

# ANCIENT ISRAELITE HYPOSTASIS

*A Study of the Continuum of Hypostasis in Ancient Israel*

Douglas M Hamp

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Dr. Seth Sanders  
Thesis Advisor

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## Abbreviations

Akk. Akkadian  
Heb. Hebrew  
SBH Standard Biblical Hebrew

For abbreviations in the following fields consult:

### *Assyriology:*

CAD Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, Chicago, (1958).

### *Biblical Studies:*

ABD Anchor Bible Dictionary, New York, (1992).

### *Egyptology:*

R. O. Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts*, Warminster, (1973).

## Translations

English translation of the Bible:

American Standard Version (1901).  
Jerusalem Bible, London, (1966)

Second Temple literature:

J. H. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, London, (1985).  
R. H. Charles, "The Wisdom of Solomon", *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*,  
Oxford, (1969).

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## Preface

### *The Identity of Wisdom in Proverbs 8.*

The nature and role of Wisdom in Proverbs 8 is the central text of this study. The passage has been debated for centuries. There are at least two words in it which render the interpretation extremely difficult (*qanah* and *amon*). How one decides to understand these terms affects how one views God's nature. In the passage, Wisdom speaks to humanity in the first person and even claims to have attributes like God. Wisdom declares that she was in the beginning with God. Before anything at all was made, she was there.

I believe that unlocking the two enigmatic words, especially *amon*, will thereby enable us to see that Wisdom is more than a poetic device; YHWH, though one, was not exactly alone in the beginning. The New Testament affirms that God is manifest in three distinct *persona* also known as hypostasis. In fact, hypostasis was a word that the early church adopted in order to help clarify the nature of God as a trinity.

It is a common assumption that the idea of a God with hypostases (variable manifestations of attributes) began with the Christian age. The concept underlying the trinity, is commonly assumed to be a new type of theology invented by the Church – something foreign to Judaism. I have also heard it said whether in the university setting or in the streets of Jerusalem and beyond, that Jews could accept Jesus if he hadn't claimed to be the Son of God. In other words, the fact that God could in any way be made manifest on earth is somehow thought to be foreign to any true Jewish thinking. This, however, is not the case.

Proverbs 8 and its interpretation is central in this issue in that it was later interpreted in Second Temple Jewish writings as God having a hypostasis. In other words, the notion that God's nature was a complex unity was already a reality before the Church or even the New Testament Writers. The concept, as will be demonstrated in the body of this paper, is of great antiquity. The ancient believer seems to have always tended to regard God as possessing some type of intermediary, which was not simply an angel; the intermediary was dependent

and yet somehow distinguished from God. It was both God almighty and yet separate from him.

Precisely where the ideas began is not pertinent to this study. Rather it will be shown that the notion was not exclusive to Israel. Many ancient nations shared the concept of a god or gods having a type of substance which was separate from them. What is important to notice about the phenomenon in Israel is that the hypostases did not become deities in the own right. What began as a hypostasis in other cultures often became a deity entirely distinct from the original god.

### ***The Importance to the Believer***

Understanding that the ancient Israelites believed God to have a hypostasis shows that the Church's stance was rather more of a new title than a new concept. The concept itself is very ancient. Furthermore, if Wisdom was indeed a hypostasis of God, then it further strengthens the case made by John, Paul and just about all of the New Testament writers that namely: in the beginning, a prototype –logos, Torah – was next to God the father. This paragon, archetype was next to God during the process of creation and perhaps as John suggests, was the one through whom all was made.

And so, the central theme of this thesis is to show that the notion of hypostasis was not a new invention of the Church, but was rather something that had its roots in antiquity and was very Jewish. This will be done through the examination of extra-biblical and biblical against Proverbs 8. Based on the environment in which it was written and the language employed, there are good reasons to believe that the author(s) was writing more than one meaning in mind. One of those, however, was the same belief underlying the words of Jesus, "I and the Father are one." (John, 10:30)

## Introduction:

The Bible is an eclectic book containing many different traditions and stories. Its diversity is part of its attraction. There is one axiom, however, from which the Bible, taken as a whole, does not seem to deviate – only the God of Israel is worthy to receive glory and worship. Though the Bible may not deny the existence of other gods (Ex. 20:3),<sup>1</sup> neither does it give any place whatsoever to other gods to receive glory, honor or praise alongside YHWH, the God of Israel.

The thesis of this study is to show that, despite the strong biblical and Second Temple period injunctions against worshiping other deities, the worship of God's attributes and or cultic objects (hypostasis) was native to ancient Israel.<sup>2</sup>

Exodus 20:3-5 provides an excellent example of how God himself, as understood by the author, prohibits the worship of any other gods.

You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.

לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל־פָּנָי:  
לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה־לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר  
בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל  
וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם  
לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא  
פֹקֵד עֵינָי אֶת־בְּנֵי עַל־שֹׁלֵשִׁים  
וְעַל־רְבָעִים לְשֵׁנָאִי:

Isaiah would go so far as to deny the existence of any other god besides the God of Israel (Isa. 43:10,11; 44:6; 45:6). He emphatically states that God will in no way share his glory with another.

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<sup>1</sup> McCarter relates to the  $\text{מָא} (\$ma)$  (Deut. 6:4) “as if it were a polemic against the practice of worshiping local manifestations.” He states that “the context shows clearly that the concern of this verse is not with the unity of Yahweh himself or even the centralization of his worship. The subject is the exclusiveness of his worship, as Deut 6:5 shows: ‘You shall love Yahweh, your god, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.’ Israel has one god, and he is a ‘jealous god’ (Deut 6:15).” P. K. McCarter, (1987), p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> The appearance of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22-31 (a transitional text) illustrates a biblical example of hypostasis and serves as a transition point in the continuum of hypostasis which then emerges in the Second Temple period thereby making Israelite hypostasis of that period a native idea and not a *sole* borrowing of Greek ideas I am not suggesting that they may not have Douglas M Hamp Page 7

I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images. (Isa. 42:8)

אֲנִי יְהוָה הוּא  
וְכִבְדִּי לְאַחֵר לְאַתָּן  
וְתַהֲלִתִּי שְׁמִי לְפִסִּילִים:

Thus, we can see from these two texts, (two major representatives of biblical tradition – Torah and Isaiah demonstrating various eras of composition), that God is depicted as not willing that another receive worship in his stead.<sup>3</sup> The writers of the Pseudepigrapha were also well aware that their God was a jealous God. The Apocalypse of Zephaniah, written sometime between 100 BC and 100 AD,<sup>4</sup> reminded its audience of the importance of worshipping God alone. The seer of the vision saw a ‘great angel’ like the angel in Daniel 10:5. In fact, he was so over-taken by the figure that he said, “I rejoiced, for I thought that the Lord Almighty had come to visit me.” The seer believed that he had seen the Almighty and fell on his face to worship. Upon doing so he was cautioned “He said to me, ‘Take heed. Don’t worship me. I am not the Lord Almighty...’”<sup>5</sup> Obviously, the injunction against worshipping creatures was still clear in the mind of the Second Temple period Jew and moreover, the Talmud specifically prohibits such worship.<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that people never worshiped angels.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of what they actually did, however, the Jewish cultic conscience still regarded it as not normative in the Jewish faith.

In the Similitudes of Enoch (48:5), people fall down and worship a being other than YHWH.<sup>8</sup> “All those who dwell upon the earth shall fall and worship before him [the Son of Man]...” J. Collins suggests that there was an assimilation of the Son of Man and the Deity. “While the title messiah plays a minor role in the Similitudes, it is all the more significant that the identification of Messiah and the Son of Man can be assumed ... In many respects he seems to be assimilated to the Deity (who also sits on the throne of his glory).”<sup>9</sup> Many of the examples in the late Second Temple period portray him as assimilated to God. While Collins’ is not the only view on this complex issue, and while the Son of Man is not always assimilated, I nevertheless, agree with his point. Many texts ascribe glory and adulation to some one other than YHWH; behavior normally reserved for God. Some texts indicate that the ‘anointed one’ will

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borrowed from other cultures to shape the thought. Rather, the history of hypostasis in Israel is ancient enough to render the need to find the kernel in the Greek culture unnecessary.

<sup>3</sup> See also Exodus 34:14; Deut. 5:6-9; Isa. 2:8; Rev 22:8,9 for other examples of created beings refusing praise.

<sup>4</sup> Charlesworth, (1985), notes that this text has a surprising lack of ‘Christian elements’

<sup>5</sup> Apocalypse of Zephaniah, 6:15.

<sup>6</sup> See Yerušalmi Beruḥot, 9:13

<sup>7</sup> L. Stuckenbruck, (1995), offers further discussion concerning the worship of beings.

