs', *JBL* 91 (1972), pp. 144-57 [1972a].

—'"Better"-Proverbs: An Historical and Structural Study', *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Literature* 2 (1972), pp. 343-54 [1972b].

H.H. Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit* (BZAW, 101; Berlin, 1966).

M.V. Fox, 'Aspects of the Religion of the Book of Proverbs', *HUCA* 39 (1968), pp. 55-69.

Wilson, 'Sacred and Profane'.

R.N. Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTSup, 99; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990).

—'Yahweh-sayings and their Contexts in Proverbs 10.1–22.16', in M. Gilbert

(ed.), *La Sagesse de l'Ancien Testament* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 51; Leuven, 1979), pp. 153-65.

—*The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (1994) [1994a].

W. McKane, 'Functions of Language and Objects of Discourse according to Proverbs 10-30', in Gilbert (ed.), *La Sagesse de l'Ancien Testament*, pp. 166-85.

The following works are not specifically referred to in the chapter but deal in their various ways with this part of the book of Proverbs:

T.P. McCreesh, *Biblical Sound and Sense. Poetic Sound Patterns in Proverbs 10–29* (JSOTSup, 128; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991). This is not a contribution to the structures in Proverbs 10–29 but deals with the use of sound patterns in the individual poems.

R.C. Van Leeuwen, *Context and Meaning in Proverbs 25–27* (SBLDS, 96; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1988). Endeavours to find four 'proverb-poems' in chs. 25–26 but regards ch. 27 as a 'proverb-miscellany'. 27.23-27 is a 'parable' addressed to 'shepherd'-kings.

W. Bühlmann, *Vom rechten Reden und Schweigen. Studien zu Proverbien 10-31* (OBO, 12; Göttingen, 1976). A comprehensive survey of the subject of speech and silence in the 'sentence literature'.

Commentary references relating to the grouping of sentences:

Barucq (SB, 1964) has a 'Table analytique des matières' at the end, but the references are to the pages of the commentary rather than to the sentences themselves; this table also covers the whole book.

Kidner (TOTC, 1966) has, in his Introduction, a section entitled 'Subject Studies' (pp. 31-56: God and Man, Wisdom, the Fool etc) and concludes his commentary with 'A Short Concordance' (to the AV/KJV version, pp. 184-92).

Scott (AB, 1965) has a classified list of the sentences in 10.1–22.16 on pp. 130-31 and of those in 25.1–29.27 on p. 171.

Whybray (CBC, 1972) has a classified list which covers the whole of the book (pp. 188-89).

Aitken (DSB, 1986) arranges his commentary on the material in 10.1–31.31 into three major parts: Types of Characters (simple, fool, hothead etc); Wisdom in Various Settings (the home, the community, the market etc); Ways of Man and the Ways of God. At the end he has a short appendix of 17 proverbs which he has been unable to fit into his classification.

Whybray (NCB, 1994) [1994b] deals with the question of groupings in the body of the commentary as well as in his general Introduction and in the introductions to the two Solomonic collections.

4

APPENDICES TO THE 'SOLOMONIC' COLLECTIONS

APART FROM THE TWO MAIN BLOCKS of material in the book of Proverbs which have been discussed in the two preceding chapters—the 'Instruction' material in chs. 1–9 and the 'Sentence' literature in chs. 10–29—there are several smaller units in the book either inserted *between* the two main 'Solomonic' collections (in 22.17–24.34) or added *after* the second of these (in chs. 30–31). It is to these smaller units or 'appendices' that this chapter is devoted.

Appendices to the First 'Solomonic' Collection: 22.17–24.34

22.17–24.22

It is not only the wording of 24.23—'These also are sayings of the wise'—that signals the beginning of a new section, with the corollary that a preceding one has been brought to a close at 24.22, but also the fact that the preceding section, too, might have had something like 'sayings of wise men' as its title. No such title explicitly occurs in the Hebrew text of 22.17, but the expression 'words of the wise' does occur in the body of that verse. Most commentators are agreed that these words originally formed the heading for this section (and they accordingly extract them from the body of the verse) and that it comprises 22.17–24.22. It soon becomes clear that we are back in the same style as we found in chs. 1–9, the style of the 'Instruction' with its second person address and motive

('because...') and/or final ('so that...') clauses. In contrast to the more expansive 'discourse' style of chs. 1–9, however, what we have in this section is a series of separate commands or prohibitions. The aim of this collection was certainly to provide 'instructions' (*mō'ēṣōt*, NRSV 'admonition', 22.20), and the intention of the compiler is expressed in 22.21: 'to show you what is right and true, so that you may give a true answer to those who sent you'. It is a single individual who is being addressed ('my child', 23.15, 19, 26; 24.13, 21; although the expression is not such a distinctive pointer to the beginning of a section as it was in chs. 1–9), and it is a single individual ('I', 22.19-20) who is offering the guidance.

Another link with Proverbs 1–9 is that this section, too, has parallels with Egyptian instruction literature; indeed, the latter are most often thought to be particularly marked in relation to the *Instruction of Amenemope*, an Egyptian work which was certainly known and used as early as the twelfth century BCE (for the question of the dating of Amenemope see above p. 42). *Amenemope* became known only as late as 1924, but from then on the majority of scholars have interpreted the relationship between it and this section of the book of Proverbs in terms of the dependence of the latter on the former. Some scholars have sought to argue in the opposite direction, in terms of the dependence of *Amenemope* either specifically on Proverbs or more generally on Semitic material; some would argue that there is no relationship—or no very obvious relationship—in either direction.

Not only is *Amenemope* unusual in that it is composed in verse as opposed to prose, but it is also divided into 'chapters'. It consists of 30 chapters, and scholars have sought to find, in the rather difficult Hebrew of 22.20, the numeral 'thirty'. The Hebrew text of this verse reads, literally : 'Have I not written for you "three days ago" (*šilšōm*; there is a variant reading represented by the Qere *šālîsîm* 'officers') in admonitions and knowledge?', but most scholars agree on emending the text slightly to replace the rather odd expression 'three days ago' with the numeral 'thirty' (*šelōšîm*). They have then endeavoured to find 30 sections or sayings within the compass of 22.17–24.22. Most

commentators find it possible to divide this part of the book into 30 units, preceded by an introduction in 22.17-21. Not all of them are agreed on the detailed division of the material or on the exact composition of each of these 30 units, but there is, on the whole, a fairly general consensus with only minor variants between such scholarly views. More recently a smaller number of scholars have rejected the emendation to 'thirty' in 22.20 and would argue that 22.17–24.22 is neither a unity nor susceptible of division into 30 sub-units.

Even among those who subscribe to the theory of dependence of the Proverbs material on *Amenemope* it has often been felt that the correspondences with the Egyptian work are not very precise; the themes of the Hebrew material are not in the same order in which they occur in the Egyptian 'original'; the correspondences do not appear to extend beyond 23.11. 23.13-14 is very closely paralleled by a pair of sayings from an Aramaic work known as *The Words of Ahiqar*. The oldest known text of this work which, in various forms, circulated widely in both Jewish and later Christian circles, was found at the Jewish colony at Elephantine on the upper Nile. Although the text was found in Egypt, it is clearly Semitic (probably north Syrian) in origin, and its two component parts—a narrative about a wise counsellor at the Assyrian court and a series of sayings and maxims on a wide range of topics—probably date from different periods, the sayings being marginally older than the narrative and going back to about the seventh century BCE. An alternative theory about the origins of Prov. 22.17ff. might be to suggest that the Israelite author had begun to base his work on *Amenemope* but soon exhausted the material which he felt to be suitable and turned partly to other material (such as *Ahiqar*) and partly to his own resources. It will be clear from a reading of the text, however, that many of the themes which appear in chs. 1–9 surface here too with recurring injunctions to receive wisdom and accept discipline. Most of the units are fairly short (two verses at most), though some are rather longer, for example, 23.29-35 which is a warning against drunkenness in the form of a question-and-answer lesson.

