

## Proverbs 8:22–31: Three Perspectives on Its Composition

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Proverbs 8:22–31 is one of those passages in the Hebrew Bible that has profoundly affected Western religious tradition. The development of Prov 8:22–31 in Sirach 24 with its identification of personified Wisdom as Torah, for example, and the role of Prov 8:22–31 in the early church's christological controversies stand out as almost rites of passage in its ongoing postbiblical life.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this article is to step back in history to the nativity of this poem to offer (yet another) demonstration that it was from the beginning conceived in theological discourse, born into polemic, and nurtured in concerns of divine–human mediation. To achieve this goal I investigate and interpret several literary factors in the composition of Prov 8:22–31, presenting three complementary perspectives to show that the language of this poem weaves a rich tapestry of literary allusions and creates multi-valent poetic possibilities in order to explain personified Wisdom's origin and relationship to Yahweh, to polemicize against foreign gods of wisdom, and to pre-

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<sup>1</sup> For this text and its role in the early christological controversies (probably starting with the prologue of John's Gospel and the statements in Col 1:15–16), see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 173–210, esp. 191–97. An example of this pericope's prominence in Jewish tradition is its use in the opening *parashah* of *Genesis Rabbah* (see J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba: Critical Edition with Notes and Commentary* [in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1965], 1–2; I owe this reference to David Bernat) and the appearance of part of Prov 8:22 in the frontispiece to the book of Proverbs in some editions of the *מקראות גדולות* (e.g., New York: Pardes, 1951).

sent personified Wisdom as Yahweh's uniquely qualified, prophetlike messenger to humanity.

## I. FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Because a particular stance on several critical introductory issues to the book of Proverbs and to chs. 1–9 in particular informs my interpretation of Prov 8:22–31, I begin with a brief presentation of my working assumptions.

### *The Date of the Final Redaction of the Book of Proverbs*

Though the composition of the book of Proverbs has a long and complicated redactional history<sup>2</sup> and assigning absolute dates to the various stages of this process is difficult if not impossible given the evidence at hand,<sup>3</sup> I assume that the final redaction of the book took place in the early Second Temple period, that is, in Persian or early Hellenistic times.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Relative Chronological Position of Proverbs 1–9 in the Book*

It is widely held that chs. 1–9 constitute some of the latest material in the book of Proverbs.<sup>5</sup> This is usually and rather precariously argued, as many commentators

<sup>2</sup> Besides the discussions in the commentaries, see R. N. Whybray, *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTSup 168; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) for a recent, if brief, discussion and theory of the book's composition. For Proverbs 1–9 specifically, see now Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 322–30. For the Old Greek and its relation to the MT, see, e.g., William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 33–47; Emanuel Tov, "Recensional Differences between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint of Proverbs," in *Of Scribes and Scrolls: Studies on the Hebrew Bible, Intertestamental Judaism, and Christian Origins Presented to John Strugnell on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. Harold W. Attridge, John J. Collins, and Thomas H. Tobin; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 43–56; and Johann Cook, *The Septuagint of Proverbs: Jewish and/or Hellenistic Proverbs? Concerning the Hellenistic Colouring of LXX Proverbs* (VTSup 69; Leiden: Brill, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Whybray, *Composition*, 157–65.

<sup>4</sup> See Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 6, who dates the final redaction between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C.E. Others push the date into the Hellenistic period. So, e.g., Fox (*Proverbs 1–9*, 48–49), André Barucq (*Le Livre de Proverbes* [SB; Paris: Lecoffre, 1964], 17), and Arndt Meinhold (*Die Sprüche*, Teil 1, *Sprüche Kapitel 1–15* [ZBK 16.1; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991], 39–40). In any case, we know that the book was essentially in its final form by the beginning of the second century B.C.E., when Ben Sira used it for his work. See Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: A New Translation with Notes* (AB 39; New York: Doubleday, 1987), 43–45.

<sup>5</sup> See Scott Harris, *Proverbs 1–9: A Study in Inner-Biblical Interpretation* (SBLDS 150; Atlanta:

have noticed, on the basis of (1) the content/form/style of these chapters and their supposed reflection of a particular social setting, for example, exogamy, which is said to originate in a period later than chs. 10–29, the core of the book;<sup>6</sup> (2) the fact that the chapters read like an introduction to chs. 10–29;<sup>7</sup> and (3) the supposed late features of the language of these chapters.<sup>8</sup> Another method for discovering relative dating of particular texts has emerged recently as scholars have begun making methodologically controlled and convincing cases that prove portions of Proverbs 1–9 allude to earlier biblical texts, for example, to Jeremiah in Proverbs 1.<sup>9</sup> (I will argue for several other examples of allusion below.) The presence of this hermeneutical method in chs. 1–9 points to a religiocultural context later than that found in the core of the book, which, as far as I know, does not show signs of this activity.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, this study will proceed under the assumption that chs. 1–9 were composed at a time later than the core of the book.

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Scholars Press, 1995), 22 n. 64 for representative literature. See also more recently Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 48; and Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), xix–xx.

<sup>6</sup> It is generally recognized that the style, form, and tone of chs. 1–9 differ significantly from the remainder of the book (see, e.g., James L. Crenshaw's textbook *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* [rev. and enl. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998], 60). The difficulty lies in determining how to link that recognition securely to the issue of date. In terms of content and social setting, see, e.g., Clifford, *Proverbs*, 5–6; and Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 48, for the literature relating to Proverbs' supposed concern with exogamy (among other issues used to link content and date), which in fact misrepresents the issue of the "strange woman" (as they both recognize).

<sup>7</sup> For the explicit idea that chs. 1–9 form an introduction that dates to a time later than the core of the book, see, e.g., recently Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 6, 48; and Murphy, *Proverbs*, xix–xx (noting the fact that such a view is likely, though impossible to prove). See Whybray, *Composition*, 159, for examples of the redactional propensity of adding material at the beginning and end of biblical books.

<sup>8</sup> See Clifford, *Proverbs*, 4–5, for a brief review and critique of this method of dating with reference to Proverbs. Note also that the very idea of Late Biblical Hebrew has come under considerable methodological attack in recent studies of the history of the Hebrew language; see esp. *Biblical Hebrew: Studies in Chronology and Typology* (ed. Ian Young; JSOTSup 369; London: T&T Clark International, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> My words "controlled and convincing" are used deliberately to distance myself from the rather unconstrained display of intertextual findings by André Robert in his series of articles in *Revue Biblique* during 1934 and 1935 ("Les Attachés littéraires bibliques de Prov i–ix," *RB* 43 [1934]: 42–68, 172–204, 374–84; and 44 [1935]: 344–65, 502–25). See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 287–88, for a critique of Robert's method. The use of inner-biblical interpretation for confirming the relative dating of portions of Proverbs is convincingly presented in Benjamin D. Sommer, "New Light on the Composition of Jeremiah," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 646–66.

<sup>10</sup> See Harris, *Interpretation*, throughout; and Michael Fishbane, "Torah and Tradition," in *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament* (ed. Douglas A. Knight; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 275–300. See also Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 556; Childs notes that Prov 30:5–6, part of a late text in the book of Proverbs (just outside the book's core), draws on 2 Sam 22:31 (// Ps 18:31) and Deut 4:2 for its formulation.

### *The Compositional Character of Proverbs 1–9 and the Wisdom Poems*

There is a general consensus that chs. 1–9 are textually composite.<sup>11</sup> Ten lectures or series of instructions form the core, which then accumulated various additions; most important among these are the poems spoken by or about personified wisdom, that is, Wisdom, in chs. 1, 8, and 9. Because these poems do not show signs of coming from one author, I agree with Fox that they are a series of reflections from several authors inserted into what is now chs. 1–9, probably at various times.<sup>12</sup>

### *The Tradition of Personified Wisdom Poems*

In light of this, one may speak of a developing tradition of personified Wisdom poems in the book of Proverbs. Scholars already recognize that such a tradition exists for personified Wisdom more broadly conceived. Witness, for example, Roland Murphy's discussion of the development of Wisdom from an incipient notion in Job 28 to a mysterious personification in Proverbs to the identification with Torah in Ben Sira on to a highly developed and abstract universal principle in the Wisdom of Solomon.<sup>13</sup> Given the existence of the tradition, it is reasonable to see in the book of Proverbs manifestations of various, even if smaller incremental developments of it.

I would suggest, therefore, that the search for *the* single background that illuminates all the poems concerning the personification of wisdom in Proverbs is ill-founded. There is no shortage of descriptions of the various proposals, so I shall not undertake one in this context.<sup>14</sup> What I wish to underline is simply this: there is no reason to believe that each person who contributed a poem about or speech in the mouth of personified Wisdom had the same background image in mind. Once the

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Whybray, *Composition*, 11–61; idem, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 23–30; McKane, *Proverbs*, 7–10; Barucq, *Le Livre*, 17; and Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 322–30.

<sup>12</sup> Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 326–29.

<sup>13</sup> See his chapter “Lady Wisdom” in *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1990); and his “The Personification of Wisdom,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honor of J. A. Emerton* (ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 222–33.

<sup>14</sup> See Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 331–45 for a recent extensive review of suggestions and the relevant literature, including many of the recent feminist interpretations. More briefly, see, e.g., John Day, “Foreign Semitic Influence of the Wisdom of Israel and Its Appropriation in the Book of Proverbs,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, 68–70; and Clifford's appraisal, especially emphasizing the Mesopotamian background (*Proverbs*, 23–28). Tikva Frymer-Kensky addresses the more general question of why Wisdom is presented as a woman (*In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* [New York: Free Press, 1992], 179–83).

personification became a literary reality, the shaping of that tradition probably would have or at least could have operated independently of the original background that first gave expression to the personification. Thus, there may be a discernible original background for or cause of the first creation of the personification, but this need not steer the interpretation of the figure in all relevant passages. As the tradition grew, in my view, so would have grown the complexity of Wisdom as a figure.<sup>15</sup>

### *Approaching Proverbs 8:22–31*

The final working assumption is the recognition that Prov 8:22–31 is a separate poem from the rest of ch. 8.<sup>16</sup> Content is a very significant factor in this decision: Wisdom describes herself in 8:22–31 in a manner completely unexpected or unanticipated both by what comes before in ch. 8 and by what follows.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, ch. 8 reads quite smoothly without the poem in vv. 22–31.<sup>18</sup> A look at the LXX supports the argument from content. Apparently an early reader also felt the rather abrupt transition to v. 22 and added a phrase to smooth it out.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, although there

<sup>15</sup> Fox comments: “Most likely, features of several models are fused in this complex literary figure” (*Proverbs 1–9*, 333); “Components of her portrayal must come from known types of person (real or mythological), but these need not coalesce into a single human type to create a unity” (p. 341); and more specifically about the growth of the figure and the integration of Wisdom poems with the earlier material in Proverbs 1–9, “Given the diverse authorship of at least some of the interludes” (which for Fox includes the Wisdom poems), “along with the resonances of the lectures in the interludes, we can picture the process of growth as a series of insertions by scribes learning from and building on the lectures rather than as a compilation and reorganization of unrelated texts by a redactor. The connections among the Wisdom interludes can be explained not from having a single author but from a process of organic growth, with each successive author reading the earlier text and elaborating on it” (pp. 328–29).