<sup>8</sup> J. Collins, (1995), p. 181.

dwell in the midst of God's people as their King. (I Enoch 45) And still other texts indicate that it is a figure other than God who will purge the impurity of God's people.<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes, however, the figure was not the 'anointed of YHWH' but rather an attribute of YHWH (Wisdom of Solomon 7:22-27). Rabbinic literature, most probably recording an older tradition, shows that even the altar of God was praised.<sup>11</sup> In the religions of the ANE, these claims were not so incredible; polytheism had existed for many years and was considered the norm. In fact, Jews and subsequently Christians were occasionally thought of as not having religion since they believed in only one God.<sup>12</sup> Thus, why would a society so deeply moved to acclaim that there was only one God, envision that other entities and even inanimate objects could actually have a share in God's praise? The many martyrs during and after the time of the Maccabees should be recalled as a case in point. Rather than yield to the religious atrocities of the Greeks, many preferred to die than to eat pork and offer sacrifices to the gods. Thus, one cannot conclude that the worshippers of YHWH took their beliefs lightly. And so we are left with the dilemma of how this plethora of dissident texts arose. Did these seemingly radical ideas of polyvalent worship come from an origin foreign to Judaism? Did they originate in the Second Temple period? Were they primarily Greek in origin? The study of ancient Israelite hypostasis seeks to answer these questions.

## PLAN OF STUDY

**Method:** In order to determine if a given text contains a hypostasis, it must meet the following criteria: 1) Is the entity in question an attribute, abstract quality or cultic object of another entity? 2) Is the entity in question understood to have the ability to act autonomously of the original entity? 3) Is the entity still

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (8-11). The author suggests that, via him (the priest to come), sin shall be destroyed 'in his priesthood sin shall cease', lawless men shall repent 'and lawless men shall rest from their evil deeds' and ultimately through him the saints will obtain eternal life 'and he will grant to the saints to eat of the tree of life'. Generally these are attributes reserved for God Himself.

<sup>11</sup> See: Mishnah Suk. 4:5, and J. H. Tigay, (1986), p. 11.

considered to be a logical part of the original entity? If these three criteria are met then we know that we are dealing with a hypostasis.

**Structure:** In order to argue the above proposals, many issues need to be examined: 1) non-Israelite hypostases, 2) Israelite-extra-biblical hypostases 3) biblical hypostases 4) and a brief survey of Second Temple hypostases. Hypostasis outside of Israel will be the first issue to be addressed. This is important so that we may see what polytheistic cultures understood hypostasis to be in contradistinction to a culture claiming to be monotheistic. Next, examples of Israelite extra-biblical hypostasis will be considered to show how religion outside of the pages of the Bible related to God in order to show that cultic practice and belief was congruent both in and outside of the Bible. Once we understand what was happening outside of the textual witness of the Bible, we shall turn inward to see the parallels between the biblical and extra-biblical evidence. And finally, to demonstrate the prevalence of hypostasis, a brief survey of Second Temple texts will be conducted.

Once we have seen what hypostasis was in the various contexts above, an examination of Proverbs 8:22-31 (a transitional text) shall ensue since Wisdom was so often interpreted as a hypostasis – evident in Second Temple literature (discussed in this paper). I believe that this passage is perhaps the most salient example of hypostasis in the Bible. Demonstrating it to be an example of hypostasis will, in my opinion, seal the case for hypostasis in Ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism.

Issues to be addressed: 1) ancient and modern debate over Proverbs 8 including a discussion of the key words – *qānāh* and especially *amon*, 2) source of the word *amon* and its meaning in Proverbs 8 and 3) how the meaning which I propose enhances the claim that Wisdom is an example of Ancient Israelite hypostasis.

The central question underlying the study of Proverbs 8: did its author intend Wisdom to be an Israelite hypostasis? After discussing the various debates concerning its interpretation, I will discuss the context of the passage which I consider to be an important clue for its understanding. Item 2, therefore, will deal with the Egyptian context that scholars generally agree underlies

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<sup>12</sup>See: Kenneth, Scott, Latourette, (1953), for further discussion.  
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Israelite Wisdom texts.<sup>13</sup> While it may, however, seem that an Egyptian background to Israelite Wisdom literature would naturally preclude the proposal that hypostasis was native to Israel, it in fact does not. Israel, like every nation of old (and modern as well), was affected by its surroundings, including Egypt just as she was affected by Israel and her neighbors.

Once all of the proposed material has been surveyed, it is hoped that we will understand that the author of Proverbs 8 was referring to Wisdom as a hypostasis of God and consequently, the conflicting ideas of the late Second Temple period will be recognized as representations of hypostasis rather than solely a borrowing of pagan elements (Hellenistic, Persian etc.) which were incorporated into Israel's faith (including Second Temple Judaism). Moreover, the seemingly 'unorthodox' statements ascribing praise, glory and exultation to one other than God, were not heresy; rather they were a very ancient form of understanding God's presence in this world – a conception native to Judaism.

## Terminology

### *Personification*

In the ancient Near East, there was a phenomenon whereby an attribute or cultic object was personified, that is to say, it had characteristics of a person. A biblical example of personification is Exodus 15:14-15.

The people will hear and be afraid; Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; The mighty men of Moab, Trembling will take hold of them; All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away.

שָׁמְעוּ עַמִּים יִרְגְּזוּן חֵיל אֶחָז יִשְׁבִּי פְּלִשְׁתִּים:  
אֱלֹהֵי אֲדוֹם אֵילֵי מוֹאָב יֶאֱחָזְמוּ רָעַד  
אִז נִבְהָלוּ נִמְגְגוּ כָּל יִשְׁבֵי כְּנָעַן:

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<sup>13</sup> Since Egypt seems to have been so influential on Israelite Wisdom literature, it stands to reason that the source of the enigmatic word *amon* may have an Egyptian background, which will hopefully shed light on its meaning. Investigating the source of this word is in fact very important to the question of ancient Israelite hypostasis. Since Proverbs is a transitional book, demonstrating that the author believed Wisdom to be a hypostasis will *de facto* confirm that its interpreters understood thus also. I believe the word *amon* to be the crucial key to unlocking the meaning of the whole text. Therefore, I will attempt to explain *amon* in light of the Egyptian semantic range of the word to clarify the author's intent, which in my opinion, was nothing less than hypostasis.

Here the personification is not of a divine attribute, but is sorrow (or writhing) itself. Furthermore, the poet continues by saying not simply that the people will tremble, but that “trembling” will take hold of them. This type of speech is a device to add excitement and suspense to the account. There is no reason to assume that the author had in mind an entity such as Trembling who would literally take the people into its arms.<sup>14</sup> Another example, perhaps more convincing, is Ps. 98:8: “Let the rivers clap their hands...” Here too the poet is using personification to exalt God - a device which the author uses to bring to life an otherwise inanimate idea or thing for the sake of embellishment and elaboration.

### **Hypostasis**

There is a subtle, but important difference between a personified object and a hypostasis. A personification was never equated with god, (though it may have been considered a god in extra-biblical mythological texts). In the Bible, the personified object was not equal to God. Hypostasis on the other hand was thought to be an accurate representation of the deity.

The term hypostasis is a term which has been in use for millennia. The word is Greek in origin and was used in several contexts. Its basic meaning was *standing under, supporting*.<sup>15</sup> By the time of the Church Fathers it was used to designate the three persons of the Trinity.<sup>16</sup> The word also was employed in Platonic and Stoic philosophy<sup>17</sup> as well as everyday usage. Bible and Ancient Near East (ANE) scholars have employed the term to describe the process of

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<sup>14</sup> That is not to say that there are no mythological features here. Outside of the Bible Trembling may well have been a deity (the same being true for River in Ps. 98:8). A reading of the passage in its entirety reveals the lack of a definite article on the word *yam* (Ex. 15:8). This suggests a personal name: i.e. the Ugaritic sea goddess.

<sup>15</sup> See: Liddel and Scott, (1968). See also: *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, (1975). Other meanings include: some thing that stands under and supports; foundation b) the underlying or essential part or anything as distinguished from attributes; substance, essence, or essential principle; Greek; hypostasis – that which settles at the bottom; substance, nature, essence.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth, Scott, Latourette, (1953), p. 161. It was adopted by the Christian forum of Nicene to help define the three persons (substance - *substantia*) of the trinity.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

regarding an abstract quality of a deity<sup>18</sup> as a real entity, e.g. wisdom (σοφία), glory (δόξα), presence (παρουσία), name (ὄνομα) (see especially Ex. 33); or a cultic aspect of the god, e.g. the temple, or cultic apparatus e.g. the sacred tree etc... Though the actual Greek word *hypostasis*, does appear 21 times in the LXX and once in the New Testament (signifying *substance, ground, hope, foundation, and burden*), it never denotes, however, any type of abstraction which stands in the place of another. Currently, it is used to describe the process whereby the essence of the deity is assimilated into another form or manifestation. One Biblicalist suggests this understanding: “a quality, epithet, attribute, manifestation or the like of a deity which through a process of personification and differentiation has become a distinct (if not fully independent) divine being in its own right... Such local manifestations, or hypostases, were not understood to be foreign gods adopted into a polytheistic pantheon. Rather they were abstract aspects of Yahweh that were personified and given substance.”<sup>19</sup>

And so, hypostasis in this paper will be defined thus: an attribute or cultic object of a god (or man)<sup>20</sup>, that is regarded as a supernatural being which is distinct from the original *and* is invoked (or cursed) alongside a god (or in place of) and is given the same reverence and honor (or fear) which the particular god is given.<sup>21</sup> The phenomenon of hypostasis can be observed by the fact that a worshipper addresses a cultic object and/or attribute of a god either independently or in conjunction to the primary god as a worthy and comparable substitute for the primary deity. That is to say, the worshipper seeks a relationship with the deity’s hypostasis in addition to or as a proxy by which he may access the primary deity.<sup>22</sup>

How is hypostasis different than polytheism? The dividing line between the two is perhaps thin, but nonetheless important. Polytheism admits that there are many deities in the cosmos. The various gods act independently of one

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<sup>18</sup> It may occasionally be used in relation to humans e.g. the evil eye.