24.23-34

The immediately following section, 24.23-34, although it purports from its title to relate to 22.17–24.22, is not consistently in the same style. Verses 27-29 contain the familiar imperative style of the 'Instruction', and a number of commentators point to the true 'proverbial' character of v. 27 in particular, with its openness to interpretation (see the discussion of McKane's definition of *māšāl* above pp. 53-54):

> Prepare your work outside
> get everything ready for you in the field;
> and after that build your house.

This can be taken quite literally, in the sense that the fields produce the wherewithal for supporting life and establishing the wealth which enables the house to be built (or the household or family to be established), but it also allows of a wider sense in that 'no task should be begun until the resources which are necessary to its successful completion are assured and effectively present' (McKane 1970: 576). Other verses in this section, however, are more akin to the 'sentence' style of the main collections in the book, with vv. 24-25 running to two sentences.

Verses 30-34, a longer poem still, are quite different from the material which immediately precedes them and represent a style which we have already encountered in, for example, 4.1-5 and 7.6-23, the personal reminiscence and reflection of the wisdom teacher. This is not, of course, to be regarded as necessarily reflecting an actual occurrence; it is a teaching device intended to engage the interest and attention of the pupil. The illustration cited here has been used already by the teacher whose material is found in 6.6-11; indeed 24.33-34 is verbally identical to 6.10-11. 'This gives us an insight into the way in which the wisdom teachers elaborate traditional material: two teachers independently created lively material out of the same older saying' (Whybray 1972: 144).

24.23-34, then, is to be regarded as an appendix to the longer section which precedes it, an appendix to the appendix to the first 'Solomonic' collection.

Appendices to the Second 'Solomonic' Collection: 30.1–31.31

The existence of the headings in 30.1 and 31.1 suggests that chs. 30 and 31 may be considered not only as separate collections but either as appendices to the second 'Solomonic' collection or as separate entities adding to the variety of collections already found in Proverbs 10–29. There are two factors which make it probable that ch. 30 is not a self-contained unit. The first is that the Septuagint places 30.1-14 *before* and 30.15-33 *after* 24.23-34. Secondly, that division of the chapter between vv. 14 and 15 is supported both by form and by content, and to this we now turn.

30.1-14

The heading of this block of material is extremely uncertain. Literally it reads: 'The words of Agur son of Jakeh, the oracle'. Neither of these proper names is known from elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible; the expression 'the oracle' is strange, since what follows is not a prophetic oracle. It has to be admitted, however, that the word which introduces the second part of v. 1 often indicates the conclusion of a prophetic oracle (where it is usually rendered 'says [the Lord]'. This has led the NRSV here to translate 'Thus says the man'. The Hebrew word for 'oracle' is *massā'*; but the same word also occurs in Gen. 25.14 as a proper name, that of one of the sons of Ishmael. It has been very commonly suggested that what we have here is the mis-writing of the adjective *massā'ī*, indicating Agur as a 'Massaite', that is as a member of a north Arabian tribe, whose eponymous ancestor was that son of Ishmael. This, if correct, would suggest that the material which we have at the beginning of ch. 30 is wisdom material of non-Israelite origin. The second part of 30.1, presumably the beginning of Agur's 'words', is virtually incomprehensible as it stands. The commentaries discuss the various problems of the verse and their varied solutions, and to these the student should refer.

There is little agreement as to how far these 'words of Agur' extend. Verse 1b as commonly emended (see the EVV and the commentaries) and vv. 2-3 are certainly expressed in

the first person ('I'); v. 4 appears to relate to what immediately precedes it. Accordingly, most commentators are agreed that the 'words of Agur' comprise at least vv. 1b-4. Verses 5-6 have an element of instruction in them, in that the prohibition of v. 6a is followed by a warning in v. 6b. Verses 7-9 are again in the first person, with a threefold request in v. 8 followed by a justification in v. 9. Verse 10, with its warning, stands in isolation, while vv. 11-14 contain a fourfold enumeration which seems to point forward to the numerical sayings that predominate in the remainder of the chapter (from v. 15 onwards), though here the numeral is not explicitly indicated. These verses (11-14), however, with the catchword 'curse' linking v. 11 with v. 10, seem to belong more with what precedes than with what follows. It may, then, be that the 'words of Agur' are to be found in the two sections in the first person (vv. 1b-3, 7-9) to which have been added vv. 5-6 on the one hand and v. 10 on the other, with vv. 11-14 both connecting with what precedes them and pointing forward to what follows.

Those who regard the 'words of Agur' as extending no further than v. 4 (there are many who restrict them to only vv. 1b-3) regard vv. 5-14 as additions which have accrued at different times. Some point out that not only vv. 11-14, as we have already observed, but also vv. 7-9 ('Two things', v. 7) are numerical sayings. Verses 5-6 belong together since both speak about God's word. Verse 6 is a prohibition about adding to God's word, and v. 10 is another prohibition, this time against slander. The artistic structure of vv. 11-14 is clear, each of the four characteristics beginning with the word *dōr* (literally 'generation'; NRSV 'there are those who...').

30.15-33

The second part of ch. 30, vv. 15-33, consists of a group of numerical sayings which have, on three occasions, had sayings of other types added to them. Verse 15a is a separate unit which is linked to the sayings which follow because it contains a number ('two'). The most characteristic numerical sayings are found in vv. 15b-16, 18-19, 21-23, 29-31, in each of which we find the pattern of two numerals (n...n + 1), in this case 'three...four...'. This kind of 'graded numerical

saying' is not confined to the wisdom literature in Israel (though there are examples of it in the book of Job) but extends also to prophetic literature where the best known example is in the foreign oracles in Amos 1–2, where 'for three transgressions or for four' implies a multiplicity of sins. The graded numerical saying has been traced back to Ugaritic (Canaanite) poetry, where it may have had some originally magic significance. It is used in Hebrew both to express multiplicity (as in Amos) and perhaps to suggest that there is more than one answer to a question. The sayings here in Proverbs 30 enumerate respectively insatiability (vv. 15b-16), the wonders of nature (vv. 18-19), things that are intolerable (vv. 21-23) and stately creatures (vv. 29-31). Verses 24-28 is the fifth numerical saying in the chapter; it simply lists in a straightforward way four minute but exceedingly wise creatures. Verses 17, 20 and 32-33 are separate entities about disrespect to parents, the adulteress (though not with the terminology that occurs so frequently in chs. 1–9) and pride. Verse 20 could be regarded as a comment on or an example of the last line of v. 19, and the theme of pride in vv. 32-33 connects with the idea of 'stateliness' in vv. 29-31. There seems to be no particular rationale behind the presence of v. 17 where it stands.

31.1-9

If the so-called 'Sayings of King Lemuel' are really of royal provenance, they are the only section in all of Israel's wisdom literature to indicate the supposed original foreign instructional background of such literature. This is certainly instructional literature with its imperatives and direct address to an individual, and this example is unique in that the 'teacher' is the king's mother. Here, then, we would appear to have the same kind of training for the exercise of supreme royal power as we find in much of the Egyptian literature of this type, in particular two works, *The Instruction for Merikare* and *The Instruction of Amenemhet*, in each of which it is the reigning monarch who is instructing the crown prince (literally, as here, 'son') with a view to the royal succession. Verses 4-5 and 6-7 are warnings against the evils of intoxication; vv. 8-9 are on the subject of justice for the

disadvantaged. Verses 2-3 probably belong together, and while v. 3 seems to be a warning against the adulteress (a theme common, as we have seen, in chs. 1–9), no one really knows what v. 2 means because of the uncertainty as to the sense, in this context, of the thrice-repeated opening word. Interpretations range from 'What!' (NJB) or 'What?' (REB), via 'No' (NRSV) to 'Listen!' (McKane, Plöger). An additional problem in this section is the identity of King Lemuel and the meaning of the word *massā'* ('oracle'). The Hebrew text of v. 1 as transmitted indicates a break in sense between the word translated 'king' and the word 'oracle', and this is reproduced in the NRSV: 'The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him.' If we were to disregard the punctuation of the Hebrew text, the heading could be rendered as in the REB: 'Sayings of King Lemuel of Massa, which his mother taught him'. The problem of the word *massā'* being also a common noun meaning 'oracle' is the same here as in 30.1 above. There is nothing 'prophetic' about this context either, and the word is mostly taken in its geographical/ethnic sense, indicative of an area or tribe of which Lemuel was the ruler. Such a geographical location might, additionally, help to explain the peculiarities in the language of v. 2, some of which (the word for 'son' for example) appear to be Aramaic rather than Hebrew.