<sup>16</sup> This is the view of many commentators. For example, Whybray, *Proverbs*, 120–21; McKane, *Proverbs*, 351–52; Berend Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1937), 37; and Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1899), 171, who calls the passage “(a) section distinct from, but allied to, the preceding.”

<sup>17</sup> McKane goes so far as to say that the far-reaching primeval claims made for Wisdom in vv. 22–31 are *logically* out of order with the chapter’s earlier, earthly claims of her royal influence (v. 15). “Wisdom’s dwelling with God before the world and men were created would have lent perspective and sanction to her claim to dwell with shrewdness and to dominate politics and practical affairs in a this-worldly context” (*Proverbs*, 343).

<sup>18</sup> See the similar comment by Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs: The Concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9* (London: SCM, 1965), 74, about all of his “group 2” texts. Important to this observation in Proverbs 8 is the renewed “teacher” language in 8:32–36 (see Bernhard Lang, *Frau Weisheit: Deutung einer biblischen Gestalt* [Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1975], 60–66).

<sup>19</sup> The text reads: ἐὰν ἀναγγείλω ὑμῖν τὰ καθ’ ἡμέραν γινόμενα μνημονεύσω τὰ ἐξ αἰῶνος ἀριθμηῆσαι, “If I proclaim to you the things occurring daily, I will remember to account the things

is some dissent,<sup>20</sup> it is reasonable to treat Prov 8:22–31 as a distinct poem with a separate genesis from the rest of the chapter.

In light of these general considerations, I now turn to examine three literary factors in the composition of Prov 8:22–31 and to interpret how these have shaped the poem. The text of the poem reads as follows:

22 יְהוָה קִנְּנֵי רֵאשִׁית דְּרָבּוֹ קֶדֶם מִפְּעֻלּוֹ מֵאָז:  
 23 מֵעוֹלָם נִסְכַּתִּי מֵרֵאשִׁית מִקְדָּמֵי-אָרֶץ:  
 24 בְּאִין-תְּהִמּוֹת חוֹלְלָתִי בְּאִין מַעֲיֵנוֹת נִבְכִּי<sup>21</sup>-מֵיָם  
 25 בְּטָרָם הָרִים הִטְבְּעוּ לִפְנֵי גְבְעוֹת חוֹלְלָתִי:  
 26 עַד-לֹא עָשָׂה אֶרֶץ וְחוּצוֹת וְרֵאשִׁית עֲפָרוֹת תִּבְלָ:  
 27 בְּהִכִּינוּ שָׁמַיִם שָׁם אָנִי בְּחוּקוֹ חוּג עַל-פְּנֵי תְּהוֹם:  
 28 בְּאִמְצוֹ שְׁחָקִים מִמַּעַל בְּעֵזוֹ<sup>22</sup> עֵינּוֹת תְּהוֹם:  
 29 בְּשׁוּמוֹ לַיִם חָקוּ וּמֵיִם לֹא יַעֲבְרוּ-פִּי  
 30 בְּחוּקֵי אֶרֶץ: 30 וְאֶהְיָ אֶצְלוֹ אֲמוֹן<sup>23</sup>  
 31 מִשְׁחָקָת בְּתִבְלֵ אֶרְצוֹ וְשִׁעְשַׁעִי אֶת-בְּנֵי אָדָם:

- 22 Yahweh acquired me at the beginning of his ways,  
 the earliest of his acts, from of old.  
 23 From ancient times I was poured out,  
 from the first, from the primeval times of the earth.  
 24 When there were no depths, I was brought forth,  
 when there were no springs, the sources of the waters.  
 25 Before the mountains were sunk,  
 before the hills, I was brought forth,  
 26 When he had not yet made the earth and open fields  
 or the world's first clods of dirt.

from of old.” See Cook, *Septuagint of Proverbs*, 206–7. McKane calls this addition an “editorial bridge” that may indicate that “vv. 22f. were discontinuous with what preceded them” (*Proverbs*, 351).

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 292; and Patrick W. Skehan, “Structures in Poems on Wisdom: Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24,” *CBQ* 41 (1979): 373.

<sup>21</sup> I am following here the oft-cited emendation of וְנִבְכִּי, “abounding (?)” (see BDB, 457), to וְנִבְכִּי, “sources of,” based on Job 28:11 and supported by Ugaritic *nb/pk*. See the commentaries; *BHS*, 1285 n. 24b; *HALOT*, 663 (s.v. \*נִבְכִּי); and, for the Ugaritic evidence, G. del Olmo Lete and J. Sanmartín, eds., *Diccionario de la Lengua Ugarítica* (2 vols.; AuOrSup 7–8; Barcelona: Editorial AUSA, 2000), 316 (*nb/pk*, “fuente”).

<sup>22</sup> I emend the MT’s בְּעֵזוֹ to בְּעֵזוֹ with *BHS*, 1285 n. 28a and *HALOT*, 809.

<sup>23</sup> The MT has אֲמוֹן. I defend my emendation below.

<sup>24</sup> Perhaps read בְּחִזְקוֹ, “when he reinforced,” here instead of MT; see *BHS*, 1285 n. 29b and *HALOT*, 347.

- 27 When he founded the heavens, there I was,  
     when he inscribed the horizon upon the face of the depths,  
 28 When he fixed the clouds above,  
     when he established the sources of the depths,  
 29 When he set the sea's limit,  
     so the waters would not transgress his order,  
 when he carved out the foundations of the earth,  
     30 I was alongside him as a master.  
 I was delight daily,  
     playing before him all the time,  
 31 Playing in his habitable earth,  
     and my delight is with humanity.

## II. COMPOSING PROVERBS 8:22–31: A CLARIFICATION OF THE PERSONIFIED WISDOM TRADITION

### *A Deficiency in the Tradition*

Chapter 8 (minus vv. 22–31) makes many claims about Wisdom, perhaps the greatest of them being in vv. 15–16, where Wisdom claims to be important to the rule of kings and princes. Chapter 1 similarly informs the reader about this figure. How could any postexilic reader have missed the prophetic tone of voice in her speech?<sup>25</sup> Yet even considering both speeches of chs. 1 and 8, one does not learn of Wisdom's origins nor of her relationship to Yahweh.<sup>26</sup> Both of these notions, however, were already latent in the book of Proverbs in 3:19–20.

יְהוָה בְּחִכְמָה יִסְדֵּאֲרֶץ כּוֹנֵן שָׁמַיִם בְּתַבּוּנָה: 19  
 בְּדַעְתּוֹ תְּהוֹמוֹת נִבְקְעוּ וְשִׁחְקִים יִרְעִפוּ־טֹל: 20

Yahweh founded the earth with wisdom,  
     established the heavens with understanding.  
 With his knowledge the depths burst open,  
     and the clouds trickled dew.

<sup>25</sup> I am assuming, of course, that this poem was already in its present position in the book.

<sup>26</sup> Proverbs 8:22–31 is part of Whybray's "group 2" texts. These texts, he says, were composed and inserted into the book of Proverbs to identify the wisdom presented therein as explicitly belonging to Yahweh. Proverbs 8:22–31 is the only substantive passage among the group 2 texts that is part of the personified Wisdom tradition. See Whybray, *Wisdom in Proverbs*, 72–76.

*The Remedy: The Literary Connection of  
Proverbs 8:22–31 and 3:19–20*

The conceptual proximity of Prov 8:22–31 to 3:19<sup>27</sup> has been pointed out before, in fact, many times.<sup>28</sup> The authors who offer substantive comment about this connection seem to explain it via tradition history. For example, Whybray writes: “Verses 22–31 are quite unparalleled unless—as is probable—they can be regarded as a kind of baroque development of the simple statement made in 3:19 that ‘the Lord by wisdom founded the earth.’”<sup>29</sup> Lennart Boström’s comments are more explicit in this regard:

In Proverbs 3:19–20 wisdom is referred to as a mere instrument of God without any hint regarding her independence. When wisdom is depicted separately from the Lord in Proverbs 8, there is no reason to assume that a thoroughly reworked concept of wisdom is being introduced. This argument becomes more convincing when we consider the structural similarities between these two passages. It seems reasonable to argue that similar concepts and thought patterns underlie the passages—that they belong to a common tradition.<sup>30</sup>

I have found evidence, however, that indicates a closer relationship, a relationship of *literary dependence*. In this section I will show that Prov 3:19–20 is one of the literary bases for the composition of 8:22–31. By looking to 3:19–20, Prov 8:22–31, among other purposes, clarified the issue of Wisdom’s origins and specified her relationship to Yahweh.<sup>31</sup> This suggestion of literary dependence builds on Fox’s

<sup>27</sup> The idea expressed in 3:19, that Yahweh founded the earth and established the heavens by his wisdom/understanding, is not unique in the Hebrew Bible. See especially Jer 10:12 and 51:15 (both of which have identical wording): *עשה ארץ ברחו מכין תבל בהכמתו ובתבונתו נטה שמים*; and Ps 104:24 for a similar idea.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Whybray, *Proverbs*, 121; and his *The Book of Proverbs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 50–51; Toy, *Proverbs*, 171 (mentioning both 3:19 and 20); and R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 18; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 70–71. Note in a broader context Luis J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World: A Philological and Literary Study* (AnBib 39; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970), 34.

<sup>29</sup> Whybray, *Proverbs*, 121 (see also his comments on the relationship of these two passages in *Wisdom in Proverbs*, 75 and 98–99).