<sup>19</sup> S. Dean McBride, (1969), p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> As will be demonstrated, the Evil Eye was considered a supernatural being derived from a person. The eye stems from someone else’s supernaturally powerful ill will and psyche.

<sup>21</sup> I reject the idea as proposed by Meir, (1983), p. 39, that Satan in the book of Job is a hypostasis of God on the grounds that the hypostasis is in direct conflict with its originator. A hypostasis of a god was considered to be a suitable substitution for the original deity. Addressing the hypostasis was to address the original deity, as will be seen.

another and have different levels of power. However, to worship one is not to worship another. The important distinction is witnessed in particular, in the relationships of the gods of Mesopotamia. The gods can beget, hate, deceive and war against one another just as humans do. So, worshiping Shamash (the sun god) is not same as worshiping Nergal (the god of pestilence). These gods could plot against and hold one another hostage, which could ultimately result in death.<sup>23</sup> Hypostasis, especially in the Hebrew Bible, is very different from polytheism in Mesopotamia<sup>24</sup> and elsewhere. Both the biblical and extra-biblical examples of hypostasis in Israel never addressed the hypostasis as an entity entirely independent of YHWH. There was always a nexus between the two.

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<sup>22</sup> As will be seen in the first example, hypostasis was not limited to the divine. However, it is considered the comparable representation of the entity in question.

<sup>23</sup> See for example, the Descent of Ištar. Ereškigal holds Ištar prisoner in her realm of the netherworld and Ištar eventually dies. See: B. R. Foster, (1993), pp. 403-428.

<sup>24</sup>Of course in first millennium Mesopotamia there are texts that treat all gods as hypostases of one god, such as Aššur. See S. Parpola (1997) and K. Van Der Toorn (1997), for a discussion.

## 1 Hypostases in the Ancient Near East

As noted in the introduction, there existed a phenomenon in the ANE wherein an attribute or cultic object of a god or goddess became a quasi-independent or even fully independent entity. This supernatural being most often acted as the intermediary between a god/goddess and his/her subjects. This new entity had all the authority which the primary god had and was understood to be a representation of the deity. Worshiping the hypostasis was to worship the god whom it represented, that is, there was no qualitative difference between the two.<sup>25</sup> This phenomenon was found both in and outside of Israel.

### 1.1 The Evil Eye

It is important to notice how the Evil Eye in every example was understood to be an entity which was capable of helping or harming an individual. The being in question could be invoked to strike someone, roam about seeking a victim, receive honor and glory, and could even talk with individuals. One of the most striking examples of hypostasis is that of the Evil Eye found in texts from Ugarit. What is most interesting and informative about this text is that it demonstrates the ancient belief of hypostasis. Though it is not an abstract attribute of a god, or a cultic object, it is nonetheless part of a being (in this case human) which became an independent entity able of inflicting harm upon another.<sup>26</sup> (Italics in translation indicate uncertain meaning according to Ford)

<i>'in.hlkt.wšnwt</i>	The Eye, it roamed and darted;
<i>tp. 'aḥh.kn 'm.</i>	It saw its "brother" – <i>how</i> lovely (he was)!
<i>'aḥh.kysmsm.</i>	Its "brother" – <i>how</i> very seemly!
<i>tsp. 'i.š'irh l.bl ḥrb.</i>	Without a knife it devoured his flesh,
<i>tš. dmh lbl.ksl</i>	Without a cup it guzzled his blood;
<i>tpnn. 'nbḥy.</i>	(It was) the eye of an <i>evil</i> man (that) saw him,
<i>'n bḥt.</i>	the eye of an <i>evil</i> woman;

<sup>25</sup>S. Olyan, (1988), p. 31. "...naming the cult symbol of the deity is synonymous with naming the deity [itself] herself."

<sup>26</sup>For complete details see: J.N. Ford, (1998), p. 202.

<i>tpnn 'n.mḥr.</i>	(It was) the eye of a <i>merchant</i> (that) saw him,
<i>'n.pḥr</i>	the eye of a potter,
<i>'n.tḡr.</i>	the eye of a gatekeeper.
<i>'n tḡr!tḡr.tḡb.</i>	May the eye of the gatekeeper return to the gatekeeper!
<i>'n.pḥr lpḥr.tḡb.</i>	May the eye of the potter return to the potter!
<i>'n.mḥr lmḥr.tḡb.</i>	May the eye of the <i>merchant</i> return to the <i>merchant</i> !
<i>'n.bḡy l bḡy.tḡb.</i>	May the eye of the <i>evil</i> man return to the <i>evil</i> man!
<i>'n.[bḡ] lbḡ.t[ḡb]</i>	May the eye of the [ <i>evil</i> woman] re[turn] to the <i>evil</i> woman! <sup>27</sup>

It is evident from this text that the Eye was no mere abstract idea without concrete visualization. Whether they believed the Eye could in fact be visibly seen is a question which shall not be addressed here. Rather, it is important to understand that the Evil Eye was considered a real entity. The number of verbs describing its mobility, vision, lust, and destructive abilities clearly and unequivocally demonstrate that the ancient author understood that there was in fact an entity, having some appearance of an eyeball, which could seek out a victim and inflict harm of a certain magnitude. The utilization of *verba movendi* - *ibāma...ibā'ma...ṛumma* 'it passed through...it entered' (lines 4,6,8), verify that the eye is no doubt depicted as 'roaming'.<sup>28</sup>

Couldn't "roaming" simply refer to the act of someone moving his eyes from side to side? Indeed there are other texts in which people are said to move their eyes back and forth and, subsequently, that is one of the meanings.<sup>29</sup> However, the text has a much more sinister message. The vocabulary of the Evil Eye is different from that of a physiological eye. A distinction in the vocabulary can be noted "between *īnum* 'the (evil) eye' (singular) - (Old Babylonian incantation text, Ford 1998, p. 206) and *ēnāšu* (IGI<sup>II</sup> -*šū*) HIS (physiological) eyes' (dual) in the present, non-magical text, the latter clearly not referring to the Evil Eye."<sup>30</sup> An important observation is made by P. B. Gravel concerning the differentiation in language between the Evil Eye and speech related to the physiological eye. He says that in all languages, "the Evil Eye is always singular,

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 202.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 207.

<sup>29</sup>Ford addresses this point and concedes that it is one of the meanings of the "roaming" eye. "The 'roaming' of the eye refers, on one hand, to the ever-moving, searching glance of the physiological eye." Ford, (1998), p. 211.

never plural.”<sup>31</sup> The special terminology for the Evil Eye in contradistinction to that of a physiological eye can thus be clearly seen. The author was doing much more than referring to his neighbor’s evil glare. He was referring to the Evil Eye – a *real* entity – which was seeking a victim. And likewise, he was saying an incantation against that real force.

Another text dealing with the ruin caused by the Evil Eye is that of an incantation related to childbirth. Again, one can note the use of verbs of motion which show that the Evil Eye could roam. The verb in this bilingual – Sumero-Akkadian incantation, is parallel with that of wandering demons that roam about a city.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, the same lexeme (*mum*) is used to describe the Evil Eye rather than (*ēnāšu* (IGI<sup>II</sup> -*šū*) for the physiological eye. For the ancient Mesopotamians expecting a child into the world, the hypostasis of the Evil Eye was a reality which they constantly dreaded. The Evil Eye could strike at any moment to inflict injury on them or their children.

<p>[i]-[n]u-{<i>um-ip-pa-la-āa-it-ta-na-ap</i>}<sup>33</sup> -  <i>[ra ar]</i>  <i>ša-a-š-ka-lum sà-ḥi-ip-tum</i>  <i>ḥu-ḥa-ru-um sà-ḥe-e-š-tum</i>  <i>ba-ab la-’i i-ba-ma</i>  <i>i-na be-re la-’i se- {el} -ta-am i-š-ku-un</i>  <i>ba-ab wa-li-[d]a-ti-im i-ba-ma</i>  <i>še-ri-šl-na u-ḥa-ni-iq</i>  <i>i-ru-ma a-[n]a [b]i-ot qè-e</i>  <i>ši-pa<sup>(?)</sup>-sa-am [i]š-bi-ir</i></p>	<p>The (Evil) [E]ye looks,  while [roa]ming about;  (It is) a <i>šuškallu</i>-net which swoops down,  a <i>ḥuḥāru</i>-net which ensnares.  It passed through the doorway of infants;  It passed through the doorway  of women in labor,  And strangled their babies;  It entered the <i>bī qē</i>,  And broke the sealing (?) ...<sup>34</sup></p>
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The Evil Eye was not an entity without a concrete form like the Spirit of God in the Bible (Genesis 1:2). Rather, it was conceived of as an entity with feet, legs, a head, and hair. In other words, the worshipper could employ magical incantations against the Eye since it had an actual body. In support of this, Ford suggests that it was conceptualized as a distinct demon in the expression of its body parts.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 212.