31.10-31

The final section of the book comprises a poem about the virtuous or capable wife (31.10-31). This 22-line poem is in the form of an alphabetic acrostic, a form in which each line in turn begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Apart from Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 51.13ff., which is imperfectly preserved as an acrostic in Hebrew, this is the only example of this genre in the wisdom books themselves. There are a number of examples of it in the Psalms, for example Psalms 37, 145, with Psalm 119 as the great *tour de force*, where not only does each of the 22 eight-line stanzas feature the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, but each of these eight lines begins with the featured letter. Psalms 37 and 119 in particular are often regarded as part of the 'wisdom literature' in the wider sense of that term. The

genre is found also in Lamentations 1–4. Just as was the case with the graded numerical saying, so the origins of and reasons for this particular literary genre are obscure; they may have to do with the idea of wholeness or completeness in that the whole of the alphabet is utilized. This particular literary form, however, need no more be regarded as a literary strait-jacket than the exigences of rhyme or of particular stanza forms such as the sonnet in Western European literature or than alliteration in Anglo-Saxon poetry.

However, the demands of the acrostic mean that the virtues of the woman in this poem are not enumerated in any logical or sequential way. The spinning process, for example, is described (v. 19) after the mention of the selection of the already spun materials for weaving into cloth of different kinds (v. 13), the weaving process itself being referred to later still in the poem (v. 24). So, although these three verses refer to the three stages on the way from fleece to finished cloth, they are neither described in their proper sequence nor placed in juxtaposition.

While there is no trace of the *form* of the Instruction (second person commands with or without a motive or final clause)—and it is the form that for McKane is, of course, the *sine qua non*—nevertheless it may well be that this poem intends to present the woman as a paradigm both in the sense that in her are enshrined the qualities which a man should look for in the ideal prospective wife and in the sense that here is the model which, in Israelite society of a certain level—and we need to remember that wisdom literature is aimed, for the most part, at an upper or upper-middle class—is held up for women of that class. The poem has, indeed, been described as a paradigm for marriageable girls, a kind of prospectus for an ancient Israelite school for prospective wives (Crook 1954), and so, in that sense, as a parallel to the 'Instruction' of chs. 1–9 which was aimed at the young men of the middle to upper-middle classes of Israelite society. The main aim in life for these women—an aim which in our more egalitarian society would now be regarded as highly sexist—is to smooth the path of life for their husbands, leaving the latter free of all domestic and even financial and economic

concerns, free to play their own particular roles in society (v. 23).

There is also, in the comparison with which the poem opens ('far more precious than jewels', v. 10), a direct link with the figure of wisdom as depicted, for example, in 3.13-16; 8.11, 19. In this way, too, this 'capable woman' (*'ēšet ḥayil*) is contrasted with the 'strange woman' (*'iššāh zārāh*) of chs. 1–9 and provides a fitting and positive conclusion to the book as a whole.

Further Reading

J.B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, 3rd edn with Supplement, 1969). For a translation of the *Instruction of Amenemope* see pp. 421-25; and for a translation of *Ahiqar*, pp. 427-30.

For a discussion of the relationship of Prov. 22.17–24.22 to *Amenemope* in particular, besides the commentaries.

J. Ruffle 'The Teaching of Amenemope and its Connection with the Book of Proverbs', TynBul 28 (1977), pp. 29-68. His view is that the relationship is no more than one of a half-remembered Egyptian text on the part of the (Egyptian?) author of the material that is now found in Prov 22.17–24.22.

G.E. Bryce, *A Legacy of Wisdom* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Universitry Press, 1979). He believes that the non-Israelite material has become so 'integrated' that it is now no longer possible to prove dependence of the one upon the other;

D. Römheld, *Wege der Weisheit* (BZAW, 184; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989). He believes that the 'thirty sayings' is a unitive work which has emerged out of its writer's knowledge of *Amenemope* and the thought of which can be related to that of the Egyptian original.

For a thorough discussion of the various points of view see now Whybray, *Composition*, pp. 132-45.

W.M.W. Roth, 'The Numerical Sequence x/x+1 in the OT', VT 12 (1962), pp. 300-11; and *Numerical Sayings in the OT: A Form-Critical Study*, *VTS* 13 (1965) on numerical sayings.

For translations of *Merikare* and *Amenemhet* see *ANET*, pp. 414-19 and for a discussion of their form and content McKane, Proverbs (1970), pp. 67-75, 82-86.

For the suggested possible nature of the final acrostic poem in the book, see M.B. Crook, 'The Marriageable Maiden of Prov 31.10-31', *JNES* 13 (1954), pp. 137-40.

For the idea that this poem has been deliberately placed as the concluding element of the book's framework see C. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985) and Whybray, *Composition*, pp. 153-56.

5

THE FEMININE IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

ONE THING WHICH MUST immediately strike the reader of the book of Proverbs, especially in the light of our contemporary feminist movement, is the significant role played by female figures in the book. We have already noted that though teaching is passed from (male) teacher to (male) pupil—or, perhaps more basically, from father to (possibly 'adopted') son—there are two references within Proverbs 1–9 to the fact that the mother, too, played a part in the instruction of her children. Prov. 1.8 and 6.20 both refer to the mother's 'teaching' (*tōrāh*) in parallel to the father's 'instruction' (*mūsār* in 1.8) or 'commands' (*miṣvāh* in 6.20), and these references provide one of the arguments for suggesting that the educational process in ancient Israel was conducted not in schools but in family contexts.

Much attention is also devoted to a female figure who is to be shunned by the inexperienced young man just emerging from that family context on to the wider stage of life. This figure is first encountered in 2.16-19 as the *'iššāh zārāh* (v. 16a) // *nokrīyāh* (v. 16b), the 'strange' or 'foreign' woman. The Hebrew adjective *nokrī* (here, of course, in the feminine) may refer either to someone who is ethnically non-Israelite or to someone within the Israelite community who is nevertheless something of an 'outsider', 'someone who has become estranged from the natural corporate setting of his life and has severed the relationships which would normally shape and determine his behaviour' (McKane 1970: 285). In

either of these cases, there is something fascinating in the 'strangeness' of the woman, and, although some have argued for a cultic connotation for the figure, it seems more probable that she is one who has abandoned her original social setting with its attendant moral constraints (v. 17). Most modern translations describe her as an 'adulteress' (so, e.g. REB). Resort to her, the young men are warned, is the sure way to moral and even physical disintegration (vv. 18-19).

Similar strictures appear in greater or less detail in a number of other passages: 5.3-9, 20; 6.23-26, 29, 32; 7.4-27. In all of these there occur the same two terms either separately or in parallel: (*'iššāh*) *zārāh* // *nokrīyāh*. It is also made quite clear that the woman against whom the young men are being warned is not a prostitute; the contrast is made explicit in 6.26 (possibly also in 6.24 if an emendation on the basis of LXX is accepted; see NRSV, REB). She could easily be mistaken for a prostitute since she dresses like one (7.10), but she is quite explicitly described as someone else's wife (6.26, 29; 7.19-20). In all of these passages, too, warning is given not to succumb to her initial physical attractiveness (5.3; 6.25; 7.5, 16-18), and the destructiveness of such a relationship is emphasized (5.4-6; 6.27-29, 32-35; 7.22-23, 26-27).

Elsewhere in the book, female figures are presented in a much more positive light—though the modern feminist movement would not necessarily see all of these presentations as positive images of women. In 5.18-19 the wife of one's youth is held up as one whose love will satisfy at all times. The contrast here is with the unsatisfactoriness of relationships with the adulteress who is being warned against in other parts of ch. 5.