<sup>30</sup> Lennart Böstrom, *The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs* - (ConBOT 29; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990), 58.

<sup>31</sup> The specification of Wisdom’s relationship to Yahweh in Prov 8:22–31 has attracted considerable discussion. See, e.g., Whybray, *Proverbs*, 27 and 121; McKane, *Proverbs*, 344, 352; and Gale Yee, “An Analysis of Prov 8:22–31 According to Style and Structure,” *ZAW* 94 (1982): 66. Note also Stadelmann: “Wisdom literature, on the other hand, widened the historical perspective by presenting ‘wisdom’ within a cosmic background. It was she who would know about the secrets of creation, since she was present at the construction of the world, she herself being anterior to it, and having stood at the side of Yahweh during his creative work. It is not surprising therefore that ‘wisdom’ claims to satisfy the intellectual need in man in his endeavor to apprehend the revealed truth which is unattainable by natural knowledge” (*Hebrew Conception of the World*, 36).

idea that “(t)he connections among the Wisdom interludes,” which I am calling Wisdom poems, “can be explained not from having a single author but from a process of organic growth, with *each successive author reading the earlier text and elaborating on it*” (my emphasis).<sup>32</sup>

One important point for establishing literary dependence is the dependent text’s use of the same or similar vocabulary as found in the source text.<sup>33</sup> Proverbs 8:22–31 and 3:19–21 share the following items: יהוה, ארץ, שמים, תהומות, שחקים, and both use the verb כּוּן. A fainter similarity may be seen in the use of יסד־ארץ in 3:19 and מוסדי ארץ in 8:29. In addition, there are sound plays between נִבְקְעוּ in 3:20 and נִבְכִּי in 8:24 and between שְׁחָקִים in 3:20 and מְשַׁחֶקֶת in 8:30 and 31. Many of these items, of course, are quite general. And because of a conceptual similarity between the two texts—that is, both texts deal with creation—these items *alone* cannot prove literary dependence.<sup>34</sup>

The following evidence, however, combined with the similar vocabulary noted above, does establish a close literary dependence between the two texts. I present these factors in the order of their importance, working from the lesser to the greater. First, יהוה is the first word in each text. Second, both texts use the verb כּוּן to describe the activity of creating the heavens. This use of the verb is unique to these two contexts in the Hebrew Bible. Third, and most important, Prov 8:24 uses מעינות and תהומות in a poetic parallelism that is unprecedented in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>35</sup> In order to explain this unique parallelism, I suggest that the author of 8:22–31 was in fact looking at 3:19–20 *in its present literary context*.

Proverbs 3:19–20 comprises four cola, two to each verse. The word תהומות occurs as the middle term of the third colon (i.e., the first colon of v. 20). In the first colon of the immediately following verse (3:21) one finds the word מעיניך.

בְּדַעְתּוֹ תְּהוֹמוֹת נִבְקְעוּ וְשַׁחֲקִים יִרְעֲפוּ־טָל: 20  
בְּנִי אֶל־יָלִזוּ מְעִינֶיךָ נֶצַר תִּשְׁיֶה וּמְזִמָּה: 21

With his knowledge the depths burst open,  
and the clouds trickled dew.  
My son, they shall not escape from your eyes,  
guard sound wisdom and discretion.

<sup>32</sup> Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 328–29.

<sup>33</sup> See Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 285, for an explicit statement on the importance of “lexical linkages” in establishing literary dependence. Similar attention to lexical linkage may be seen in the work of Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); and Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>34</sup> For this caution, see Sommer, *Prophet Reads Scripture*, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Outside of Prov 8:24, מעינות and תהומות occur in proximity to each other only in Gen 7:11 and 8:2, where they form a construct chain, מעינת תהום (“springs of the deep”)—but note the singular form of תהום.

For an author using the context as source material for a composition, **מעיניך**, by way of its first four consonants,<sup>36</sup> could easily have suggested the poetic parallelism of **מעינות** and **תהומות**.<sup>37</sup>

Given this explanation of the otherwise unprecedented poetic parallelism, the peculiar use of **כֹּחַ** for the creation of the heavens, the same first word of each text, and the general similarities in vocabulary, there is reasonable evidence to see a literary dependence between 3:19–20 and 8:22–31, with the latter text dependent on the former. This dependence, as I will show now, resulted not simply in the inspiration for a new poem but in the explication of a new idea.

### *Proverbs 8:22–31 as Interpretation*

To understand this new idea, we must understand the several ways our poem utilized its source and accommodated the material to the new context of ch. 8.

The difference of voice in the two texts is an obvious accommodation of the source text to its new context. The change of the third person description in 3:19–20 to the first person report in 8:22–31 can be explained by the fact that the earlier material in ch. 8, written in the first person, dictated the voice that had to be used in the new addition (8:22–31). The antecedents of the first person references throughout 8:22–31 are found in 8:1. Interestingly, these antecedents correspond to the names for wisdom in 3:19 exactly, **תבונה** and **חכמה**.

In both 8:22–31 and 3:19–20 Yahweh is the agent of creation. Indeed, Yahweh is the focus (at least at first in 8:22–31), marked out by the fact that his name appears as the first word in each text. Because of its interest in the origins of Wisdom, 8:22 immediately moves on to elaborate on the second word in 3:19, **בחכמה**. In 3:19 this word denotes the *instrument* of God's creative activity, whereas in 8:22 it identifies the *object* of God's activity: Yahweh acquired me, that is, Wisdom.<sup>38</sup> This statement probably reflects a logical step back behind the statement in 3:19. Proverbs 8:21, in essence, speculates, "if God used wisdom in the creation process as is asserted in 3:19, then there must have been a time when God acquired wisdom."<sup>39</sup> Thus, the

<sup>36</sup> Perhaps we could say that the first five consonants activated the idea, since handwritten *waw* and *yod* often look similar in ancient Hebrew manuscripts (e.g., in the Dead Sea Scrolls).

<sup>37</sup> My argument is not actually dependent on the vertical alignment of the two cola (as presented in the Hebrew above).

<sup>38</sup> Whatever other connotations the use of **קנה** in 8:22 conveys, one can be sure that the word was used here to connect the poem with the rest of Proverbs 1–9, where we read about acquiring wisdom with some frequency. Yahweh, therefore, is the prototype of what a human is supposed to do: acquire wisdom (see 4:5 and 4:7 [note **קנה חכמה קנה חכמה**]; and Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 280). Such connections would have been impossible with the more technical words **ברא** and **יצר**. See below for another allusive advantage of using **קנה**.

<sup>39</sup> Judith M. Hadley posits a similar thought process in "Wisdom and the Goddess," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, 238.

assertion is made in 8:22 that Yahweh acquired wisdom. This acquisition, the text continues in the rest of v. 22, is to be understood as the first, prerequisite (?) step, apparently, to God's other creative activity (ראשית דרכו קדם מפעליו).<sup>40</sup> In addition to this relative priority to the other deeds of Yahweh, the text also emphasizes in vv. 22–23 the absolute chronological priority of God's acquisition of wisdom using the terms מאז מעולם, מראש מקדמי-ארץ. This absolute chronological priority may be seen also as a logical extension of 3:19; that is, the text conjectures that if Yahweh were to have acquired wisdom before creation to use during creation, and this was to be understood as his first act, then the acquisition must have occurred in the very remote past. (I will suggest yet another facet to understanding this unparalleled pile of chronological lexemes below.)

The text continues its explication of 3:19–20 by describing the process of creation in vv. 24–30a. Whereas 3:19–20 does this in a rather straightforward and simple fashion, 8:22–31 adopts a quite different and complicated style that better suits its purpose. If Wisdom is indeed “of old” as was asserted, then the description of creation must be a negative one in which none of the expected elements of the cosmos was in place when Wisdom was brought forth.<sup>41</sup> Such a description was not a difficult task to conceive by any means since such negative descriptions were very frequently incorporated into creation accounts in the ancient Near East.<sup>42</sup> The text creates its negative account via the use of the words באין, בטרום, and עד-ללא at the head of several phrases in vv. 24–26. In concert, these verses show that wisdom came into being before anything else had.

<sup>40</sup> קדם מפעליו is a unique phrase in the Hebrew Bible. ראשית דרכו only occurs here and in Job 40:19. See Fox's discussion of the meaning of these two phrases (*Proverbs 1–9*, 280). He sees both of these phrases functioning adverbially, “at the beginning of . . .” Whybray sees them in apposition to the object of קנה, “me” (*Proverbs*, 131). Thus, the two phrases are names of Wisdom herself. Either way, the result is ultimately the same: she was acquired by Yahweh as his first activity in the process of creation.

<sup>41</sup> So, e.g., Bernhard Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: A Hebrew Goddess Redefined* (New York: Pilgrim, 1986), 77.

<sup>42</sup> See Richard J. Clifford, *Creation Accounts in the Ancient Near East and in the Bible* (CBQMS 26; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1994), 36–38, 62–64. The parade example for this is the opening lines of the *Enuma Elish*. The “negative creation” statements here and in ancient Near Eastern creation accounts in general have caused some interpreters to posit a kind of creation hymn tradition behind these verses (see, e.g., Helmer Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East* [Lund: Håkan Ohlssons Boktryckeri, 1947], 102; and Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, 38–39). I do not think we need to go this far. But, on the other hand, I do not think similarities that exist with many of the ancient Near Eastern creation texts are simply coincidental (contra R. N. Whybray, “Proverbs VIII 22–31 and Its Supposed Prototypes,” *VT* 15 [1965]: 504–14, whose focus on the function of negative temporal clauses in creation accounts causes him to overlook the many similar cosmological images and concepts in the very texts he considers). Rather, each account draws upon a stock of traditional images, vocabulary, and grammatical locutions to describe the formation of the created order. Thus, the similarities exist at the level of tradition, but I do not think they should be limited to a specific hymnic tradition.