<sup>31</sup> P. B. Gravel, (1995), p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Ford, (1998), p. 207.

<sup>33</sup> Upper brackets represent partial restoration.

<sup>34</sup> Ford, (1998), p. 206, (Old Babylonian Incantation ).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 213.

ēnu leqāšīma itti k[ušā]ri ēdānū šēp ēša ruksā “As for the (Evil) Eye, take it and bind its feet to a solitary ree[d st]alk!”<sup>36</sup>

Since the Eye could have its feet bound then it necessarily had limbs and an entire body. This manifestation was eventually captured by an artist so that no doubt should remain; the Evil Eye was a giant eyeball, with a body, which roamed about seeking other’s ruin. The depiction below, found in Syria and dating to the early first millenium (circa 900-700 BC)<sup>37</sup>, shows how the eye, in the shape of a head with a body, was believed to have been a creature which could eat other people.<sup>38</sup>



**The Evil Eye**

In the Akkadian text CT 17, 33, as well as other Sumero-Akkadian incantations<sup>39</sup>, the ‘Evil Eye’ is presented acting *independently* of its owner and is occasionally hypostatized as an animal or ‘monster’ like the muš.huš<sup>40</sup> “dragon”. The evil eye can likewise be ‘slaughtered,’ according to a Sumerian incantation.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 212, VAT 10018:19

<sup>37</sup> A more precise dating was not available.

<sup>38</sup> Picture taken from A. Caquot and R. du Mesnil du Buisson, (1971).

<sup>39</sup> Sumerian texts: YOS 11, 70 I 1’-14; YOS 11, 70 I 15’-23’ = YOS 11, 71; YOS 11, 70 I 24’-II 6’; TCL 16, 89: 3-12 = BL, no. 3, 3-9; Akkadian text: VAT 10018 (Ebeling, ArOr 17/1, p. 203 -205).

<sup>40</sup> See: M. L. Thomsen, (1992), p. 25.

## Summary and Conclusion of the Evil Eye

In our first example of hypostasis we have seen, from magic texts, how the ancient person would have said the incantation to ward off the very real and malevolent entity which sought him harm. The Eye was described in graphic terms of motion, attack and vision. For the ancient, the Evil Eye was not some personification of the poet to describe bad events. Rather, the bad events were a direct cause of the visitation of the Evil Eye. If the cantor of the incantation could successfully implement the magic, then the actual entity of the Evil Eye would not be able to harm its victim. Whether or not the ancient actually believed that he could see the Evil Eye is unknown. However, that does not mean that he didn't conceptualize what it looked like in its physical form. This is seen from the text relating to the parts of the body and of course the drawing itself. Therefore, if the eye of someone was conceived of as manifesting itself as a new entity, able to move about and suffer death, then the notion that an abstract attribute of a god (which, of course, is a higher being) or that the cultic apparatus of a god could take on an *independent* existence is not surprising. However, it would be surprising if this phenomenon were not observed.

Our conclusion therefore must be that the Eye was at the same time a real entity, separate of the person from which it originated, which had the power to act in concrete ways. And yet was also intimately connected with its originator: its identity was found in whom it came from, and it did not appear from an unknown region (seeking a victim to destroy). It was independent of the parent entity, in that it could move about freely without the person's direction but was dependent on the wicked person's inclinations. The Evil Eye meets all of the criteria for hypostasis.

### **1.2 Beth El**

The next example is taken from a Mesopotamian text in which Bethel is referred to as an entity capable of making choices. Like the Evil Eye, the hypostasis of Bethel (literally *house of god* = temple) is thought to be conscious

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<sup>41</sup> YOS 11, 71:17-18, see M. L. Thomsen, (1992), p.30.

and powerful. Here, Bethel is actually the one invoked to give the person over to a lion. This example is given to show how part of the cultic apparatus (in this case a temple) could be conceived of as a deity. What once was no more than a place to pay homage to the gods became itself a god which received homage (or invocations) from others.

[ <sup>d</sup> ba-a-a-ti DINGIR.MEŠ <sup>d</sup> a-na- t]I – ba-a-a-ti – DINGIR. [MEŠ <sup>d</sup> ] ina ŠU.2 UR.M[AH a-ki-li] lim-nu-ku-nu	May [Bethel and Ana]th-Bethel hand you over to the paws of [a man-eating] lion. <sup>42</sup>
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Similar to the Evil eye, cultic places and objects were also hypostatized on occasion. Bethel is a place spoken of in the Bible and God is declared to be the God of Bethel “I am the God of Beth-el” (אֲנֹכִי הָאֵל בֵּית־אֵל)(Gen. 31:13). What is important from the Biblical witness is that it was specifically called a place, and God was the God of the place.<sup>43</sup> Whether or not the Mesopotamian text above is referring to the same place is perhaps insignificant since the ancient writer clearly knew of such a place(s) and understood it to be a place before it was a deity. The example of Bethel is brought in to demonstrate how for the pagan, a cultic object became a separate entity. And for the Jews in Elephantine, discussed below, it could be worshiped alongside of God. In other words, the hypostasis did not become simply another god to whom someone could pray, but it was a compliment to YHWH and acted as the intermediary between him and his subjects.

### 1.2.1 Linguistic Analysis

It is clear in this text that Bethel is a deity. First, this invocation appears along with many other gods who are likewise invoked at the signing of a treaty. Secondly, Bethel, like the other gods, is preceded by the god determinative (represented by the small *d*). The Akkadian is clear concerning the identification

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<sup>42</sup>(Treaties of Esarhaddon – 680 to 669 BC), S. Parpola & K. Watanabe (Ed), (1988), p. 49.  
Douglas M Hamp

of Bethel. Ba-a-a-ti (house) appears in construct with DINGIR.MEŠ (gods) thus signifying *house of gods*. Like every other appearance of a deity in Akkadian, the determinative DINGIR precedes the name. *House of gods*, therefore, with the deity determinative in front of it – is itself a god.<sup>44</sup> In support of the deity marker attached to Bethel and Anath Bethel, the verb, *lim-nu*, appears in the third person plural which means that more than one entity<sup>45</sup> was invoked.

Hypostatization of temples, as seen in Bethel above, was very common in the ANE. McCarter supports this finding and brings further evidence for it by way of the Aramaic god of *bayt-‘el* (“Bethel”) which was worshiped in Mesopotamia. The god, he says, was the actual personification of the temple (Heb. בית־אל) itself<sup>46</sup> – thus, it was a hypostasis of the temple. Interestingly, Jer. 48:13, states that it was worshiped in Israel too. However, unlike Genesis 31:13, where God is declared to be the God of Bethel – אֱלֹהֵי בֵית־אֵל –, Jer 48:13 is adamantly opposed to the very idea. What a radical change took place in Israelite religion in a few hundred years!<sup>47</sup> What was acceptable religious speculation in the time of the writing of Genesis became anathema just before the Babylonian conquest. Nonetheless, we see that personification of a temple could become an independent entity even in Israel.<sup>48</sup>

A similar hypostasis occurred in the Jewish community located at the Egyptian island of Elephantine circa the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Bethel and Anat, the

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<sup>43</sup> There exists the possibility that the writer actually meant that God is the God Bethel rather than the God of Bethel. Bethel could be an appellation rather than be in construct with *El*.

<sup>44</sup> If Genesis (31:13) is thought to be parallel to its Mesopotamian counterpart, then we have evidence for the interpretation that God is the God “Bethel” and not simply the God of the place e.g. The God of Israel.

<sup>45</sup> Though *Anat* could also be thought of as a hypostasis of Bethel i.e. the sign of YHW (Yahu). This will be explained below.

<sup>46</sup> McCarter, (1987) p. 147.

<sup>47</sup> A digression and a bit of speculation cannot be avoided at this point. Parpola suggests that the attacks of biblical prophets against idolatry and the worship of heavenly bodies and foreign gods were not so much against these other entities per se, but rather to the excessive worship of the hypostases at the cost of God himself. Thus, considering that Jeremiah who was a priest and undoubtedly mindful of the Torah would make such a bitter attack against Bethel (a place of which God claims to be its God), Parpola’s claim certainly has weight. For how else can his denunciation of Bethel be explained in light of Genesis 31:13 where God claims to be its God?