In the final chapter of the book we find two female figures of quite different kinds. In 31.1-9 there is the queen who instructs her son in his kingly duties and royal behaviour. Here, too, warnings against potentially destructive behaviour are given: consorting with 'women who bring down kings' (v. 3) and over-reliance on wine (vv. 4-7), obviously, from the amount of space devoted to it, a very real hazard. More positively, the mother commends to her son the pursuit of justice and the protection of those who are unable to protect themselves (vv. 8-9). The conclusion of the book as a whole is the

poem in the second part of ch. 31 in praise of the virtuous wife (31.10-31). A number of possible interpretations of this poem have already been indicated (above pp. 80-81), and I have drawn attention in particular to the probably deliberate placing of this poem as a conclusion to the book, picking up as it does language in which the figure of wisdom is described in chs. 1–9 and contrasted as it is with the figure of the adulteress—the *faithless* wife—in these opening chapters of the book.

But, of course, the main female figure, especially again in chs. 1–9, is that of wisdom herself. Wisdom first appears in this way in 1.20-33 where she is depicted as a figure who presents herself in the public places of the city (vv. 20-21), addresses herself to 'simple fools' (v. 22) and delivers a speech referring to herself in the first person in which she rejects those who have refused to listen to her but promises security to those who respond to her counsel and submit to her guidance (vv. 22-23). In 2.4, some translations (e.g. REB) render the Hebrew as if it were referring to a person ('seek *her*' etc.). But the Hebrew word *ḥokmāh* ('wisdom') is a feminine noun (as are a number of words often used as synonyms of and parallel to 'wisdom'), and it is equally valid to translate 2.4 (as does the NRSV) in an impersonal way ('seek *it*' etc.). The same might, at first sight, be true of 3.13-18. Not only, however, is this a more sustained passage where the impersonal abstract mode is more difficult to maintain, but it does contain anthropomorphisms (right hand/left hand, v. 16) as well as personal language (lay hold/hold fast, v. 18). So this passage, too, seems clearly to be presenting wisdom as a female figure. The personal element is also clearly present in 4.5-9, where the language is even more anthropomorphic than that of 3.13-18. Here verbs such as 'love', 'cherish', 'embrace' are used to describe the attitude desired vis-à-vis wisdom. These are terms which are difficult to apply to an abstract concept.

In 9.1-6 wisdom is depicted in terms very similar to those used of the adulteress in ch. 7 with the spread banquet (9.2, 5; cf. 7.14, 16-17, where it is the 'spread bed' which lures the fool) and the invitation (9.3ff.; cf. 7.18, 21). But the 'invitation' has also been characteristic of 1.20-33, though

'summons' might there be a better description of wisdom's call. The parallelism with the adulteress passages is even more evident in that counterpiece to wisdom's invitation in 9.1-6, namely 9.13-18, where it is Lady Stupidity (REB) or Dame Folly who seeks to entice the simpleton into her house, which is again depicted in terms of the doorway to the realm of the dead (cf. 2.18; 7.27).

It is 8.1-36 which sees the most developed presentation of a personified wisdom. The bulk of this chapter presents in a more expansive and developed form primarily what has already been encountered in 1.20-33. Again wisdom makes her appearance in the public places of the city (vv. 2-3; cf. 1.20-21) and utters an impassioned plea, this time to 'all mankind' (v. 4; not just to the 'simple fools' of 1.22) to choose her ways. There is, however, a greater confidence on wisdom's part in ch. 8 than any we have encountered previously. Now she can claim (vv. 15-16):

> Through me kings hold sway
> and governors enact just laws.
> Through me princes wield authority,
> from me all rulers on earth derive their rank.

All sound government and skilled statecraft derive from and depend upon her. It is she—and she alone—who bestows shrewdness, knowledge and discretion (v. 12); from her come advice and ability, understanding and power (v. 14). This is the kind of language that McKane has described as that of 'old wisdom', on which basis he felt able to separate out his Class A proverbs in the sentence literature (see above pp. 61-64).

But there is one section of the chapter, 8.22-31, which certainly goes beyond anything we have encountered so far in those sections of chs. 1–9 where wisdom is personified. Here wisdom is described as the first product of Yahweh's creative activity. The earlier part of this section describes that creative activity mostly in negative terms ('when there was yet no...', v. 24) in order to emphasize the primordial nature of wisdom (vv. 22-26). From v. 27 onwards, however, Yahweh's creative activity is described in positive terms, and here the emphasis is on wisdom's presence alongside Yahweh in creation (vv. 27-31). For the most part, the poem simply

tells us that wisdom 'was there' (v. 27a) or 'at his side' (v. 30a). In some translations (e.g. REB) that is all that is stated; in others (e.g. NRSV) something more is implied with a translation of v. 30a along the lines of 'then I was beside him *like a master worker*', with its suggestion of wisdom's personal participation in the actual work of creation. These translation differences hinge on the interpretation of the Hebrew word *'āmōn*. The form of the word in the MT suggests something like 'confidant', derived from the verb *'mn* 'to be trustworthy'; hence REB 'darling'. A commonly suggested emendation of the word to *'ommān* ('craftsman' in Song of Songs 7.2 [EVV 7.1]) is based primarily on the supposition that what we have here is an Akkadian loanword meaning 'expert, craftsman' (hence NRSV). To suggest, however, that wisdom played an architectonic role in the creation process is to lay too much emphasis upon *one* interpretation of a single difficult Hebrew word. It is perhaps safer, then, to regard wisdom's role here as observational, participant only in the sense that she was at Yahweh's side throughout the work of creation. McKane, relating *'āmōn* to the same Akkadian word, also suggests that she was Yahweh's 'confidant', though he seems to feel the need to revocalize the word to achieve that sense (1970: 356ff.).

In all likelihood vv. 22-31 constitute an originally independent poem which clearly reflects mythological themes and motifs, and Whybray (*Composition*, p. 41) is careful to point out the implicit contradiction between this whole section (vv. 22-31) and the rest of the chapter. This is not the same as the creation account of the Priestly writer in Genesis 1, nor that suggested by the occasional references in the Psalms and elsewhere to the Canaanite (and Babylonian) conception of the created world emerging from the conflict between the creator god and the sea monster (cf. esp. Ps. 74.12-17; Hab. 3.8-15; the peculiarly Israelite name for the sea monster, Rahab, features in, among other places, Ps. 89.11 [EVV 89.10]; Job 26.12; Isa. 51.9). Here in 8.22-31 wisdom is pre-existent, 'the first of his [Yahweh's] works' (vv. 22-23). In a rather different style, the wisdom poem in Job 28 says something similar. There, especially in v. 27, wisdom is 'the fundamental principle which governs the design of the world...the

flawless centrepiece of the universe' (Habel 1985: 400).

Attempts have been made to trace the origins of this concept of 'wisdom' in relation to the created world. For those scholars who have laid emphasis on the foreign, especially Egyptian origin of the whole wisdom tradition, the figure of *Maat* is generally regarded as the prototype of the figure of wisdom. *Maat* in Egypt is basically an abstract noun which can be translated as 'justice' or, in some instances, 'truth'. It is the expression of the divine order immanent in the world. Subsequently in Egypt it came to be regarded as a goddess, and in a text remarkably similar in many ways to Prov. 8.22-31, the god Atum names his daughter Tefnut '*Maat*' (Kayatz 1966: 93-94). *Maat*, then, is hypostatized, and many would regard the presentation of 'wisdom' in Proverbs as a female figure—a hypostasis, an aspect of the Godhead. One scholar even goes so far as to reject the Egyptian origins of such a hypostasis and argues for the existence of an ancient Hebrew goddess now 'redefined' in the figure of 'wisdom' in Proverbs (Lang 1986). If, however, the foreign origin of the wisdom tradition seems now less assured that it once was, and in view of the fact that Lang's arguments often seem to rest on rather shaky foundations, neither of these two views seems entirely satisfactory. At this stage in the development of 'wisdom' we are probably faced with little more than a personification of the attribute of Yahweh cited in 3.19 as that by which he 'laid the earth's foundations'. Wisdom is, as we have seen, personified in a number of places in Proverbs 1–9, and in these passages she presents herself as outstandingly precious and to be acquired at all costs; she it is by whom kings and princes rule. But in 8.22-31 she is an object of Yahweh's creative activity and therefore subordinate to him. The idea of her as a fellow worker with him seems unlikely in the context; she may be pre-existent in the sense that she was there 'before all that he made' (v. 22), but she is not Yahweh's equal and is therefore not a hypostasis.