Then, as if to pick up on the notion that Yahweh did indeed *create* בַּחֲכֹמָה as stated in 3:19, the poem uses a series of infinitive constructs with prefixed preposition -כּ (“when he . . .”) in vv. 27–30a<sup>43</sup> to present a positive, well-ordered description of the process of creation.<sup>44</sup> בַּחֲכֹמָה in Prov 3:19 clearly indicates wisdom’s instrumentality in creation.<sup>45</sup> Is Wisdom’s instrumentality in view in Prov 8:22–31? The text does not contradict Prov 3:19–20 on this point; rather, I suggest that it assumes and interprets it. Wisdom is a personality in Prov 8:22–31—a “me” in v. 22. As such, she cannot be an intellectual tool or abstract instrument with which God can manufacture the universe. Thus, in the positive account of creation in Prov 8:27–30 the text transforms what was presented in 3:19–20 as wisdom’s non-sentient instrumentality in the process of creation into Wisdom’s personal *presence* at creation. This is accomplished through two brief phrases: first, in v. 27a, שָׁם אָנִי, and then, most emphatically, in v. 30a with וְיִהְיֶה אֲצִלּוֹ אִמָּן. These two laconic statements form an *inclusio* around the positive description of the activity of creation.<sup>46</sup> In this way Prov 8:22–31 explains בַּחֲכֹמָה in 3:19 not as an instrument but as a personal presence alongside Yahweh during the genesis of the cosmos. I shall return to this below.

We have seen, then, that Prov 8:22–31 uses 3:19–20 as a basis for explaining the origin of Wisdom. To rephrase that statement, 8:22–31 turns to an earlier, perhaps authoritative<sup>47</sup> portion of the book of Proverbs as a source text for determining an understanding of Wisdom’s origin and relationship to Yahweh. In so doing, it is obvious that the text explicates Wisdom’s relationship to Yahweh, in agreement with 3:19–20, as one of subordination. And though her precise role in the process of creation is still to be determined here, it is clear that whatever that role may be, it is in fact *Yahweh* who is the active agent in the process of creation, not Wisdom. In this, again, 3:19–20 and 8:22–31 agree. Furthermore, the interpretation of Prov 3:19–20 in 8:22–31 has allowed us to see the text reason backwards via a logical inference to an understanding of Wisdom as something Yahweh acquired at the beginning of his works, the timing of which is located in the remote past. As mentioned above, this latter point may be seen also as a kind of secondary inference

<sup>43</sup> Job 38:7–9 is this presentation’s closest biblical parallel, yet there does not appear to be any convincing evidence of a literary dependence between the two texts.

<sup>44</sup> Noting the order of the text’s presentation of creation, Fox comments, “This systematic movement . . . impresses on the reader creation as a coherent panorama rather than just an assemblage of phenomena” (*Proverbs 1–9*, 281–82).

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Whybray, *Proverbs*, 127.

<sup>46</sup> For a detailed structural analysis of this passage see, e.g., Yee, “Analysis of Prov 8:22–31,” 58–66, who interacts with Jean-Noël Aletti, “Proverbes 8,22–31: Étude de structure,” *Bib* 57 (1976): 25–37.

<sup>47</sup> The authority of this passage may have been underscored by the fact that it was in agreement with earlier prophetic texts (Jer 10:12 and 51:15).

from 3:19. However, I think there may be another, perhaps stronger motivation for the insistence—for that is how the text reads—on Wisdom’s absolute chronological priority to all things.

### III. COMPOSING PROVERBS 8:22–31: A POLEMIC AGAINST MESOPOTAMIAN WISDOM:

#### *Background*

Proverbs 8:22–31 is full of words within the semantic domain of “water.” Note the following attestations: נבכיימים, מעינות, תהמות (v. 24); על־פני תהום (v. 27); עינות תהום (v. 28); מים, ים, and finally מוסדי ארץ<sup>48</sup> (v. 29). The most striking of all these “water words” is the triple invocation of תהום. Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible does the word occur so frequently in such a short span of text. In the texts in which one might expect it to occur with some frequency, for example, Genesis 1 and the flood accounts, it occurs only once (Gen 1:2) and twice (Gen 7:11 and 8:2), respectively.

The birth language in vv. 22–25 is another conspicuous element in this passage. Although the meanings of קנה and נסך are disputed,<sup>49</sup> the very clear meaning of the verb חיל points to the fact that Wisdom came into being via birth. It is this verb in this context that may have caused the readers of the poem to reevaluate their *prima facie* understanding of קנה, “to acquire” (which is in line with the verb’s previous use in Prov 4:5, 7), and to consider it in terms of its association with birth, as in Gen 4:1, and the process of creaturely creation, as in Ps 139:13.<sup>50</sup> There is no need to limit the sense of this verb to one meaning or the other, for, as I will argue,

<sup>48</sup> I understand these as a subterranean feature of the ancient Near Eastern cosmos, and thus related to water.

<sup>49</sup> קנה is variously rendered “created,” “begat,” or “acquired” by the commentators and various English versions. I follow Fox (*Proverbs 1–9*, 279) and Whybray (*Proverbs*, 130) in seeing “acquire” as the primary meaning of the verb, for in this way the beginning of the passage ties in with the idea of humans acquiring wisdom in Proverbs 1–9 (see n. 38 above). In saying this, however, I also think that the verb activates the language of creation, if only secondarily, especially in light of the use of נסכתי in the next line (see immediately above). Clifford presents a brief summary of the Semitic evidence for understanding קנה to mean “create” (see *Proverbs*, 96) and an overview of the versions (ibid., 96 n. 6; but note Fox’s contrasting explanation [*Proverbs 1–9*, 280]). As for נסכתי, the Mesopotamian text that I think 8:22–31 is working with may help in understanding its sense. To anticipate the discussion, I do not think the MT need be altered.

<sup>50</sup> See Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, “Nursling, Advisor, Architect? אָמוֹן and the Role of Wisdom in Proverbs 8,22–31,” *Bib* 80 (1999): 391–400, here 394. Whybray’s caution about reading too much into “acquiring” in terms of a mythological background can be applied to the notion of “acquiring by birth” as well, and to the entire passage for that matter (*Proverbs*, 130). Contrast Hurowitz, “Role of Wisdom,” 395.

multivalence and the creation of a web of textual associations through its choice of language are distinguishing features of this composition.<sup>51</sup>

Of further interest in light of the “water words” mentioned above is the fact that the disputed verb in Prov 8:23, *יְהִי עִמִּי*, sounds very much like a common epithet for Ea, the Mesopotamian god of water and wisdom, namely, *naššiki* (usually spelled *niššiki*), “the prince.”<sup>52</sup> Victor Avigdor Hurowitz has also noticed this similarity. And although he determines the connection to be of only secondary significance, he writes, “This point becomes even more interesting because the next verse [that is, v. 24] mentions the subterranean waters that are Ea’s domain.” Hurowitz then provocatively asks, “Could the image of the Mesopotamian god be alluded to in this pericope?”<sup>53</sup> I suggest that this is in fact the case.

Water and birth are very commonly associated images. But, if one also figures Ea into this association, the complex is quite different. There is only one text to my knowledge that contains all three of these elements: *Enuma Elish* tablet 1, lines 79–108. I believe this passage informed Prov 8:22–31 in its presentation of Wisdom’s origin as a birth and provided a motivation to emphasize Wisdom’s absolute chronological priority to everything.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> See the similar comments in Hurowitz, “Role of Wisdom,” 398.

<sup>52</sup> See Hannes D. Galter, *Der Gott Ea/Enki in der akkadischen Überlieferung: Eine Bestandsaufnahme des vorhandenen Materials* (Dissertationen der Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz 58; Graz: Verlag für die Technische Universität Graz, 1983), 41, for attestations of this epithet in Akkadian texts. See also the note in W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-ḥasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 148–49, who suggest a possible link between the epithet and Biblical Hebrew *יְהוָה* (“leader, chief”).

<sup>53</sup> Hurowitz mentions the fact that on this line of interpretation *יְהוָה* would need to mean “advisor” (see below for more on this meaning), and to support this association, which is but secondary to him, he cites many terms in ch. 8 that might connote royal imagery (see “Role of Wisdom,” esp. 398–99). Although language suggestive of royalty may be present in 8:22–31, I agree with Hurowitz that it plays a secondary role, if that, in the meaning of the poem. The royal connotations of Prov 8:22–31 have been mentioned by others. See, e.g., Dexter E. Callender, Jr., *Adam in Myth and History: Ancient Israelite Perspectives on the Primal Human* (HSS 48; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 191–200, who ties the whole poem in 8:22–31 to a “primal human” tradition with royal connotations and associates Wisdom with other culture-bearer figures like Mesopotamia’s Adapa. Yet even for Callender the language of 8:22–31 suggests only a vestigial allusion, at best, to such a tradition. I suspect, however, that the points of contact that he sees with the “primal human” tradition may in fact be similarities due to the creation language and the points of contact I will suggest that the text has with Ea, Adapa’s patron deity, and Marduk. Other scholars have pointed to Ea and Mesopotamian wisdom in association with this passage, but they either did not develop the idea (as, e.g., W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Book of Proverbs* [New York: E. P. Dutton, 1929], 63), ruled it out (so Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom*, 141), or overinterpreted it (see Clifford, *Proverbs*, 24–28, and n. 77 below).

<sup>54</sup> Concerning the possibility that an Israelite text is literarily dependent on a Mesopotamian one, David M. Carr has recently presented the case for a “two-track” educational system for Israelite scribes that covered Hebrew texts as well as some of the major texts from foreign lands—he especially notes Sumero-Akkadian materials. “This sort of two-track system,” he claims, “is the most plausible

The text of *EE* I 79–108 reads as follows:<sup>55</sup>

- ina kišši šīmāti atman ušurāti*  
 80 *lēu lēuti apkal ilī dBēl ittarehe-ma*  
*ina qereb Apsu ibbanni dMarduk*  
*ina qereb elli Apsu ibbanni dMarduk*  
*ibnišu-ma dEa abāšu*  
*dDamkina ummašu ḥaršassu*  
 85 *itiniq-ma šerrēt dištarāti*  
*tāritu ittarrūšu pulḥātu ušmalli*  
*šamḥat nabnišsu šarir niši inišu*  
*uṭṭulat šitāšu gašir ultu ullu*  
*imuršu-ma dAnu bānū abišu*  
 90 *iriš immir libbašu ḥidūta imla*  
*uštašbīšum-ma šunnat ilūssu*  
*šušqu maḏiš elišunu atar mimmūšu*  
*lā lamdā-ma nukkulā minātūšu*  
*ḥasāsīš lā naṭā amāriš pašqā*  
 95 *4 inišu 4 uznīšu*  
*šaptīšu ina šutābuli dGirru ittanpaḥ*  
*irtibū 4 ḥasāsā*  
*u inī kī-ma šuātu ibarrā gimrēti*  
*ullu-ma ina ilī sūtur lānšu*  
 100 *mešrētūšu šuttuḥā ilitta šūtur*  
*Māri-Utu Māri-Utu*  
*māri Šamši dŠamši ša ilī*

context suggested up to this point for influence of non-Israelite texts on Israelite literature” (*Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], 157). With regard to the *Enuma Elish* particularly and its mobility throughout the ancient world, it is worth noting that many classicists believe that the Mesopotamian myth had some influence on Hesiod’s *Theogony*, a poem roughly contemporary with Homer’s epics (see Fritz Graf, *Greek Mythology: An Introduction* [trans. Thomas Marier; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993], 90–95). (See n. 88 below for Mesopotamian influence more generally throughout the ancient world during the Persian and Hellenistic periods.)