<sup>48</sup> J. Bright, (1965), p. 320, “The parallelism suggests that Bethel is here, as in the Elephantine papyri and elsewhere, a divine epithet. No doubt it was a surrogate for Yahweh current in the official cult of northern Israel as practiced at Bethel.” See also: J. P. Hyatt, (1939), 81-98, and: W. F. Albright, (1942), p. 168-74. Albright explains the occurrences at Elephantine as hypostases “Name of the House of God,” “Sacredness of the House of God,” and “Sign (of the Active Presence) of God” or, “Will of God.”

same pair invoked to throw people to a man-eating lion, were worshiped alongside of YHWH. This Anat is not necessarily an independent goddess, but could rather be a hypostasis of Yahu as demonstrated by B. Porten.

The name Anathyahu shows that the goddess was associated with the Israelite deity...perhaps they are to be related to such names as ‘Astarte Name of Baal’ from Ugarit (UT 127:56) and fifth century (?) Sidon and ‘Tinnit Face (*pn*) of Baal’ in the later Punic inscriptions. In Israelite religion, the ‘name’ and ‘face’ of the Lord were but terms indicating His presence, comparable to *kabod*... A goddess who is the ‘name’ or ‘face’ of Baal may have reflected some attribute or manifestation of that deity.<sup>49</sup>

That is to say that “Anat” could in fact be a word used to describe the presence of the god *analogous* (though not parallel) to the placement of the DINGIR symbol in Akkadian divine names as seen above<sup>50</sup> – *anat* in front of an object or symbol signified a hypostasis.

Likewise, though the Jews were living in a foreign country, they were still worshippers of the Israelite God YHWH. And though they called Him by a different name – Yahu,<sup>51</sup> the evidence shows that they were worshiping Him and yet at the same time worshiping another entity – Bethel, which, as noted, was hypostatization of the temple (בית אל) McCarter suggests that Bethel is more precisely a surrogate for YHWH and the other gods worshiped there were not foreign gods being brought into some kind of Jewish pantheon, but rather hypostases of YHWH.<sup>52</sup> He says “ they are abstracts of Yahweh – his sacredness, his cultically available presence, etc. – given substance (hypostasis), personified, and worshiped as semi-independent deities.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, the Jews of Elephantine still maintained their monotheistic beliefs and did not incorporate foreign gods to make a pantheon. Rather, these entities were part of YHW’s (Yahu) essence. Worshiping them was the same as worshiping YHW.

In summary, Bethel has provided us with an example of how a place and/or cultic object could become an entity that was worshiped by people claiming monotheism. For the Jewish residents of Elephantine, Bethel was not a

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<sup>49</sup> B. Porten, (1968), p. 171.

<sup>50</sup> I am not suggesting that DINGIR signifies hypostasis. I am simply saying that Anat is also a marker – in this case signifying hypostasis and not merely a divine name.

<sup>51</sup> There is, however, no connection to the modern day website!

<sup>52</sup> McCarter, (1987), p. 147.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

new god but was an intermediary between themselves and YHW. Bethel could receive praise and worship in the stead of the deity and yet could act independently. Furthermore, the occurrence of Anat found alongside of Bethel and Yahu Anat seems to be a marker indicating the presence of the deity's hypostasis.

### **1.3 Kuntillet 'Ajrud: Ašerat YHWH**

In this section I will deal with the inscriptions of Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Kôm. I am proposing that the enigmatic *YHWH and his ašerah* is better understood as a hypostasis of YHWH rather than a consort goddess. I will argue this based on the inscriptions found there and by way of analysis, will hopefully show that the ancient worshipper was invoking God's hypostasis – that is, the presence of God, rather than a foreign goddess thought to be his wife.

Kuntillet 'Ajrud, was excavated in the seventies by Z. Meshel. The site is located approximately 50 km south of Kadesh-Barnea, near the Darb el-Ghazze, the road leading from the southern Mediterranean coast to Eilat.<sup>54</sup> Meshel and other scholars have proposed that this site may have served as a religious center for ancient traders<sup>55</sup> due to the inscriptions found at the site.

#### **1.3.1 The Inscriptions**

The inscriptions found therein, however, contain a somewhat troublesome message. One of which is “Yahweh Teman and his *ašerah*.”<sup>56</sup> Teman is understood to be located somewhere in Edom.<sup>57</sup> However, what should be done with the phrase, *his ašerah*, that is, YHWH's *ašerah*? If this were the only inscription of its kind then scholars would not, perhaps, make such an ordeal of

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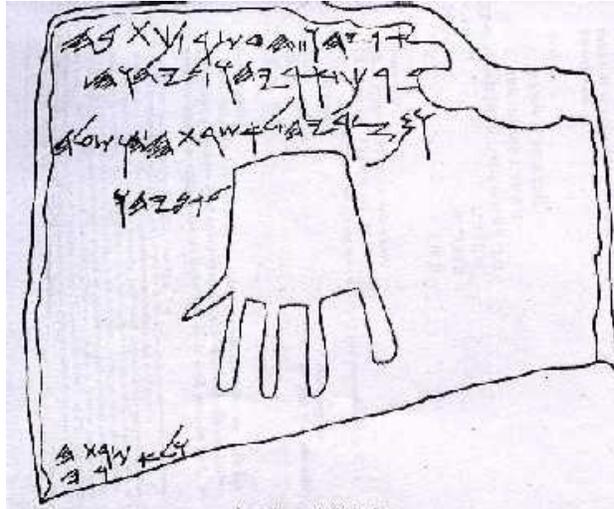
<sup>54</sup> Z. Meshel, (1977), p. 161.

<sup>55</sup> The site has been known to travelers for a long time. Edward Palmer a visitor to the site in 1869, discovered some writing fragments and mistook the *aleph* for an *alpha* and therefore claimed that the site was dated to the Roman era. Meshel, (1992), p. 103.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

the matter. However, this and other inscriptions found at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, were actually discovered after others of the same nature were found approximately eight miles from Hebron in an Arab village known as Khirbet el-Kôm.<sup>58</sup>



#### **An Inscription from Khirbet el Kôm**

Khirbet el-Kôm was the first of the two important discoveries, which gave scholarship a new perspective into the non-temple cultic practices of the first temple era. A salvage excavation of the site was undertaken by W. Dever, who, in the course of his excavations, discovered the tomb from which the inscription had been cut and discovered another two inscriptions written in ancient Hebrew script.<sup>59</sup> The inscriptions, on purely epigraphic criteria, are typically dated to the eighth century BC.<sup>60</sup> I believe that it is also significant that the first of the two sites was located so close to Jerusalem, seat of the official cult, in light of Lemaire's conclusion concerning the inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud. He concludes that the site was settled by the Northern Kingdom. "The mention of 'Samaria'<sup>61</sup> and the way the personal names are written with the ending *-yw*, seem to indicate that these Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscriptions were written by people from the Northern Kingdom of Israel, rather than the southern

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<sup>58</sup> A. Lemaire, (1984), p. 42.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> In light of Naveh's reading, however, *šmrn* could just as easily refer to *our guardian*. Naveh, (1979), p. 28.

kingdom of Judah.”<sup>62</sup> What this suggests, in my opinion, is that both kingdoms, at approximately the same time, were worshiping YHWH in a very similar manner. Meshel also is in accord with the suggestion that priests from the Northern Kingdom came to offer cultic services to travelers.<sup>63</sup> “The site, occupied for only a few years, was likely inhabited by a small group of priests dispatched from the Northern kingdom of Israel with an officer (*sr* ‘*r*) at their head. They were sustained by the various sacrifices and tithes that were sent as provisions primarily from Judah...”<sup>64</sup>

### Kuntillet ‘Ajrud<sup>65</sup>

- A. *L’bdyw bn ‘dnh brk h ‘ly* By Obadyau, son of Adnah. May he be blessed by Yahweh.
- B. *‘mr X ‘mr l-Y wlhyw ‘sh w[l-Z] brkt ‘ikm lyhwh šmrn wl ‘šrth.* X says: Say to Y and Yau‘asah and [to Z]: I bless you by Yahweh, our guardian, and by his *Ašerah*.
- C. *‘mr ‘mryw ‘mr l’dny X brkt lyhwh [šmrn] wl ‘šrth* Amaryau says: Say to my lord X: I bless you by Yahweh [our guardian], and by his *Ašerah*.

### Khirbet el-Kôm

- D. *‘ryhw hsrr ktbh. Brk ‘ryhw lyhwh. Nšry wl ‘rth.* Uriyahu the governor wrote it. May Uriyahu be blessed by Yahweh, my guardian and by his *Ašerah*.

For means of a control factor, I have gathered some texts from Arad and from the Bible in which some one is blessing X by YHWH to show that the above inscriptions are standard blessing formulas with the exception of *ašerah* of

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* p. 44.

<sup>63</sup> It should be pointed out that the cult of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud had interaction with the cult of Jerusalem which would preclude ideas extremely radical in nature. This will be demonstrated by way of the inscriptions themselves. We will see that the language of Kuntillet ‘Ajrud is very similar and often parallel to that of the Bible and to Khirbet el-Kôm which was only a day’s or less journey from Jerusalem.