This presentation of wisdom here, however, marks the beginning of a further development. At the head of this section (vv. 22-31) in the NRSV translation, after the heading 'Wisdom's Part in Creation' there stands, in brackets, 'Cp Jn 1.1-3'. What is the connection between Prov. 8.22-31 and the

Prologue to the Fourth Gospel and by what route is it made?

The first stage in this development is to be found in the Wisdom of Ben Sira, a book known variously as Sirach or Ecclesiasticus, where, in ch. 24, we find a hymn in praise of wisdom in which again wisdom speaks in the first person. Two things are particularly significant in that chapter. The first is that wisdom, so often thought to be of foreign origin and certainly an international phenomenon in the ancient Near East, is here firmly indigenized in Israel. Wisdom is once more depicted in a creation context ('it was I who covered the earth like a mist', v. 3) though still as God's creature ('he who created me', v. 8), but she is specifically ordered to make her home in Israel (vv. 8-12). It was there that she has flourished and blossomed (vv. 13-17), and she concludes her speech with words of invitation already so familiar from the book of Proverbs (vv. 19-22). But then Ben Sira comments on this wisdom speech (and this is the second highly significant element in this chapter) in v. 23:

> All this is the book of the covenant of God Most High,
> the law laid on us by Moses,
> a possession for the assemblies of Jacob.

Not only has wisdom been firmly located in Israel, but she is here unequivocally identified with Torah ('the book of the covenant...the law...'). Often wisdom is thought of as marginal in relation to Torah, to the saving history, to the phenomenon of prophecy (a point to which I shall return) but for Ben Sira this is not the case. Wisdom is as fundamental for him as is the covenant between God and his people, the covenant of which Torah is the binding agent.

Ben Sira was writing in Palestine in the late second century BCE. A little later, in the Jewish community in Egypt probably in the first century BCE, we find an Alexandrian Jew writing, not in Hebrew as did Ben Sira, but in Greek, in a book which has come to be known as the Wisdom of Solomon, and there developing ideas about wisdom's role in creation. To begin with he does not seem to go beyond what we find in Proverbs and Ben Sira when he states that wisdom 'was *present* when you created the universe' (9.9). But he begins to build on the idea of wisdom not just *present* at creation but as an active participant in it, 'the active cause of all

things...the artificer of all that is' (8.5-6). He also moves quite specifically along the lines of wisdom as a hypostasis when he describes her thus: 'she is so pure that she pervades and permeates all things. Like a fine mist she rises from the power of God, a clear effluence from the glory of the Almighty' (7.24-25). 'No biblical writer comes as close as this author to seeing wisdom as divine' (Ashton 1986: 168) This is not, of course, a specific identification, for the Wisdom of Solomon insists that wisdom is still God's gift to humankind (9.4), and it has indeed been argued that 'when set within the context of faith in Yahweh there is no clear indication that the Wisdom language of these writings had gone beyond vivid personification' (Dunn 1980: 170). In Wisdom of Solomon 10, however, we have a whole historical perspective in which wisdom is seen as having been the protective power over the heroes of Israel's earliest beginnings, an active participant on the stage of Israel's saving history (cf. 9.18 'men...were *saved* by wisdom'). To this mix is added the influence of Greek Platonic and Stoic thought through the medium of the Jewish philosopher Philo (20 BCE–45 CE). From Greek thought, too, comes the very concept of 'Logos' (the 'word' of Jn 1.1-14), a highly important concept in Philo, who uses it to refer to God himself in his approach to humankind to the extent that he is and can be known by humankind (Dunn 1980: 228). So, now the stage is set for wisdom's transformation into the Johannine Logos of Jn 1.1-14. It may well be, too, that in this gradual transformation of the personified wisdom of Prov. 1.20-33 and 8.1-36 into the almost divine figure of the Wisdom of Solomon—via Ben Sira 24.8 with its reference to the dwelling (lit. 'tenting') of wisdom in Jacob/Israel and the imagery of *1 En.* 42.1-2 where wisdom fails to find a dwelling among the sons of men—we see something of the origins of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, where the Logos ('word') becomes flesh and dwells (lit. 'tents') among humankind (Jn 1.14), by whom he is ultimately rejected, among whom he finds no home (Jn 1.11).

Further Reading

Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine* (1985).
C. Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9* (Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966).
B. Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelite Goddess Redefined* (New York, 1986).
N.C. Habel, *The Book of Job* (London: SCM Press, 1985).
J.D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (London: SCM Press, 1980).
J. Ashton, 'The Transformation of Wisdom. A Study of the Prologue of John's Gospel', *NTS* 32 (1986), pp. 161-86.

6

WISDOM AND THEOLOGY

ONE OF THE CHARACTERISTICS of the wisdom literature is its almost total lack of reference to or apparent interest in either the historical contexts in which ancient Israel found herself or the cult of the Jerusalem temple which was so much the focal point of Israel's religious practices. These ahistorical and acultic aspects of the wisdom literature not only make the wisdom books themselves almost impossible to date with any degree of accuracy, but they have also led to their marginalization in terms of Old Testament theology. Because of their lack of interest in Israel's salvation history or the cult of the temple, they have been felt to have little or nothing to contribute to the general theological perspectives of the Old Testament.

This difficulty has already been overcome to some extent in the work of Ben Sira. The major final part of his book is the so-called 'Hymn to the Fathers', that section which begins with the well-known 'Let us now praise famous men' (chs. 44–50). In these chapters Ben Sira praises the heroes of Israel's past, culminating in a magnificent eulogy of Simon the Just, who was High Priest in Jerusalem from 219 to 196 BCE. The heroes chosen by Ben Sira are not, perhaps, those who might initially spring to mind if one were asked who the 'famous men' of Israel were, but this is not the occasion on which to examine Ben Sira's principles of selectivity. Suffice it to say that here at last is a wisdom writer who does manifest an interest in Israel's sacred history. The quite specific

emphasis given in the Hymn to Moses, Aaron and Phinehas (45.1-26)—'heroes' who are specifically connected with cult and priesthood—suggests, as does also the Simon eulogy of ch. 50, that Ben Sira had an explicit interest in the cult also. This is borne out by a number of other passages in the book which encourage honour and respect for the priesthood and the cult (7.29-31; 35.4-11; note, too, the singling out in the Hymn of the cultic reformers Hezekiah and Josiah for developed treatment in 48.17–49.3).

But if we turn to the standard works on Old Testament theology we find either an almost total disregard of the wisdom literature or an embarrassment on the part of the author as to know how to deal with it. Let us look briefly at a more or less random selection of four fairly standard works.

T. Vriezen (*An Outline of Old Testament Theology*) solves the problem by regarding all the 'Writings' (that third section of the Hebrew Bible which contains, among other things, all three of the wisdom books) as having only 'secondary canonicity', and he can say of them that 'it is not so evident that these books are the Word of God as it is in the case of the other books' (p. 71). This is simply a way of selecting those parts of the Old Testament which particularly suit one's purpose—for Vriezen that is primarily the prophetic material—and no one has seriously followed him down that road.

W. Eichrodt's *Theology of the Old Testament* is, of course, centred on the idea of covenant, which he sees as the focal point of the Old Testament as a whole, and the entire first volume is devoted to that theme of covenant in all of its many manifestations. In his second volume he has included a sub-section entitled 'The Wisdom of God' (II, pp. 80-92) which is really dealing with one of the attributes of God but in which the main emphasis is on Prov. 8.22-31, with 'wisdom as the principle of cosmic order and as hypostasis' (pp. 83-89). These few pages, however, are his only acknowledgment of the role of wisdom in Old Testament theology.