<sup>55</sup> The Akkadian text and line numbering follow W. G. Lambert, ed., *Enuma Eliš: The Babylonian Epic of Creation: The Cuneiform Text*, copied out by Simon B. Parker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 4–5. This is only a study edition (as is Philippe Talon, ed., *The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth Enūma Eliš* [SAA Cuneiform Texts 4; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2005], which was not available to me at the time of this writing). Unfortunately, an up-to-date, full critical edition of the text has yet to appear. My transcription follows the method of John Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian* (HSM 45; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997). For another translation of these lines see, e.g., Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 235–36.

*labiṣ melammī ešret ilī šaqiṣ itpur*  
*pulhātu ḥamšāssina*<sup>56</sup> *elīšu kamrā*  
 105 *ibni-ma šār erbetta uʾallid*<sup>d</sup> *Anim*  
*qātuššu umalla mārī limmelli*  
*ibšim epra meḥâ ušazbal*  
*ušabši agamma / agâm-ma udallah Tiamat*

- In the cella of fates, the sanctum of designs,  
 80 The most clever of the clever, the sage (*apkallu*) of the gods,  
     Bel, was begotten (*reḥû*).  
 In the midst of the Apsu, Marduk was created (*banû*).  
 In the midst of the pure Apsu, Marduk was created (*banû*).  
 Ea, his father, created him (*banû*).  
 Damkina, his mother, bore him (*harāšû*).  
 85 He nursed at the breasts of the goddesses.  
     The nurse reared him; she filled him with terror.  
     Extraordinary were his features; flashing were the rising of his eyes.  
     His emergence was manly (i.e., mature); from of old (*ultu ulla*) he  
     was powerful.  
     Anu saw him, the begetter of his father.  
 90 He rejoiced (*râšû*); he was radiant (*namāru*); his heart was filled  
     with joy (*ḥidûtu*).  
     He looked upon him; his divinity was double.  
     He was the most exalted over them; he was superior in every way.  
     Unfathomable and artful were his limbs.  
     They were not fit to understand; difficult to view.  
 95 He had four eyes and four ears.  
     His lips, when moving, repeatedly flared up with fire.  
     Great were his four ears.  
     And his eyes similarly: they observed everything.  
     Highest among the gods, superior was his stature.  
 100 His limbs were long; from birth he was superior.  
     Mari-Utu, Mari-Utu,  
     My son, Shamshi, Sun of the gods!  
     Clothed in the radiance of ten gods, he was highly crowned.  
     Their fifty terrors were heaped upon him.  
 105 Anu made four winds and gave birth to them.  
     Into his (Marduk's) hands he placed (them):  
     “My son, let (them) play!” (*mēlûlu*)

<sup>56</sup> The edition has *ḥa-KUR-si-na* (*ḥaššāssina*; see CAD K, 113). The above transcription follows a variant, *ḥa-am-šat-si-na*, noted in *AHW*, 318. Both readings mean “their fifty.”

He formed dust; he caused the *mehû*-storm to carry it.  
 He caused the marsh/waves to be present; he stirred up Tiamat.

*The Literary Relationship of Proverbs 8:22–31  
 and Enuma Elish 179–108*<sup>57</sup>

After Ea defeats Apsu, he and his wife, Damkina, repose in their cella. Then, beginning in line 79 of tablet 1, the myth describes the birth of the divine couple's son, Marduk. In lines 80–84, that is, in the very opening lines of this section, there is a series of verbs that describe the birth of Marduk. He is sired (*rehû*) and created (*banû*, used three times), and his mother goes into labor to give birth to him (*harāšû*). I believe each of these has a counterpart in Prov 8:22–31.<sup>58</sup> The Akkadian verb *banû* usually means “to build” but has the meaning “to create” or “to engender” in contexts of human (pro)creation. For example, Esarhaddon calls his father “my *bānûya*,” that is, “my creator, progenitor,” in his annals.<sup>59</sup> I suggest that this verb roughly corresponds to the use of קנה in Prov 8:22–31, not as an exact semantic parallel, but rather in the general sense of a verb denoting a procreational process (קנה, “acquire via birth,” “to create”; *banû*, “to engender,” “to create”).<sup>60</sup> *Harāšû* corresponds to Hebrew חיל, generally, in that both deal with the mother's labor in the process of birth.<sup>61</sup> And *rehû*, I submit, corresponds to נסך in that both mean “to

<sup>57</sup> In considering this passage in relation to Prov 8:22–31 I have heeded the methodological cautions of John S. Kloppenborg in his study of the influence of the Egyptian goddess Isis on the portrayal of Sophia in Wisdom of Solomon. Kloppenborg rejects “various scattered epithets and functions” as determinative for detecting a direct connection between Wisdom of Solomon and a mythical text. Instead, he sees the necessity of finding “a consistent pattern of attributes of Sophia which bears a significant correlation to the major foci and patterns of the theologies of Isis” before claiming direct influence. See his “Isis and Sophia in the Book of Wisdom,” *HTR* 75 (1982): 57–84. Unfortunately, because Prov 8:22–31 is a much shorter text than Wisdom 6–10 (the textual basis of his study), the direct influence of *EE* I 79–108 on Prov 8:22–31 will have to be secured on a smaller basis.

<sup>58</sup> I should note that in lines 85 and 86 Marduk is nursed (*enēqu*) and reared (*tarû*), but these are not represented in Proverbs 8.

<sup>59</sup> For *banû* meaning “to create, engender,” see *CAD* B, 87–88; for Esarhaddon and other similar references, see the citation in *CAD* B, 94 (s.v. *bānû*).

<sup>60</sup> Of course Hebrew has a cognate of the Akkadian *banû* (i.e., בנה), and this verb does occasionally mean “to build a house” (by means of children) (*qal*) or “to obtain a child” (*niphal*) (see *HALOT*, 139). But this meaning does not correspond exactly to Akkadian *banû* and would not have served the needs of the poem in 8:22–31: בנה would not have allowed the kind of connections קנה creates with the larger context of Proverbs 1–9. Thus, the fact that the author of Prov 8:22–31 did not use the Hebrew cognate is ultimately irrelevant to the establishment of dependence.

<sup>61</sup> חיל (*qal*) means “to be in labor”; (*polal*): “to be brought forth through labor pains” (see *HALOT*, 310–11). The Akkadian *harāšû* (G stem) is similar: “to be in labor”; (D stem): “bring to birth, deliver” (see Jeremy Black, Andrew George, and Nicholas Postgate, eds., *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* [Santag 5; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999], 107, for this meaning, which is based on *AHW*, 324 [with listed attestations]. In 1956, *CAD* H did not fully recognize this meaning).

pour out/over” in their concrete sense<sup>62</sup> but may also denote “insemination.”<sup>63</sup> By using נִסְכָּתִי, Prov 8:22–31 simply adopted a Hebrew word semantically similar to what was found in the source text in order to convey the source text’s idea. The common scholarly practice of deriving נִסְכָּתִי from סִכַּךְ, “to be woven, manufactured,” should be seen not as an expediency to obtain a better sense in the passage but as another poetic possibility latent in the ambiguous grapheme נִסְכָּתִי.<sup>64</sup> This secondary sense is underlined by the fact that the G stem of סִכַּךְ occurs in parallel to קָנָה in Ps 139:13. Finally, as mentioned above, the fact that נִסְכָּתִי plays on an epithet of Ea (though one not present in our text) may have contributed to the choice of this verb as well (or it may have simply been a felicitous, unintended result). In any case, this wordplay should remain a background association, as Hurowitz maintains (see above).

Besides several “birthing” verbs at the opening of the account, there are other non-birth-related similarities that point to a connection between Prov 8:22–31 and *EE* I 79–108. For example, Marduk’s emergence is said to be “of old” (*ultu ulla*), which, of course, recalls the numerous chronological terms in Prov 8:22–23. Marduk also causes his grandfather, Anu, to rejoice (*rašû*), to be happy or radiant (*namāru*), and his heart to be full of joy (*hidūti*). These correspond to the use of שָׂעֲשַׁעִים in Prov 8:30, in which Wisdom says, literally, “I was delights everyday.” The LXX locates this delight in Yahweh,<sup>65</sup> which probably has correctly filled out what is already latent in the Hebrew. Thus, in both texts, a senior god takes pleasure in the birth being described. Another point of similarity may be seen in the use of a word for “play” in both texts (Hebrew מִשְׁחֻקָּת and Akkadian *mēlulu*). Although it is Wisdom herself who plays in Prov 8:22–31 (in contrast to Marduk’s charge to let the winds play), the connection is still suggestive.

Finally, there is a broad similarity at the mythic level. Although not directly mentioned in our lines, Marduk’s mythological function in *Enuma Elish* is that of

<sup>62</sup> See, e.g., Barucq, *Le Livre*, 92, “«J’ai été coulée», comme une statue,” and similarly Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 133.

<sup>63</sup> For נִסַּךְ, see *HALOT*, 703 (s.v. נִסַּךְ I, *qal*). *HALOT* does not recognize the passive (*niphal*) meaning required for our passage, but it is clear that “to be poured out” is the proper sense of the verb in this stem. For נִסַּךְ meaning “insemination,” see Hurowitz, “Role of Wisdom,” 394, who cites the similar נִתַּךְ in Job 10:10 as support. For *rehû*, see *CAD* R, 252–54.