<sup>64</sup> Meshel, (1992), p. 108.

course. It should be noted that the biblical formula is identical to two of the blessings in the texts above. The others are very similar.

### Arad Ostraca<sup>66</sup>

#### E. Num. 16 (Catalogue No. 16)

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1) <i>'hk. ḥnnyhw. šlh lšl</i>   | Your brother Hananyahu (hereby) sends   |
| 2) <i>m 'lyšb. wlšlm bytk br</i> | greetings to (you) Elyshaib and to your |
| 3) <i>ktk lyhwh</i>              | household. I bless you to YHWH.         |

#### F. Num. 21 (Catalogue No. 19)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1) <i>Bnk. yhwkl. šlh lšlm. Gdlyhw</i> | Your son Yehukal (hereby) sends greetings to |
| <i>[bn]</i>                            | (you) Gedalyahu [son of] Elyair and to your  |
| 2) <i>'ly'r. wlšlm.bytk brtkk (l)</i>  | household. I bless you (to) [YHW]H.          |
| <i>[yhw]</i>                           |  |

#### G. Num. 40 (Catalogue No. 22)

- |                                |                                 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 3) <i>mlkyhw brkt[k lyhw]h</i> | Malkiyahu. I bless you to YHW]H |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|

### Bible

#### Genesis 14:19

And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth:

יְבָרַכְתִּהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּךְ אֲבָרָם  
לְאֵל עֵלְיוֹן קֹנֵה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:

#### I Sam. 15:13

...and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of Jehovah...

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ שְׂאוּל בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה לַיהוָה  
הַקּוֹמֵתִי אֶתְדַבֵּר יְהוָה:

#### Ruth 2:20

<sup>65</sup> Translation: J. Naveh, (1979). Most scholars agree with the above translations: See: Lemaire, (1977), p. 599. Dever, W.G., (1984).

<sup>66</sup> D. Pardee, (1982).

And Naomi said unto her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he of Jehovah,

וַתֹּאמֶר נַעֲמִי לְכַלְתָּהּ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לַיהוָה

Judges 17:2

Blessed be my son of Jehovah.

בְּרוּךְ בְּנִי לַיהוָה:

### 1.3.2 Analysis

What we may observe from the entire corpus of texts is that though one blessing form dominated, there was more than one way to bless someone. What the texts have in common is the lack of the imperfect as a way of man blessing man by God. The imperfect of בָּרַךְ (*brk*) does exist in the Hebrew Bible, but only when God is blessing someone and from man to man. The standard blessing formula in the Bible is to use the qal passive of *brk + l*. We can speculate that the Biblical writers thought it was more pious to use the passive as a jussive “blessed are you” i.e. “may [he] bless you” in that the speaker does not claim agency for himself (“I MYSELF BLESS YOU”) but gives agency and power to bless to God.

The qal passive is found twice in the extra-biblical invocations – once at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and once at Khirbet el-Kôm. This suggests that while the majority of the invocations differ from those in the biblical corpus, the language employed is from the same cultural realm as the biblical writers. The formula in the Bible is: blessed are you X by YHWH. This is the same formula used in two of the inscriptions mentioned above – qal passive participle (*brwk X l Y*). The rest of the inscriptions have the formula: *brtk lyhwh*. These appear to be standard-blessing formulas found in places that had interaction with the cultic center of Jerusalem.

Furthermore, the inscriptions all demonstrate the use of the dative *lamed* whenever someone is invoking the divine for the good of someone else. We may conclude from this that every time one person blesses another *lamed* is used to signify that it is the divine through whom the blessing is performed. In other words, the *lamed* signifies the invocation of a divine power. Therefore, when we

meet this trend in regards to *Ašerah*, we must conclude that “his *ašerah*” refers to something divine. Thirdly, in the inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Kôm, the word *ašerah* ends with the third singular masculine possessive – in SBH, a proper noun never takes a suffix i.e. we would never find an example of “his Rachel” or “his Sarah”.<sup>67</sup> The word *ašerah*, therefore, is necessarily connected to YHWH – *his ašerah*. The simple fact that the Bible does not contain an example of this usage does not preclude its usage elsewhere. However, it does render any interpretation contrary to the biblical paradigm unlikely in that the Bible itself already represents a wide spectrum of the language. Interpreting the word *ašerah* in light of the biblical paradigm, one is forced, therefore, to conclude that *ašerah* does not refer to a goddess, though nor is it merely a thing. It would seem to be an entity associated with YHWH. This will be explained later in greater detail.

Considering that the blessing is apparently the standard formula, the interaction with Jerusalem, and the mention of *ašerah* found in two inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud and one at el-Kôm, we can conclude that this was a widespread cult. People of Israelite origin were invoking God and his *ašerah*. This conclusion is strengthened by the comparison with other invocations. “[May Aššur, father of the gods, and king] of the totality of heaven and earth... May [Mullissu, the great mother, his] beloved wife...”<sup>68</sup> This text demonstrates that when spouse gods were summoned, even for curses, they were mentioned individually. The text does not say: “Aššur and his Mullissu”. Both gods, though a pair, are listed separately. This leads us to conclude that the inscriptions above, in which *ašerah* is invoked with YHWH, are abnormal. The norm is to invoke the gods separately – corroborating that *ašerah* is not a goddess and yet not a simple object.

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. P. Joüon – T. Muraoka, (1996), p 505, proper nouns “cannot be followed by a determinate (not indeterminate) genitive.”

Who or what then was *ašerah*? She/it is more than an object and yet not exactly a goddess. Why should she/it be placed next to YHWH so as to be invoked with YHWH?<sup>69</sup> This latter question is all the more puzzling if Kuntillet ‘Ajrud was indeed a religious site with priests partially sponsored by Jerusalem.

### 1.3.3 Analysis of the Drawing: Is A Picture Worth A Thousand Words?

Found among the shards of pottery was a drawing of three figures, two standing and one seated. The theories related to what these could signify range greatly. The problem, however, is not so much the figures, but that they are situated beneath the inscription which says, “...I bless you by Yahweh, our guardian, and by his *ašerah*.”<sup>70</sup> Some theories, therefore, have suggested that the two standing figures are of YHWH and his consort,<sup>71</sup> others, such as Lemaire, suggest the exact opposite (the seated figure was Bes) “There is no reason to believe that the left figure is Yahweh or that the middle figure is a depiction of Yahweh’s consort, an *ašerah*. In short, there is no figure here that could possibly be Yahweh.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Accession Treaty of Esarhaddon – (680 to 669 BC), S. Parpola & K. Watanabe (Ed), (1988), p. 22.

<sup>69</sup> Dever, (1999), p. 13, suggests that the inscriptions were written by the less educated as mere graffiti who were not concerned about grammatical considerations. While this interpretation would seem to have its merits, Dever seems to assume that the countryside person could in fact write – a conclusion which is possible. In my opinion, however, it is improbable that at least two countryside persons could write the same thing in two different places (that is Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and Khirbet el Kôm). If it were just one of the two places, I might find his proposal acceptable. But as it stands now, it rests too much on speculation than fact. See also T. Binger, (1997), pp.105-106, for a discussion of Dever’s suggestion.

<sup>70</sup> Naveh, (1979), p. 28.

<sup>71</sup> See Dever, (1984), p. 22. Dever sets out to prove that at least one of the figures is *Ašerah* but is vague concerning the precise role of the other. Presumably, it is YHWH according to his argument.

<sup>72</sup> Lemaire, (1984), p. 46.



#### **A Pithos Drawing from Kuntillet Ajrud**

Beck has identified the two standing figures as the Egyptian Bes-like god.<sup>73</sup> Her analysis is, in my opinion, more convincing than Dever's. Nonetheless, I see no reason to state dogmatically the identity of these figures. Beck herself admits that many of the features normally associated with Bes are missing. If the very features required for identifying a figure are missing, then one should not claim (emphatically) that these figures are indeed Bes. Beck states: "The broad body and far arms, the belly splayed over the thighs and the short legs vividly convey the concept of dwarfism. All these details are missing from our Bes figures." Beck then continues her analysis by noting all of the other missing features from the Bes figures. All of that in spite of her claim: "there is no doubt that they represent the god Bes, a collective name for a group of Egyptian dwarf deities."<sup>74</sup> At most we can say that Bes is the name that should be given simply because we don't know who it is. Friedman explains the term: "... 'Bes' is a convenient term for nearly a dozen individual deities, including Aha, Hayet, Meny, and Bes, all of whom have similar if not identical physical features. To avoid confusion, Egyptologists use the term "Bes-image" when the god's specific identity is not known."<sup>75</sup> Bes it may indeed be, but then,

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<sup>73</sup> P. Beck, (1982), p. 47.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Friedman, (1998), p. 209.

who is Bes? If it is ‘merely a convenient term for nearly a dozen deities,’ then which is the true Bes?