G. von Rad (*Old Testament Theology*) deals in two volumes with 'The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions' and 'The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions' respectively, and it is in the first of these that he finds room for the wisdom

material. His treatment of it is appended to this volume, with no very obvious reason why it should stand where it does. Von Rad deals with it in a section entitled 'Israel before Yahweh (Israel's Answer)', the response of Israel to Yahweh's dealing with her in her history. He treats the book of Job in the context of the sufferings and consolation of the individual, with Ecclesiastes in terms of scepticism and with Proverbs in terms both of Israel's experiential wisdom (the sentence literature for the most part, Prov. 10ff.) and of her theological wisdom (the latest part of the Proverbs material, chs. 1–9).

Von Rad came back, however, to the wisdom literature at the end of his life in his seminal work *Wisdom in Israel*. The fact that he felt free to devote an entire volume to the wisdom tradition is one indication of the increasing significance allotted to it by scholars, and in this book von Rad was able to expand and develop independently (and in its own right, not just as an appendage to something supposedly more significant) the approach to the material already adopted in his *Theology*. Von Rad tried to hold in balance, on the one hand, what he perceived as the tendency towards desacralization evident in the very earliest strata of the Old Testament wisdom tradition and, on the other, the idea that Yahweh is nevertheless as much a part of everyday life in ancient Israel as anything else, that Yahweh's word and his activity undergird and hold together every experience of life. There is a kind of polarity here between the knowledge that can be derived from experience (experiential wisdom again) and the idea that at the very limit of knowledge there is a boundary beyond which human understanding cannot pass and where is found only the transcendent God (theological or revelatory wisdom). This polarity is, in a sense, summed up in the range of apparently contradictory proverbs which are sometimes—though not always—placed side by side. We can contrast, for example, Prov. 21.31:

> A horse may be made ready for the day of battle
> but victory rests with the Lord.

with 24.6

> Wars are won by skilful strategy
> and victory is the fruit of detailed planning

to see something of the 'double vision' with which all events are perceived. 'The phenomena are never objectified; they are always conceived only from the point of view of their relationship to the man envisaged in each particular case' (*Wisdom*, p. 311).

Von Rad's book marks the beginning of a more serious attempt on the part of scholars to integrate the wisdom literature more into the centre of a theological appraisal of the Old Testament. This time, too, we shall look at four such attempts, again selected more or less at random. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and the bibliographies associated with each will point the interested reader in a variety of directions.

In a collection of essays dedicated to Walther Zimmerli (to whom I shall turn in a moment) and focusing on the topics of *Canon and Authority*, W.S. Towner takes as his theme 'The Renewed Authority of Old Testament Wisdom for Contemporary Faith' (pp. 132-47). The problem as Towner perceives it is that of 'discerning the role ['if any', one might add] which God plays in human history and in individual experience' (p. 132). He sees this problem particularly acutely in the increasingly 'secular' way in which twentieth-century people endeavour to account for the events that impinge upon their lives. They do not see God as having any part in these events, and an increasing number of biblical scholars have come to see in the wisdom tradition a 'scriptural warrant for interpreting events in a way that is desacralized, nontheonomous, essentially "secular"' (p. 133). This is picking up von Rad's concept of 'desacralization' as an essential mark of Old Testament wisdom. Towner points to two major motifs in the Old Testament material: first, that people are able to make their own decisions within the created world, exercising a 'secular' autonomy; secondly, that this decision-making ability has its limits, in so far as Yahweh is the one who provides 'orders' in that created world, standards against which individuals must measure themselves. It is this freedom on the part of individuals to make decisions and shape their own future that may be thought to provide a certain scriptural warrant for affirming the basic 'secular' approach of twentieth-

century men and women to life and the world around them.

Zimmerli's *Old Testament Theology in Outline* appeared in English translation in 1978, but its second edition had already appeared in German in 1975. It therefore predates the article of Towner, but it also has a precursor among Zimmerli's own published works in a 1960s article on wisdom's place and limitations in the context of Old Testament theology (English version in *SJT* 17 [1964], pp. 146-58). In the second main section of the *Theology* Zimmerli discusses the 'Wise Man' ('The Gifts bestowed by Yahweh') as part of a subsection dealing with gifts of leadership where the wisdom teacher is ranked alongside, among others, prophet, priest and king. But later, under the heading 'Life before God', 'wisdom' appears as a third aspect alongside 'obedience' and 'sacrificial worship' and is defined as the 'Mastery of Everyday Life and its Concrete Secrets' (pp. 155-66). The very fact that Zimmerli can place 'wisdom' in the same section of his *Theology* as people's relation to God through Torah ('obedience') and cult ('sacrificial worship') reveals the high seriousness with which he is disposed to treat what has so often been regarded as the poor cousin in the Old Testament corpus. This is certainly a far cry from Vriezen with his 'secondary canonicity' approach. Zimmerli sees the wisdom literature as that part of the canon which quite explicitly deals with

> the realm of everyday life with its jobs to be done, its decisions to be made without a divine commandment to regulate each step...Here, too, people face everywhere the question of how to evaluate the situation correctly and what their appropriate conduct should be (p. 155).

But it is clear, here too, that these decisions are taken against a background of cosmic order—what the Egyptians described as *maat*—which for Israel was Yahweh: 'In the rationally recognized order and regularity of its daily life it can know only the One, who was also the only one to whom its supplications and praises were addressed: Yahweh' (p. 157). The God to whom obedience was given through Torah and worship paid through the sacrificial cult was also the God whose will and purpose could be discerned through the application of 'wisdom' in daily life. Zimmerli is also quite

clear—against McKane and others—'that such an awareness constitutes the actual basis for the knowledge of the world exhibited by the book of Proverbs and is not merely a peripheral element added as a kind of religious ornament' (p. 159).

In an 'essay' entitled *Problems and Prospects of Old Testament Theology*, Jesper Høgenhaven, following an analysis of the themes and problems of Old Testament theology in the post-1950 period, has proposed a structure for such a theology which reflects 'what is primary and secondary in Israelite religion, as it is exhibited in the OT' (p. 97) and which has 'Wisdom' as its starting point. He argues that for pre-exilic Yahwism what was of primary importance was not history—not even the saving history which was so prominent in the theology of von Rad, for example—but 'cosmic and social order and stability' (p. 98) and that the roots of the whole wisdom tradition in Israel, a tradition which gives expression to that order and stability, go back to the very earliest periods of Israel's history (cf. the concepts of clan and tribal wisdom discussed above p. 30). His Old Testament theology model is structured along historical lines, and for him the primary element in it is 'wisdom', which is followed, in due course and in their proper chronological place, by psalms, historical narrative, Torah and prophecy. There is perhaps nothing in what Høgenhaven has to say about the nature of wisdom that we have not already encountered; it is indeed much along the lines of Zimmerli, whose *Theology* is particularly commended (p. 98). The significance of this little monograph lies, rather, in the pride of place which is accorded to wisdom in the proposed theological model. Høgenhaven clearly sees it as one of the fundamental elements in the Israelite way of life and religious thought.

The last of our random sample of modern approaches to the role and function of the wisdom tradition in the context of Old Testament theology is by one of the major American writers in this field, Roland E. Murphy. In a short article in the *Biblical Theology Bulletin* (24 [1994], pp. 4-7), 'Wisdom Literature and Biblical Theology', Murphy begins by analysing the same areas as we have already observed, namely the marginalization of wisdom in relation to the Old

Testament's central ideas and the fact that in more recent times it has come to occupy a more central position. In the body of his article Murphy makes some suggestions for the theological role of wisdom in the context of Old Testament and biblical theology.

1. He begins by highlighting an important contribution which wisdom can make to theology, namely the concept of 'the fear of the Lord' as the fundamental principle of all life. We have noted already that although wisdom can be seen as providing scriptural warrant for our twentieth-century 'secular' approach to life, Yahweh is still the *fons et origo* of all that we are and do. We have seen this in Towner and in Zimmerli, and it is present, too, in Høgenhaven. The basis of all life lies in our reverence vis-à-vis God: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (cf., e.g. Prov. 1.7; Sir. 1.2, 20).