<sup>64</sup> This derivation, however, is often accompanied by a repointing of the verb to נִסְכָּתִי. See, e.g., Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, 38; *BHS*, 1285 n. 23b; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 48; and Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 264–65, among many others. *HALOT*, 754, recognizes both possibilities (with repointing and without) under the root סִכַּךְ II. *HALOT*, 703, also records נִסַּךְ II, a by-form of סִכַּךְ II, based only on our disputed verb (which does not require repointing of the MT). However one wishes to resolve the etymological problem, the unpointed verb in the original Hebrew composition of the poem would have presented the semantic ambiguity discussed above.

<sup>65</sup> ἐγὼ ἦμην ἢ προσέχαυρεν, “I was the one in whom he rejoiced.” See Cook, *Septuagint of Proverbs*, 229, 232; and Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 287, 415.

the hero who slays Tiamat, the personification of the chaotic, primeval sea.<sup>66</sup> With her carcass, Marduk creates the heavens and the earth. Moreover, Marduk will also have a hand in creating humanity in *Enuma Elish* VI (though there is some ambiguity on whether he himself actually did the creating). Marduk's role as creator god may have been a contributing factor in the use of the *Enuma Elish* in Prov 8:22–31. Just as Ea gives birth to Marduk, who goes on to create the cosmos, so Yahweh gives birth to Wisdom, through which (3:19–20) and with whom (8:27–30) he creates the world.

### Wisdom as אַמֹּן (אָמֹן)

As stated above, I think Prov 8:22–31 interprets בַּחֲכָמָה in 3:19 by means of the two statements שֵׁם אֱנִי and וְאֵהִיָּה אֲצִלּוֹ אֲמֹן. Again as stated above, the poem *assumes* Wisdom's role in creation based on Prov 3:19–20 and interprets this role as a personal presence. But how does Wisdom's personal presence actually demonstrate Yahweh's creating בַּחֲכָמָה? The key to understanding this is the term אַמֹּן (אָמֹן).

This term has been subject to an enormous amount of scholarly attention.<sup>67</sup> Without going into every detail here I think the two best understandings (and most common among commentators) are “nursling” and “artisan/advisor” (see Jer 52:15).<sup>68</sup> Fox has recently refined the former view so that אַמֹּן is taken to be an

<sup>66</sup> The many instances of Hebrew תְּהוֹם in the poem suggests an echo, possibly, of the mythological sea of the *Enuma Elish*. A technical etymological discussion of the relationship of the Hebrew and Akkadian terms is not necessary to establish the relationship. It seems to me reasonable to believe that an informed person in the ancient context could have made the connection via a folk etymology.

<sup>67</sup> See the review of the most important options for the meaning of this word in Michael Fox, “Amon Again,” *JBL* 115 (1996): 699–702, and *Proverbs 1–9*, 285–87, in which he interacts with the recent work of Henri Cazelles, “Aḥiqar, Ummân and Amun, and Biblical Wisdom Texts,” in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield* (ed. Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin, and Michael Sokoloff; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 45–55. See also the recent review and interpretation offered by Cleon L. Rogers III, “The Meaning and Significance of the Hebrew Word אַמֹּן in Proverbs 8,30,” *ZAW* 109 (1997): 208–21. The enormous secondary literature on this term may be accessed through these recent contributions.

<sup>68</sup> The attestation of אַמֹּן in Jer 52:15, although providing a contextually viable reading, is somewhat clouded by the fact that the two parallel texts (Jer 39:9 and 2 Kgs 25:11) show different lexemes in place of אַמֹּן. See the parallel layout of the texts in Abba Bendavid, ed., *Parallels in the Bible/ מקבילות במקרא* (Jerusalem: Carta, 1972), 160. John Bright indicates that all three texts are corrupt as preserved in the MT. Referring to Jer 52:15, he writes: “The pointing should probably be *hā'ommân* (Akk. *ummānu* [sic]) rather than *hā'amôn*. The reading of II Kings xxv 11, *hehāmōn* (‘the crowd’) is not to be preferred; xxxix 9 is also corrupt (*hā'am*, ‘the people’)” (*Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 21; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965], 364 note e–e). If this is the textual solution adopted for Jer 52:15, then Prov 8:30 is the lone attestation of the grapheme אַמֹּן in the Hebrew Bible.

infinitive absolute functioning as an adverbial complement. He translates the phrase “I was near him, growing up.”<sup>69</sup> The latter meaning, “artisan/advisor,” is usually connected to the Akkadian *ummānu*, which is best rendered for our purposes here in its most general meaning, “master” (of any art, both manual and learned).<sup>70</sup> These two interpretive options in 8:30 need not be mutually exclusive. So, on the one hand, I would allow the multivalence of the text to play itself out in the poem (and it has, as the ancient and modern history of interpretation demonstrates). On the other hand, however, given the literary dependence of Prov 8:22–31 on 3:19–20 and therefore an assumed role for Wisdom in creation, and the use of *EE* I 79–108 in Prov. 8:22–31 as argued here, I think strong consideration should be given to the meaning “artisan/advisor” or, as I prefer to translate, “master,” as the *primary* sense of the word.<sup>71</sup>

In support of this, one may note that even before the description of his birth, Marduk is called the sage (Akkadian *apkallu*) of the gods in *EE* I 80. Besides its function as an epithet for several of the gods associated with wisdom,<sup>72</sup> this term also denotes mythical, antediluvian sages linked to the god Ea (father of Marduk in the *Enuma Elish*).<sup>73</sup> After the flood the role of the mythical *apkallū* is transferred to humans who are designated *ummānū*, “masters” of specifically learned arts (therefore often dubbed “scholars”).<sup>74</sup> They are the bearers of the learned traditions,

<sup>69</sup> This view was first set forth in Fox, “*‘Amon Again*,” 699–702, and later in *Proverbs* 1–9, 287.

<sup>70</sup> See Paul V. Mankowski, *Akkadian Loanwords in Biblical Hebrew* (HSS; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 33–34, who puts a question mark next to the attestation in Prov 8:30 (and does not even mention Jer 52:15); and *AHW*, 1415–16 (s.v. *ummiānu*, i.e., with uncontracted vowels).

<sup>71</sup> In contrast, see Hurowitz, “Role of Wisdom,” 399.

<sup>72</sup> See Knut Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta: Mit einem Götterverzeichnis und einer Liste der prädikativen Elemente der sumerischen Götternamen* (StudOr 7; Helsinki: Societas Orientalis Fennica, 1938), 28–29; and *CAD* A<sup>2</sup>, 171–72.

<sup>73</sup> For an introduction to the ideas surrounding the mythical *apkallū* and their human, post-flood counterparts, the *ummānū*, see J. Greenfield, “Apkallu,” *DDD*, 72–74, and his discussion in relation to Prov 9:1 in “The Seven Pillars of Wisdom (Prov. 9:1)—A Mistranslation,” *JQR* 76 (1985): 13–20. The most recent, detailed treatment of the *apkallū* of which I am aware is that of Helge Kvanvig in his *Roots of Apocalyptic: The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure and of the Son of Man* (WMANT 61; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988), 159–213, a chapter simply entitled “Mesopotamian Antediluvian Traditions.” The *apkallū*’s apotropaic role and the identification of the *apkallū* with specific forms of figurines in Mesopotamia are treated by F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts* (Cuneiform Monographs 1; Groningen: Styx & PP, 1992), throughout, but esp. 41–103.

<sup>74</sup> The text that makes this link explicit, dating to about 165 B.C.E., is W. 20030, 7, published by J. van Dijk, “Die Inschriftenfunde,” *Vorläufiger Bericht über die . . . Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka* 18 (1962): 44–52 and plate 27. The copy of the cuneiform tablet appeared again some time later in Jan van Dijk and Werner R. Mayer, *Texte aus dem Rēš-Heiligtum in Uruk-Warka* (Bagdader Mitteilungen Beiheft 2; Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1980), Tafel 89. An English translation is conveniently offered in Clifford, *Proverbs*, 26. See the introduction in Simo Parpola, ed., *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (SAA 10; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1993) for the “succession interpretation” of this

often called *nēmequ*, “wisdom,”<sup>75</sup> that have come down to humanity through scribal channels from time immemorial.<sup>76</sup> Aware of this tradition and cognizant of the epithet given to Marduk in *EE* I 80, I suggest that Prov 8:22–31 gave to Wisdom a title that was the Hebrew equivalent of an *apkallu*’s human counterpart. Thus, the Hebrew term חָכְמָה as a designation of Wisdom corresponds to the Akkadian *ummānu*, “master, scholar.” Following this interpretation, the word in the original Hebrew text of our poem would have been written without the *waw*, thereby creating the ambiguity that has its reflex in the various renderings of the grapheme חָכְמָה in the versions (among which I include the MT). On the one hand, by not using Marduk’s actual epithet, *apkallu*, the poem avoided a term that would indicate an explicit deification of Wisdom. On the other, by applying the Hebrew equivalent of the *apkallu*’s human counterpart, an *ummānu*, the text created a field of associations that enhances Wisdom’s status and explains her participation in creation: she is “master,” “craftsman,” “scholar,” “mediator of knowledge,” etc.<sup>77</sup> This idea is corroborated by the interpretation of this word in Wis 7:21 and 8:6 (rendering the word with τεχνίτις, “craftswoman, artisan”<sup>78</sup>) and possibly in some of the other early versions.<sup>79</sup> It is in this capacity that Wisdom’s presence at creation interprets Yahweh’s creating בְּחָכְמָה, “with wisdom.”

I should at this point return to the notion of play in the two texts under comparison, first, to point out some of the differences we see between the two and offer reasons why such differences exist, and, second, to understand its role in Prov 8:30–31 more adequately, especially in light of my decision to emend חָכְמָה to חָכְמָה. Why is it that Wisdom plays whereas in *Enuma Elish* it is Marduk who lets the winds play? To invoke a principle from the methods of inner-biblical interpretation, the

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text (specifically, XVII–XVIII) and a brief introduction to the *ummānu* and Mesopotamian scholarship in general (with references there to Parpola’s earlier, more technical editions of and commentaries on the scholarly correspondence in Akkadian).

<sup>75</sup> The root of the substantive is cognate to Hebrew and Aramaic עָמַק. See Dan 2:22; Job 12:22; and Qoh 7:24 for cognate substantives that also provide a close semantic parallel.