Furthermore, we ought to tread carefully when claiming what God looked like. The Bible offers few clues as to what YHWH<sup>76</sup> looked like. Passages like Hosea 8:6 give a precarious picture at best. Moreover, the smaller figure, presumably *ašerah*, looks nothing like the traditional figure<sup>77</sup> even though the *ašerah* goddess and Bes have similar (traditional) roles.<sup>78</sup> Thirdly, there is not necessarily any connection between the figures and the inscription<sup>79</sup>. Quite possibly someone could have come along at a later time – with a different theology and either drawn the picture or written the inscription, which Beck does conclude.

Based mainly on the “stratigraphy” and placement of the inscriptions rather than any analysis of their contents... is that they were drawn by different hands than those that applied the drawings to the pithoi and at different times.<sup>80</sup>

The fact that different colors of ink were used for the drawings and inscriptions would seem to suggest they were not done at the same time, an observation made by Giluleit as well.

...הכתובת כתובה בדיו כהה יותר מזו שצוירו בה הדמויות והיא מכסה חלק מן הצויר, כך שיתכן לטעון שהיא נוספה על הכד לאחר שהדמויות היו מצורות עליו, ורק במקרה היא נמצאת מעל צויר זה ולא אחר.<sup>81</sup>

If the figures are not necessarily YHWH and *ašerah* nor are they Bes for any certain degree, we may therefore conclude, in light of the above discussion,

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<sup>76</sup> McCarter, (1987), p. 147, suggests that the two figures are probably YHWH and his consort. A picture of YHWH he presumably derives from the biblical reference to Hos. 8:6 “young bull of Samaria.”

<sup>77</sup> Mazar, (1990), pp. 501-502.

<sup>78</sup> “The gods represented by the Bes-image seem to have been guardians of infants and new mothers... it [Bes] is almost always found in scenes or on objects relating to fertility, sexual attraction, and the protection of infants and new mothers during the perilous hours after birth.” Freidman, (1998), p. 210.

<sup>79</sup> “...making a connection between one or more of the drawings and the inscription is precarious. Such a connection may not, in fact, have existed. Little can be said with assurance about the drawings beneath the inscriptions, and so they will not be used to help determine the translation of 'šrth.” Maier, (1986), pp.170-171.

<sup>80</sup> Beck, (1982), p. 47.

<sup>81</sup> M. Giluleit, (1979) – see Hebrew Bibliography.

that an interpretation of the inscriptions may be conducted without further consideration for the drawings. The same inscription, in fact, appears in another form at Kuntillet 'Ajrud without a drawing as it does in el-Kôm also without the drawing. I would suggest that the drawing and inscription are not related to one another. Not only is the ink used for both of different color, as pointed out by Gilulel, but also the inscription is overlapping the drawing in such a way as to suggest that the words and the drawing are unrelated. In any event, any conclusions formulated from the evidence are tentative at best. Therefore, let us consider what the writer meant by the term *ašerah*.

#### 1.3.4 *Ašerah*: Its Meaning

Lemaire suggests that the term, in concordance with the biblical evidence, is to be understood as a sacred tree from the Ancient Near East or perhaps a grove of trees.<sup>82</sup> He is certainly correct that the depiction of *ašerah* in the Bible is some sort of wooden object. That of a pole or sacred grove is in accord with the evidence. However, why would any one invoke a tree alongside of YHWH, unless that person truly believed that the tree were either alive or was in fact a hypostasis of a god or perhaps YHWH himself? If we adopt the theory of hypostasis as I suggest, many of the unresolved questions simply fade away.

The meaning of *aširtu* in Akkadian, is most often 1) *sanctuary*, 2) *small room in a private house*.<sup>83</sup> Though the Bible does not divulge its precise character, it shows that the *ašerah* itself was not the shrine or sanctuary, but was rather a cultic object that constituted a part of the shrine.<sup>84</sup> This is instructive to see that the when approaching this word in its Israelite context, it should not be interpreted exactly as in Akkadian texts. The semantic range shares similarities, but the Northwest Semitic usage would seem to have a tighter nuance. *Ašerah* in

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<sup>82</sup> Lemaire (1984), p. 48.

<sup>83</sup>The word also has the following meanings though with less frequency: *offering or pious gift to the gods; advice, instruction*

<sup>84</sup> McCarter, (1987), p. 145.



purpose of a hypostasis is to address the very real felt need of having a God who was truly present for the worshipper.<sup>90</sup> When the etymology of the word *ašerah* is considered, the case would seem to be clear.

The basic root **اثر** (*ʿatar*) in Arabic carries the meaning *transmit, pass along, report, relate – (something based on the authority of) leave a trace and influence, affect, vestige, sign, mark, impression, action*.<sup>91</sup> These definitions of the root help make it easier to understand how YHWH can have an *ašerah*. That is, *ašerah* signifies the “sign “ or “mark” of the divine. It is not another god being worshiped alongside of YHWH, but his very presence which is invoked with him. *Ašerah* is the ‘trace’ of YHWH which is locally available to the worshipper. The transcendent God of heaven can be accessed locally.

### 1.3.5 Summary and Conclusion to Kuntillet ‘Ajrud

Our study of the texts from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and Khirbet el-Kôm has demonstrated several issues. First of all, we have seen how the blessing formula is made in the name of a god. The above inscriptions were not written at some far off place with a different dialect. The language of the inscriptions is parallel to that found in other sites such as Arad and to the Bible itself. Secondly, the blessing was made with the invocation of YHWH similar to invocations found in

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the rabbinic understanding of Exod. 22:19b (‘save for the Lord alone’). It answers that the meaning is simply ‘to Yah we give thanks and to you, O altar, we give praise!’ (BT *Suk.* 45b). ...the address itself shows that people who were unquestionably monotheistic did not hesitate to address YHWH and a personified cult object in a way which seems to give comparable status to each. This is similar to what is done in the blessings from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, according to the view that the *asherah* a personified cult object and not a goddess.” J. Tigay, (1986).

<sup>90</sup> *Ašerah*, and hypostases in general, acted as intermediaries between man and God. The most holy God can not descend into the world of the unclean but his hypostasis can (A theology derived from Ezekiel). It is both God and yet detached from God. The hypostasis allows God to remain in heaven while it sojourns in the realm of the unholy. <sup>90</sup> Isaiah 24:23 offers a detailed picture of how YHWH can be present in the land, while still remaining enthroned in his holy abode in heaven. It is YHWH’s *kabod*, his hypostasis, whose domain is the unsanctified regions of the earth, and mediates between the subjects and YHWH.

<sup>91</sup> McCarter, (1987), p. 149. “Therefore, just as ‘*anat yahû*, means ‘the sign [of the active presence] of Yahu,’ so ‘*ašerat yahweh* means ‘the Trace [i.e., visible token] of Yahweh,’ that is, ‘the Sign/Mark of Yahweh’ or perhaps even ‘the Effective/Active Presence of Yahweh.’”

the Bible. Like the biblical examples, the inscriptions use the same formula of *brk* (whether it be in the qal passive or perfect) + X l (by) Y (deity). In three of the inscriptions the word *ašerah* was included as part of the blessing. The use of the suffix, in light of its biblical usage, strongly suggests that *ašerah* does not refer to the Canaanite goddess. Nowhere in either the Bible or ANE texts is there an example of “god x and his goddess Y (with the possessive suffix)”. Rather *ašerah* refers to a cultic object which encapsulated the cultically available presence of YHWH.

Moreover, understanding *ašerah* as a hypostasis<sup>92</sup> of the deity helps one understand the process which took place in the second temple period. Hypostasis is a deep-rooted development in Israelite thought that will later emerge in the hypostasis of wisdom and ideas about the messiah...<sup>93</sup> Seeing *ašerah* in this light, I would maintain, solves many of the difficulties of interpretation. *Ašerah* is not necessarily connected with the figure in the drawing and furthermore, need not be associated with the Canaanite goddess of the same name. *Ašerah* is the cultically available presence of God.

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<sup>92</sup> “In discussing the inscriptions from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, A. Meshel and others have held that in the blessings ‘by YHWH and Samaria/Teman and His *ašerah*,’ the term *ašerah* refers to the cultic object of that name and not to the goddess *Ašerah*. The plausibility of this interpretation is, I believe, enhanced by a practice of the late Second Temple times in which YHWH and a personified cult object were addressed in the same breath. J. Tigay, (1986), p. 11.

<sup>93</sup> Would he be merely human or the heavenly son of man? In accordance with tradition and the paradoxical role of the Son of Man in the Pseudepigrapha, *The Catholic Bible Quarterly* 45, 1983 pp. 58-59 provides us with the following - understanding. “The man-like one represents the saints in the kingdom, as the interpretation emphasizes, but inasmuch as the sovereignty over the world is that of God, exercised through the ‘man’, he is also the representative of God. The dual role of the ‘man’ accords with the messianic traditions of the OT.”