2. We have noted, too, in earlier chapters Murphy's second point, namely that 'wisdom theology is creation theology' (p. 5). This was first brought to prominence in Zimmerli's 1960s article but has since come to occupy a central place in wisdom studies. It is the sole area in which wisdom is often permitted to make a contribution to Old Testament theology. Eichrodt, for example, concentrates almost exclusively in his brief treatment on the creation passage in Prov. 8.22-31. See also von Rad, *Wisdom*, pp. 144-76, a chapter entitled 'The Self-Revelation of Creation'.

3. The moralism of the wisdom material is self-evident, especially in the sayings and admonitions of the sentence literature in the book of Proverbs, and this certainly has an important contribution to make to the subject of theological ethics.

4. The difficult question of theodicy—the whole problem of the relationship between the existence of evil and suffering alongside the existence of a just God—is one that is tackled from different angles, even though not definitively answered, in the book of Job.

5. The final area, the one in which Murphy concentrates the bulk of his article, is that of the personification of wisdom as a woman. Here he makes a number of points.

i. Wisdom, as woman, may be seen to reflect something of the nature of God and portrays God not as static and passive but as one who gives himself to us and for us (p. 6).

ii. The way in which we are invited to respond to female wisdom in Proverbs—in a language and a manner that are often very erotic (Zimmerli, p. 160)—suggests the way in which we as human beings are invited to respond to God's love for us.

iii. The depiction of wisdom as feminine may also be seen as the beginning of a way of breaking the rampant patriarchalism of the Old Testament.

iv. In a verse such as Prov. 8.35:

> Whoever finds me finds life
> and wins favour with the Lord.

it is Yahweh that we hear speaking. 'The bold personification of Wisdom as a woman serves to crack open the culturally conditioned language that refers to God in a totally masculine manner' (p. 7).

These are only some of the lines of investigation which Murphy sketches in this brief but significant article and which he considers to be worth pursuing in the context of the wisdom/theology relationship

Murphy began that article with a quotation from another scholar, H. Graf Reventlow: 'The incorporation of wisdom into Old Testament theology remains a still unresolved task for the future to deal with' (p. 4; Reventlow's work dates from 1985). As we have seen, the task has been begun, but further thought and reflection still lie ahead. Perhaps some of those who have persevered to the end of this book will have been encouraged to participate in that adventure of theological reflection.

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INDEXES

INDEX OF REFERENCES

Old Testament
Genesis
1 29, 86
12.8 64
25.14 21, 76
37–50 16

Deuteronomy
1–4 16
24.3 26

Joshua
18.9 26

Judges
8.13-17 26

1 Samuel
1–3 26

2 Samuel
9–20 16

1 Kings
1–11 21
1–2 16
3–11 16
4.3 30
12.8 26

2 Kings
10.1-6 26
6.1 26

Job
1–2 14
9.5 64
26.12 86
28 13, 86
28.27 86
32–37 13
38.1–40.2 14
40.3-5 14
42.7-17 14
42.16 14

Psalms
37 79
74.12-17 86
89.10 86
89.11 86
119 79
145 79

Proverbs
1–9 13, 20, 21, 29, 30, 33, 35, 36, 41-48, 50, 52, 62, 72, 73, 78-82, 84, 85, 87, 93
1 36, 48
1.1–9.18 33
1.1-33 47
1.1-5 43
1.1 33, 51, 52
1.2-7 36, 48
1.2 33, 36
1.3 36
1.4 36
1.5 36
1.6 36, 53
1.7–3.35 47
1.7 36, 44, 97
1.8-19 36, 48
1.8 25, 35, 69, 82
1.11-14 36
1.20-33 35, 40, 47, 84, 85, 89
1.20-21 36, 40, 84
1.22-33 36
1.22-27 36
1.22-23 84
1.22 35, 36, 40, 84
1.24-32 36
1.28-33 37
1.8b 36
2–7 49
2–5 13
2–4 48
2 37, 44, 46, 47, 49
2.1-4 37, 49
2.1 35, 43
2.2-4 43
2.4 49, 84
2.5-8 37, 44, 49
2.5 37, 49
2.6 44
2.9-11 37, 49
2.9 37, 43, 49
2.10-15 43
2.12-15 37, 49
2.12 37, 49
2.16-19 37, 38, 43, 49, 82
2.16 37, 49, 82
2.17 83
2.18-19 83
2.18 85
2.20-22 37, 49
3–7 37
3.1-12 37
3.1 69
3.11 37
3.13-24 37
3.13-20 37
3.13-18 37, 84
3.13-16 81
3.13 37

3.14-15 40
3.16 84
3.18 37, 84
3.19-20 37, 40
3.19 87
3.21-35 37
3.27-35 47, 48
3.27-30 37
3.31-35 37
4–7 47
4.1-5 75
4.1-9 38
4.1 38
4.2 69
4.3 38
4.4-9 38
4.5-9 37, 84
4.5 38
4.7 38
4.10-19 38, 39
4.11-13 38
4.14-19 37
4.14-17 38
4.18-19 38
4.20-27 38
4.22-23 38
4.25-27 38
5–7 48
5 38, 83
5.1-20 37
5.1-8 43, 44
5.2 44
5.3-9 83
5.3 38, 83
5.4-14 38
5.4-6 83
5.7 38
5.12-14 38
5.15-20 39
5.18-19 83
5.20 83
5.21-33 39
5.21-23 47
6.1-19 39, 47, 48
6.1-5 39
6.6-11 39, 47, 75
6.10-11 75
6.12-15 39
6.16-19 39
6.1b 39
6.20-35 37-39
6.20-23 39
6.20 25, 69, 82
6.23-26 83
6.24 39, 83
6.25 83
6.26 83
6.27-29 83
6.29 39, 83
6.30-31 39
6.32-35 83
6.32 39, 83
6.34-35 39
7 47, 84
7.1-27 37, 38
7.1-5 40
7.2 69
7.4-27 83
7.5 83
7.6-23 39, 75
7.10-23 41
7.10 40, 83
7.14-20 40
7.14 84
7.16-18 83
7.16-17 84
7.18 84
7.19-20 83
7.21-23 40
7.21 84
7.22-23 83
7.24-27 40
7.24 38
7.26-27 83
7.27 85
8 47, 48, 85
8.1-36 35, 47, 89
8.1-16 85
8.2-3 85
8.2 41
8.5 40
8.10-11 40
8.11 81
8.12 85
8.14 85
8.15-16 40, 85
8.19 81
8.22-31 29, 37, 40, 85-87, 92, 97
8.22-26 40, 85
8.22-23 86
8.22 87
8.24 85
8.27-31 40, 85
8.27 85
8.27a 86
8.30a 86
8.32 38, 41
8.35-36 41
8.35 98
9 47
9.1-6 35, 41, 48, 84, 85
9.2 84
9.3 41, 84
9.4 41
9.5 84
9.7-12 48
9.7-9 41, 47
9.10-12 41
9.10 41
9.11 41
9.12 41
9.13-18 38, 41, 48, 85
9.13 41
9.14 41
9.16 41
9.18 33, 41
10–31 30
10–29 22, 70, 72, 76
10–15 51, 55, 57, 59, 69
10 53-55, 62, 63, 93
10.1–22.16 29, 33, 35, 48, 51, 52, 55, 65, 69
10.1–15.33 34, 51
10.1 33, 51, 52, 56, 64
10.2-3 60
10.2 52, 60, 63
10.3 60, 63
10.4-5 62
10.5 53
10.6 54, 60