<sup>76</sup> Tracing this mechanism in Akkadian texts and traditions is the subject of chapter 2 of my dissertation, “The ‘Secret of the Gods’ and Society: Studies in the Origins, Guarding, and Disclosure of Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel” (Brandeis University, 2006).

<sup>77</sup> Clifford uses the *apkallu*–*ummānu* traditions as the one and only background that provides the best explanation for the origins of Wisdom’s personification in the book of Proverbs (see *Proverbs*, 24–28). I think this requires too broad a generalization of Wisdom’s description throughout chs. 1–9. My approach revolves around Prov 8:22–31 and the literary relationship it has with *EE* I 79–108. Wisdom’s role as a master is a response to Marduk’s *apkallu* epithet and the *apkallu*–*ummānu* tradition that it activates.

<sup>78</sup> See J. Lust, E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (2 vols.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1996), 2:474, for this meaning and the possibility that the word is a “neo-logism.” See also its use in Wis 14:2.

<sup>79</sup> See Fox, *Proverbs* 1–9, 286, 414, for the evidence from and interpretation of several of the main versions. See also *Gen. Rab.* 1.1.2 (א”ד), where MT’s חָכְמָה is interpreted as אָוִמָּה, “workman,” among other options (see Theodor and Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 2).

lexical similarities between a source text and the interpreting text are often reorganized or reinterpreted to yield a different configuration.<sup>80</sup> The reconfiguration in this case is in keeping with the wholesale rejection in Prov 8:22–31 of providing a parallel for the fierce and terrible—and detailed—description of Marduk. The author's rejection of this may be related to the possible theological implications such detail could evoke. But perhaps more importantly, creating a parallel for the awesome description of Marduk would work against the broader goal of Proverbs 1–9: to depict Wisdom as desirable, not something that terrifies. Instead of the mythological descriptive details, Prov 8:22–31 has filled out its poem with an expanded creation account (based on 3:19–20) and two lines about the joyful relationship between her progenitor, Yahweh, and herself, which is perhaps the textual reflex in Proverbs of Anu's rejoicing over Marduk.

Concerning the notion of play in Prov 8:30–31 in relation to Wisdom's role as an אָמֶן, the specific word choice in these verses, שַׁעֲשַׁעִים and מִשְׁחַקֶּת, would seem to associate Wisdom with childlike behavior, although the terms do have attestations without reference to children.<sup>81</sup> One does not expect a dignified "master" to frolic about as Wisdom does in vv. 30–31. This behavior, however, need not speak against the decision to emend אָמֶן to אָמֶן. There are two related responses that show why. First, we must dissociate ourselves from the notion that such behavior is unfit for someone of high social standing like an אָמֶן or *ummânu* in the ancient Near East. In other words, our problem with vv. 30–31 in relation to a person of standing is rooted in our modern Western notions of dignified behavior. An ancient Near Eastern example from the *Enuma Elish* will set such behavior in better perspective. When Mummu (a vizier) and his lord, Apsu, decide on a plan of action to rid themselves of the noisy gods, the text says: "Apsu was pleased with him, his face lit up at the evil he was planning for the gods, his sons. (Vizier) Mummu hugged him, sat on his lap and kissed him rapturously" (*EE I* 51–54).<sup>82</sup> "Lap" translates the Akkadian *birkāšu*, literally, "his knees." There is no sexual connotation in this word choice. Rather, *birku* is simply one of the locations for holding a child,<sup>83</sup> though Mummu, of course, is no child. In light of this, there probably need not be any objection to Wisdom's behavior in vv. 30–31, even if she were a full-grown adult. Second, we can recognize the childlike character of שַׁעֲשַׁעִים and מִשְׁחַקֶּת for what it is and try to understand how it plays itself out in the text. Thus, Wisdom's display of the carefree exuberance of a child frolicking about underlines the deity's joy with

<sup>80</sup> See Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 285.

<sup>81</sup> E.g., Isa 5:7, *כִּי כָרַם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת בַּיַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאִישׁ יְהוּדָה נָטַע שַׁעֲשׂוּעִין*, "For the house of Israel is Yahweh Sabaoth's vineyard, and the people of Judah the planting of his delights." See Hurowitz, "Role of Wisdom," 396–97; and Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 287, for a discussion of these terms (as descriptive of children as well as others).

<sup>82</sup> The translation is from Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 234. The line numbering again follows Lambert, *Enuma Eliš*, 3.

<sup>83</sup> See CAD B, 256.

her, and it underlines her own accessibility and goodness (which are in stark contrast to Marduk's ferocity).

The play of Wisdom in vv. 30–31 has another aspect to it, however, that touches on the interpretation of  $\text{חָכְמָה}$ . If the original text was written  $\text{מָרְדּוּךְ}$ , as I have suggested, with the primary meaning “master” (which is, admittedly, an obscure loanword into Hebrew), the grapheme would have presented plenty of ambiguity, opportunity for reinterpretation, or simply confusion, especially given the unique context of our poem.<sup>84</sup> Now it should be noted there has been no mention of Wisdom's nativity or terms related to growing up (on my view) in vv. 27–29, that is, throughout the entire cosmic creation account. Furthermore, we know nothing about Wisdom's age when she was present at the time of creation—though one would presume that she was old enough to remember the experience since she is recounting it with such detail. Yet the nativity account at the beginning of the poem and the childlike behavior of Wisdom at its closing, it seems, influenced v. 30 forcefully. Under this understandable contextual pressure and in light of the obscure  $\text{מָרְדּוּךְ}$ , the MT resolved the ambiguity inherent in  $\text{מָרְדּוּךְ}$  and codified its interpretation by clarifying  $\text{מָרְדּוּךְ}$  with  $\text{חָכְמָה}$ . Under these circumstances, I agree with Fox that the MT presents an infinitive absolute, adverbial complement with the meaning “growing up.” But as I have said above, this is not the only nor the primary reading. It is, however, an interesting interpretation and a wonderful testament to the way this poem exercised its early readers.

### *Wisdom, Prior to Everything*

The critical interaction and reworking of the *Enuma Elish* material in Prov 8:22–31 have one more facet, to which I have alluded a couple of times: the insistence on Wisdom's absolute chronological priority to all things, especially to the  $\text{תְּהוֹמוֹת}$ , the primeval sea. In the *Enuma Elish* Marduk's birth occurred in the Apsu at a time when Tiamat was already alive. Given the events in the myth, Marduk's birth must be seen as the mythical response to the preexistent nemesis. That is, the myth creates a divine hero to resolve the cosmic problem posed by Tiamat. Such a relatively late origin for Wisdom will not do for Prov 8:22–31. Rather, Wisdom and her progenitor, Yahweh, are both absolutely prior to all created entities, including the  $\text{תְּהוֹמוֹת}$ .

Proverbs 8:22–31, using a well-known ploy in ancient Near Eastern religions, subverts the authority of Marduk and Ea by simply asserting Wisdom's greater antiquity. The same theological ploy was used in the very passage of *Enuma Elish* that we have been considering. Thorkild Jacobsen has reasonably argued that the birth narrative described in *EE* I 79–108 was originally Enlil's, the Mesopotamian

<sup>84</sup> A look at all the versions will attest to this clearly.

god of the air and winds and the longtime supreme god of the Mesopotamian pantheon. The substitution of Marduk for Enlil in this birth account is probably to be seen as the Babylonian theologians' attempt to raise the authority of Marduk over that of Enlil.<sup>85</sup> One more example, again related to the *Enuma Elish*, must suffice to illustrate this point. The god of the people of the city of Ashur, whose name was also Ashur, was probably a personification of the city itself. Given this origin, he had no genealogical line. At some point during the Sargonic period (eighth–seventh century B.C.E.), however, scribes assigned him one that would preempt both Enlil and Marduk by giving him a greater antiquity than they. This was not achieved by rewriting the *Enuma Elish* (as would happen eventually); rather, it was done merely by writing the god Ashur's name as AN.ŠAR, one of the very first gods to emerge from Tiamat (see *EE* I 12). In this way, the scribes gave Ashur a genealogical line (actually making him an ancestor of Enlil/Marduk), established his greater antiquity, and thereby enhanced his authority.<sup>86</sup> A similar motivation is at work in Prov 8:22–31. A chronological subversion for theological reasons probably accounts for the insistent (even grammatically awkward) phrasing of Wisdom's absolute priority to everything in 8:22–23. It is precisely because of this extreme antiquity that she is unique and uniquely qualified. The gods of Mesopotamian wisdom, Ea and his son Marduk, are latecomers in comparison to Israel's figure of Wisdom. As such, their wisdom can in no way compare to Wisdom herself, for she existed before the very element (תְּהוֹמוֹת/*tiāmtu*) that gave rise to Ea and Marduk.

From this we may infer that Prov 8:22–31 is a literary effect rooted in a concern about Yahweh's wisdom in comparison to the older and more sophisticated (on some ancient people's view, no doubt) knowledge and wisdom of the Babylonian scribes.<sup>87</sup> This concern did not die with the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire to the Persians in 539 B.C.E. In fact, it was during the Persian and especially Hellenistic periods that the Babylonians became fabled throughout the world for their wisdom.<sup>88</sup> Thus, in this poem describing Wisdom's origin and relationship to Yahweh,

<sup>85</sup> See *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (ed. H. Frankfort; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 169.

<sup>86</sup> See A. Livingstone, "Assur," *DDD*, 108–9, for this example.

<sup>87</sup> See the same concern in, e.g., Isa 47:8–15 and 44:24–26a.

<sup>88</sup> Despite the loss of native kingship, the Mesopotamian scribal centers and temples flourished during this period. One need only survey the vast number of learned, ritual, and literary tablets that have come out of late-period Uruk/Warka to see this (many of these have been published and edited in a series of volumes entitled *Spätbabylonische Texte aus Uruk*, by Hermann Hunger and Egbert von Weiher [Berlin: Mann, 1976–]). Note, especially, that it was in the early third century B.C.E. (ca. 281) that Berossus wrote his *Babyloniaca*, a book that presented many of the Mesopotamian traditions, including a version of the *apkallu-ummānu* tradition and the creation story, to a Greek-speaking audience. See Stanley Mayer Burstein, *The Babyloniaca of Berossus* (Sources and Monographs: Studies from the Ancient Near East 1.5; Malibu: Undena, 1978), for an introduction to and translation of his work. See also the more recent treatment in Gerald Verbrugge and John Wickersham, *Berossus and*

Prov 8:22–31 uses a well-known account involving two patron deities of Babylonian wisdom and knowledge to subvert those gods and exalt Yahweh's embodiment of wisdom, Wisdom herself, over them.