10.7 60
10.8 54, 63
10.10-12 62, 63
10.10-11 54
10.10 54
10.11 54
10.13-15 63
10.13-14 54
10.13 54, 63
10.14 54, 63
10.18-21 54
10.18 54
10.19 54, 63
10.20-21 60
10.20 54
10.21 54
10.24-25 60
10.27-32 60, 63
10.31-32 54
10.31 54
11 55
12–15 21
12 55
12.1 55
12.2 55
12.5 54, 55
12.6 54, 55
12.7 55
12.8 55
12.9 55
12.10 55
12.11 55, 69
12.12 55
12.13-25 55
12.13 54, 55
12.14 54, 55
12.15 55
12.16 55
12.17-25 54
12.17 54
12.18 54, 55
12.19 54, 55
12.20 54
12.21 54, 55
12.22 54, 55
12.23 54
12.24 54, 55
12.25 54, 55
13 55
13.12 58
13.14 63
14 55, 57
14.26–16.15 51, 59
14.26–15.33 57
14.26 52
14.27 63
14.28 55
14.35 55
15 52, 55
15.17 59
15.23 58
16 55
16.1–22.16 34, 51, 57, 59
16.1-9 55
16.1-7 66
16.1 57
16.3 57
16.8 55
16.9 66
16.10-15 55
16.10 21, 55
16.11 55
16.17 57, 58
16.28 56
16.32 58
17.3a 68
18.5 58
19.1 69
19.13 68
20.16 68
20.20 56
21 59
21.31 93
22.2 69, 73
22.3 68
22.16 51, 55
22.17–31.31 48
22.17–24.34 72
22.17–24.22 19, 20, 29, 34, 42, 73-75, 81
22.17-21 74
22.17 20, 30, 51, 72, 74
22.19-20 73
22.20 34, 73, 74
22.21 73
23.11 20, 74
23.13-14 74
23.15 68, 73
23.19 73
23.26 73
23.29-35 74
24.6 93
24.13 73
24.21 73
24.22 34, 72
24.23-34 34
24.23 72
24.23-34 75, 76
24.24-25 75
24.27-29 75
24.27 75
24.30-34 75
24.33-34 75
25–29 29, 65
25–27 34, 65, 68-70
25–26 65, 67, 68
25 65, 67, 68
25.1–29.27 34, 64
25.1 26, 30, 52, 53, 64
25.2-27 68
25.2-7 68
25.3 67
25.4-5 65
25.6-7b 65
25.9-10 65
25.11-12 66
25.12 67
25.13-14 66
25.16-17 66
25.18-19 66
25.21-22 66
25.26 68
25.27 21
25.7c-8c 65
26 66
26.1-12 66
26.1 66
26.7 67
26.11 66
26.13-16 66
26.20-28 66
27 66-68
27.1 68
27.8 67
27.11-21 68
27.11 68
27.12 68
27.13 68
27.15-16 68
27.15 67
27.17 67

27.19 67
27.20 67
27.21 67
27.21a 68
27.23-27 66
27.25-27 66
28–29 34, 65, 68
28 69
28.2 70
28.3 68, 70
28.4 69
28.5 69
28.6 69, 70
28.7 69
28.8 70
28.9 69
28.11 70
28.13 69
28.15 68, 70
28.16 70
28.19 69, 70
28.25 69
28.27 70
29 64, 68, 69
29.2 70
29.4 70
29.5 68
29.7 70
29.12 70
29.13 69, 70
29.14 70
29.16 70
29.18 69
29.25 69
29.26 69, 70
30 76
30.1–31.31 76
30.1-14 76
30.1 76
30.1b-3 77
30.1b-4 77
30.1b 76
30.14 76
30.15-33 76
30.15 76
30–31 72
30 34, 77, 78
30.1-4 30
30.1 64, 79
30.2-3 76
30.4 34, 77
30.5-14 77
30.5-6 77
30.6 77
30.6a 77
30.6b 77
30.7-9 77
30.7 77
30.8 77
30.9 77
30.10 77
30.11-14 77
30.11 77
30.15-33 77
30.15-31 39
30.15 34, 77
30.15a 77
30.15b-16 77, 78
30.17 78
30.18-19 77, 78
30.19 78
30.20 78
30.21-23 77, 78
30.24-28 78
30.29-31 77, 78
30.32-33 78
31 76, 84
31.1-31 34
31.1-9 21, 30, 78, 83
31.1 34, 76, 79
31.2-3 79
31.2 79
31.3 79, 83
31.4-7 83
31.4-5 78
31.6-7 78
31.8-9 78, 83
31.9 34
31.10-31 79, 81, 84
31.10 34, 81
31.13 80
31.19 80
31.23 81
31.24 80

Song of Songs
7.2 86

Isaiah
1–39 16
5.21 28
8.16 26
10.13 28
29.14 28
31.1-3 28
50.4-6 26
51.9 86

Jeremiah
2–3 38
15.10-21 14
18.18 27, 28
18.19-23 14
20.7-18 14
31.29-30 14
49.7 31

Lamentations
1–4 80

Ezekiel
18.1-2 14

Hosea
1–3 38

Amos
1–2 78
7.9 60
7.10-15 60

Obadiah
8 31

Habakkuk
3.8-15 86

Zechariah
6.12 59
6.13 59

Wisdom of Solomon
7.24-25 89
8.5-6 89
9.4 89
9.9 88
9.18 89
10 89

Ecclesiasticus
1.2 97
1.20 97
7.29-31 92
24 29, 40, 88
24.1-23 40

24.3 88
24.8-12 88
24.8 88, 89
24.8b-12 31
24.13-17 88
24.19-22 88
24.23 88
35.4-11 92
44–50 91
44–49 16
45.1-26 92
48.17–49.3 92
50 92
50.1-24 16
50.27-29 16
51.13 79
51.23-30 16
51.23 26

New Testament
Matthew
5.10 30

John
1.1-14 89
1.1-3 41, 87
1.11 89
1.14 89

Pseudepigrapha
1 Enoch
42.1-2 89

Index of Authors

Aitken, K. 10, 71
Ashton, J. 89, 90

Barucq, A. 11, 47, 50, 71
Black, M. 10
Brown, R.E. 10
Bryce, G.E. 59, 70, 81
Bühlmann, W. 71

Camp, C. 81, 90
Chapman, G. 10
Childs, B.S. 31
Clements, R.E. 98
Crenshaw, J.L. 17, 26, 32
Crook, M.B. 80, 81

Davidson, R. 99
Dunn, J.D.G. 89, 90

Eaton, J.H. 14, 31
Eichrodt, W. 92, 99
Eissfeldt, O. 31

Fox, M.V. 61, 70

Gemser, B. 11
Gilbert, M. 70, 71
Golka, F.W. 22, 29, 32

Habel, N.C. 90
Høgenhaven, J. 96, 97, 99

Jamieson-Drake, D.W. 22-27, 32
Jones, E. 10

Kayatz, C. 35, 87, 90
Kidner, D. 10, 71
Knight, D.A. 32

Lang, B. 87, 90
Lemaire, A. 26, 32

Martin, J.D. 23, 32
McCreesh, T.P. 10, 71
McKane, W. 11, 20, 27, 32, 35, 36, 44-46, 49, 50, 53, 54, 61-63, 68-71, 75, 79-82, 85, 86, 96

Meinhold, A. 11
Morgan, D.F. 31
Murphy, R.E. 17, 51, 60, 69, 70, 96-98

Plöger, O. 11, 47, 48, 50, 79
Pritchard, J.B. 81

Rad, G. von 17, 31, 92-94, 96, 97, 99
Rendtorff, R. 31
Reventlow, H. Graf 98
Ringgren, H. 11
Römheld, D. 81
Roth, W.M.W. 81
Rowley, H.H. 10
Ruffle, J. 81
Rylaarsdam, J.C. 10

Saebø, M. 48, 50
Schmid, H.H. 61, 70
Scott, R.B.Y. 11, 32, 36, 47, 50, 71
Skehan, P.W. 48-50
Skladny, U. 51, 65, 69, 70
Soggin, J.A. 31

Terrien, S. 30, 99
Towner, W.S. 94, 95, 97
Toy, C.H. 10
Tucker, G.M. 32

Van Leeuwen, R.C. 71
Vriezen, T. 92, 95, 99
Watson, W.G.E. 56, 70
Weeks, S. 32
Whitelam, K.W. 32
Whybray, R.N. 10, 11, 14, 16, 17, 20, 28, 29, 31, 32, 35, 41-47, 49, 50, 70, 71, 75, 81, 86
Wilson, F.M. 50, 70
Wolff, H.W. 30

Zimmerli, W. 94-99