#### IV. THE COMPOSITION OF PROVERBS 8:22–31: A PROPHETIC AUTHORIZATION FOR WISDOM

We have seen both earlier material from the book of Proverbs used in the construction of Prov 8:22–31 and also foreign material. Are there any other resonances in this poem that could inform our understanding of how it conceived of Wisdom? Although there have been several suggestions,<sup>89</sup> I focus on two phrases, וְאֵהִיָּה אֲצִלּוֹ and אֲנִי אֲנִי, that allude to earlier biblical texts in order to assert Wisdom's prophetlike sending from God to humanity.

#### *Proverbs 8:22–31 and Exodus 3:14*

Roland Murphy has suggested that the word וְאֵהִיָּה, appearing twice in Prov 8:30, alludes to the narrative in Exod 3:14. He writes:

Even the very beginning is marked twice by a solemn אֵהִיָּה (“I am”), which recalls the mysterious revelation of Exod 3:14, where “I am Who I am” occurs twice and “I am” once more. However, the mysterious aura surrounding these verbs is to be understood, there can be hardly any doubt that v 30 alludes to that passage. This is worthy of note in view of the general tendency in Proverbs to avoid the verb “to be” in favor of juxtaposition or simple comparison.<sup>90</sup>

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*Manetho, Introduced and Translated: Native Traditions in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 13–91. The role of Mesopotamian tradition in the book of Daniel and *1 Enoch* in this period hardly need be noted. Surprisingly, the long arm of Mesopotamian influence extended even to the Dead Sea Scrolls, in which one finds mention of Gilgamesh in the Book of Giants. See 4Q531, frag. 22, line 12, אֲנִי אֲנִי and 4Q530 frags. 2 ii + 6–12, line 2, אֲנִי אֲנִי, in Émile Puech, *Qumrân Grotte 4 XXII: Textes Araméens, Première Partie: 4Q529–549* (DJJD 31; Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 28, 74. For a survey of the spread of Mesopotamian traditions during the Hellenistic period, see Stephanie Dalley and A. T. Reyes, “Mesopotamian Contact and Influence in the Greek World: 2. Persia, Alexander, and Rome,” in *The Legacy of Mesopotamia* (ed. Stephanie Dalley et al.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 107–16; and, with reference to astronomy and astrology, David Pingree, “Legacies in Astronomy and Celestial Omens,” in *ibid.*, 132–37.

<sup>89</sup> Some scholars have pointed to similarities of phrasing in our text and Job 28: 38; and Genesis 1. On the latter, see Donn F. Morgan, *Wisdom in the Old Testament Traditions* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 112–13; and Callender, *Adam in Myth and History*, 198 n. 393.

<sup>90</sup> Murphy, *Proverbs*, 53; see also Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 147, who calls the allusion to Exod 3:14 “eine beredete Anspielung.”

According to Benjamin D. Sommer's work on allusion in Deutero-Isaiah, an allusion activates the context alluded to in order to affect the alluding text's meaning.<sup>91</sup> If Murphy's identification of this allusion to Exod 3:14 is correct, then what is its purpose in Prov 8:22–31? Before answering, I think there is more here to consider than Murphy has allowed, for at the end of Exod 3:14 is this comment: אִהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֶיכֶם, "I Am' has sent me to you." The significance of this will be clear after we consider the words שָׁם אֲנִי שָׁם.

### Proverbs 8:22–31 and Isaiah 48:16

The two words שָׁם אֲנִי from Prov 8:27 occur together in only one other place in the Hebrew Bible—Isa 48:16. The larger context of the Isaian verse is a speech by Yahweh in the first person. In this speech Yahweh asserts his eternity in 48:12 (אֲנִי־הוּא אֲנִי רִאשׁוֹן אֶף אֲנִי אַחֲרוֹן), "I am he, I am the first, I am also the last"), his creative powers in v. 13 (אֶף־יָדַי יִסְדָּה אֶרֶץ וַיְמִינִי טַפְחָה שָׁמַיִם), "Indeed my hand founded the earth, my right hand spread forth the heavens"), his knowledge in v. 14 (מִי בָהֶם) הֲגִיד אֶת־אֵלֶּה, "who among them has proclaimed these things?"), and the effectiveness of his speech in v. 15. Then in 48:16 Yahweh says: קִרְבוּ אֵלַי שְׁמַעוּ־זֵאת, "come near to me; hear this." The imperative "hear" is evocative of the instructional form and even of Wisdom's words throughout Proverbs 1–9. Then, having got the audiences attention, Yahweh—at least that is whom one expects to be the speaker—continues in 48:16 rather cryptically:

לֹא מֵרֵאשִׁית בְּסֵתֶר דְּבַרְתִּי מֵעַת הַיּוֹתָה שָׁם אָנִי וְעַתָּה  
אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה שְׁלַחְנִי וְרוּחוֹ

I have not spoken in secret from the beginning. From the time of its coming into being I was there. And now Lord Yahweh has sent me, even his spirit.

What the reader may have expected to be words of Yahweh must be reprocessed by the end of the verse as someone else's speech. And thus the enigmatic statement leaves the reader with several questions. Among these are: Who is speaking? Who is active מֵרֵאשִׁית and מֵעַת הַיּוֹתָה? And finally, Who is being sent? The answers to these questions in the Deutero-Isaian context are not our concern here.<sup>92</sup> The important point is simply to recognize the fact that the passage leaves the reader with questions.

<sup>91</sup> See Sommer, *Prophet Reads Scripture*, 10–13. Note his technical distinction between "echo" and "allusion." With an allusion, "the meaning of an alluding text is affected by the content of the source text, while echoes do not suggest any altered understanding of the passage in which they appear" (pp. 30–31).

<sup>92</sup> See, e.g., the recent comments on this passage by Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40–55* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 293–96, who identifies the speaker of v. 16b as the "servant" and sees the passage, quite interestingly, as "a carefully crafted reflection of Exodus 3, especially 3:13–15."

### *The Purpose of Allusion and Wisdom's Cosmic Mediation*

Returning to Prov 8:22–31 with all of this in mind, I submit that the two phrases framing the positive account of creation in Prov 8:27–30a and denoting Wisdom's presence at creation (שם אני and ואהיה אצלו אמן) evoke two texts related to the sending of messengers: Exod 3:14 and Isa 48:16, both of which contain the word שלחני in the immediate context. The purpose of these allusions is to show that not only was Wisdom present with Yahweh at creation (obvious from the phrases themselves in the poem) and therefore uniquely knowledgeable about the structure of the universe, but also—assuming that the contexts of the allusions are indeed activated in their appropriating text's context—that Wisdom is implicitly a messenger sent by Yahweh to humanity and therefore can communicate to mortals her unique cosmological knowledge. I grant that the allusion is subtle and the idea is not obvious on the surface of the text, but the personified Wisdom tradition has already hinted at this mediatorial role for Wisdom by giving her speech in ch. 1 a prophetic tone. More to the point for the present poem, vv. 30 and 31 provide support for Wisdom's prophetic sending because these two verses explain the idea further. Verses 30 and 31, which, as Fox says, convey the idea that “as God delights in Wisdom, so Wisdom delights in mankind,”<sup>93</sup> describe the heavenly and then earthly reality of Wisdom's presence. First, 8:30bc, ואהיה שעשעים יום יום משחקת לפניו בכל-עַת, “I was delight daily, playing before him all the time,” characterizes the time Wisdom spent in the presence of God. Thus, these phrases fill out the depiction of creation presented in 8:27–30a by specifically explaining what is meant on the surface of the words שם אני and ואהיה אצלו אמן: in childlike exuberance, Wisdom as master brought delight to God during the process of creation. Then v. 31, משחקת אדם בתבל ארצו ושעשעי את-בני אדם ואהיה אצלו שם אני and אמן by drawing on the allusions to Exod 3:14 and Isa 48:16 that these words convey: Wisdom dwells among humanity as a uniquely qualified prophetlike messenger from God bearing his wisdom to them; in this activity, she finds delight in humanity.

Although this mediatorial role is suggested by the Mesopotamian background of the term אָמַן, it is presented here again in the poem by drawing on earlier Israelite texts dealing with prophetic sending. Once again, it seems, the poem revels in creating multivalence. In any case, Wisdom's prophetlike character in this poem creates a mechanism for authenticating the sayings recorded in the book of Proverbs as deriving from the heavenly realm. As 8:31 does not restrict the movements of Wisdom among humanity, it can be assumed that she is free to proclaim her heavenly authorized knowledge to one and all. In this manner she is similar to the Israelite

<sup>93</sup> See Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 288, and his defense that it is Wisdom who is feeling the delight, not humanity.

prophets, though apparently with a more universal scope. Conversely, this open communication makes her distinct from the Mesopotamian tradition of scholarly wisdom, which was maintained as strictly secret and always limited to a select group of learned individuals.<sup>94</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

Proverbs 8:22–31 is an allusive web of literary connections. Through this multi-layered tapestry, it specifically accounts for the origin of Wisdom and her relationship to Yahweh by means of an interpretation of Prov 3:19–20. The poem asserts Wisdom's ultimate and absolute chronological priority to all things through her birth in the ages past, for which it found in Marduk's birth account in the *Enuma Elish* both a model nativity and a means to polemicize against Babylonian wisdom. Finally, the poem proves that Wisdom's presence at creation as a "master" (again under the influence of the *Enuma Elish*) uniquely authorizes her to be the embodiment of Yahweh's wisdom. Present with Yahweh from ages past, she took part in creation alongside him; sent by him as a prophetlike messenger of wisdom, implicit in the allusions to Exod 3:14 and Isa 48:16, she found her delight among humanity. With a heritage in such textual richness, there should be no wonder at this text's expansive and colorful history of interpretation.

<sup>94</sup> This topic is treated in ch. 3 of my dissertation (see "Secret of the Gods' and Society"). It should be noted that Prov 8:22–31 is not unique in drawing on the prophetic tradition to provide a nonprophetic subject with a heavenly connection. The Priestly document, a document concerned with ritual and cult, does the very same thing at Sinai (see *ibid.*, 397–415).