## **2 Hypostasis in Biblical Literature**

Until now, the phenomenon of hypostasis has been studied in the realm of the ANE which included Israelite extra-biblical texts. Having seen that hypostasis was a real occurrence in the ancient world, one should expect to find passages in the Bible in other than the proposed Proverbs 8. There are subsequently several other examples in First Temple literature. The Spirit (רוח) of YHWH, word (שם), and the glory (כבוד) of God are all salient examples demonstrating how God's attributes could be turned into hypostases. Again, we should be reminded that the attributes of a god or goddess were frequently hypostatized. "Name" and "face", were terms which indicated God's presence in the world.<sup>94</sup>

We have seen that the phenomenon was wide spread in the ANE and was also native to Israelite religion in the form of *ašerah*. What writers were saying about God in the Second Temple period was not just due to Hellenistic influence, but was a continuation of hypostatic thought which had existed for centuries and perhaps even longer.

### **2.1 *Ruah* YHWH**

Isaiah 63:10, describes the people as rebelling not against God, per se, but against his holy spirit, and as a result of that God fought against them. This is more than a mere circumlocution for God. The author does not avoid mentioning God at work like the writers of the Targumim, who "often avoid literal translation of such phrases as "God said," or God spoke"; they choose instead to use periphrases involving such words as *dibbûr*, *memra*, "speaking," or "the word."<sup>95</sup> The writer here, however, is comfortable saying that God, and not a

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<sup>94</sup> B. Porten, (1968).

<sup>95</sup> The translation runs "Speaking said..." or "the word spoke..." (H. Ringgren, (1966). P. 308.) "The word, as it were, becomes semi-autonomous, interposing between God and man, and serving as a channel used by God to communicate his will to man. The Old Testament itself

divine intermediary fought against the people. However, the people are said to have rebelled against his spirit. This is not the first time that the spirit of God appears in the Bible.

The spirit was thought to be the agent by which God performed many of his acts among men. The "...spirit of God is the concrete representation of his power and activity. The spirit of God is God's numinous action in specific situations."<sup>96</sup> In other words, the spirit is quite often, though not always, thought of as a hypostasis of God.<sup>97</sup> It is the part that is sent out by God to work among mankind. At times the spirit is portrayed as identical to God 'Where could I go to escape from your spirit?' (אָנָה אֵלֶיךָ מִרוּחְךָ) (Ps. 139:7). The writer is asking where he can go to escape from God himself. Likewise, in the latter part of the verse "Where could I flee from your presence" (Jerusalem Bible) (וְאֵנָה מִפְּנֵי אֲבָרְחָ:) the author equates *ruah* with *panim* (face). This is very illuminating in that *šn ba ʿl*, (name of Baal) found in the Ugaritic text above, is one of the epithets of *Ašerah*. Thus, the Psalmist is suggesting that there is nowhere he can go to flee from the hypostasis of God. As pointed out by Ringgren, verbs used concerning the spirit shed light on the spirit's role. The spirit "clothes" Gideon (Judg. 6:34; Heb. *labeša*, which in the Jerusalem Bible is translated as came upon)...<sup>98</sup>

In later works, God promises to send his spirit to dwell among the people (Hag. 2:5). Furthermore, the role of the spirit is very much parallel to that of Wisdom in Proverbs 8, which in later works become almost identical;<sup>99</sup> the two

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contains the roots of this idea; there the word (*dabar*) can occasionally appear as a semi-autonomous entity." Ringgren, (1947), p. 307.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p. 93.

<sup>97</sup> J. B. Bauer (1981) p. 871, suggests that "the *ruah* is a life giving entity."

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. See also Encyclopaedia of the Bible, p. 628. "...the Spirit is equated with the 'arm' of the Lord, and represents the active presence of God among his people... The Spirit is 'holy,' as being the active mode of the operation on earth of the transcendent God, and is virtually identified with the being of God himself. The Spirit is personally conceived – no mere power or influence, but the object of a possible personal relationship."

<sup>99</sup> "This wisdom...associated in the later literature with the word of God, the Spirit of God, and the Law, is represented in Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon as something more than an impersonal divine attribute. It is a distinct hypostasis or divine being, created by and dependent on God but possessing an existence of its own: an associate of God in his divine work of the creation and maintenance of the world, and sent by him to dwell among men, and especially in Israel, to guide and instruct them and to confer God's gifts on them." Whybray, (1965), p. 11.

concepts were actually strongly intertwined leaving the reader confident concerning their identities: God and Wisdom were one. The hypostasis and God were God. Charlesworth observes this occurrence in the passage “unless you have given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high?” (*Wisdom of Solomon* 9:17) He concludes that in 9:17 the author “plainly makes Wisdom equivalent to the Holy Spirit.”<sup>100</sup> The author understood Wisdom and the Holy Spirit to be one and as we shall see, believed Wisdom to be equal God.

## 2.2 *Kabod YHWH*

The other salient example of hypostasis in the Bible is that of God’s glory. According to A. J. Everson, glory “...is not simply intended as an attribute or descriptive word about God; rather, the word *kabod* describes an observable phenomenon, something that is actually seen by people.”<sup>101</sup> In I Samuel 4:20, God’s glory is said to go into exile. Like the spirit, which could be sinned against, the glory can also suffer injury – in this case a physical displacement.

Then she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured." (I Sam. 4:21-22)

וַתִּקְרָא לְנֶעֱר אֵי-כְבוֹד לְאֹמֶר  
גִּלְיָה כְבוֹד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל  
אֶל-הַלְקַח אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים  
וְאֶל-חַמְיָהּ וְאִישָׁהּ:  
וַתֹּאמֶר גִּלְיָה כְבוֹד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל  
כִּי נִלְקַח אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים:

The tradition underlying this text understood the glory of the Lord to be synonymous with the Ark where God’s *presence* dwelt.<sup>102</sup> The text makes it clear that both the glory and the Ark were taken away. The name, however, also adds some further information regarding the strong lament over the exiled Ark. Contrary to the widely held tradition that the name means ‘Inglorious’,<sup>103</sup> in which the particle אֵי was understood as *there is no glory*, the name is most

<sup>100</sup> Charlesworth, (1985). See also *Encyclopaedia of the Bible* P. 628 for a discussion of identification of the Spirit and Wisdom.

<sup>101</sup> A. Joseph Everson, (1979), p. 165.

<sup>102</sup> So the people went to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of YHWH of hosts, who dwells *between* the cherubim.” I Sam. 4:4. (Emphasis mine). See also Numbers 7:89. Ps. 80:1 etc.

similar semantically to its Ugaritic equivalent *'iy*. McCarter has demonstrated that the word is best understood in the sense of 'where is?' or 'alas!',<sup>104</sup> a meaning also found in SBH (𐎗𐎍) 'î-'alas!' (see also Eccles. 4:10; 10:16). He also makes note of the term *'ôy* 'woe!' found in the LXX. He concludes from this that the "name means, 'Where is (the) Glory?' or 'Alas (for the) Glory!' It belongs to a distinctive group of names referring to lamentation for an absent deity... the popular etymology of 'Ichabod' given in the present passage, therefore, stands close to the original meaning of such a name, which should have had something to do with mourning for the departed 'Glory' of YHWH. The latter is to be understood as a technical designation for "the refulgent and radiant aureole which surrounds the deity in his manifestations or theophanies."<sup>105</sup> The writer, therefore, *must* have either believed that none other than God himself was taken into exile or that somehow God's presence (i.e. his hypostasis) could suffer such shame while YHWH remained enthroned in heaven.

The books of Ezekiel and Zechariah<sup>106</sup> also contain references to the glory of YHWH. In both books, the glory is an entity capable of acting either on God's behalf or independently of him.<sup>107</sup> In Ezekiel 1, the prophet is confronted with a very awesome vision. An explication shall not be attempted here; suffice it to say that he describes the movement of the four creatures as subservient to the □□□□ (Eze. 1:12), the center of the vehicle, which is later called the glory of the Lord (Eze. 1:28). Throughout his vision he is in relation not to God *per se*, but rather his Glory.

However, Glory was not an appellation for God, but was a hypostatized attribute which could roam in the unholy parts of the earth. In other words, God could not leave his throne since it was simply impossible that the King of the

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<sup>103</sup> McCarter, P. K., (1980), I Sam 4:21.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> In Zechariah glory was an agent which could delegate a prophet to go - "Glory sent me." (Zech. 2:12). Meyers and Meyers (1987), p. 165 indicate that □□□□ "represents divine presence, the Glory of Yahweh which manifests itself to the prophet and stimulated prophetic activity." Therefore, if the Glory could actually command someone to go to the nations, as it were, then it must be an entity. We should not make the mistake of passing off the glory as a mere appellative for God just because in one passage the author says "Glory sent me." (Zech. 2:12) and in another it is God who speaks.

<sup>107</sup> This phenomenon is especially apparent in later texts. "I have not sinned before God and his glory. "... and the spirit of Almighty God..." 4<sup>th</sup> Ezra 16:54 trans. Charlesworth, 559.

Universe could suffer injury<sup>108</sup>. Therefore, God's hypostasis – both thought to be God and yet independent of him, had to bridge the gap. Consequently, we later see in chapter 10, that the glory, which dwelt between the cherubim, departed from the Temple. There should be now no mistake that the Glory referred to God. The same language is employed in the scene where the ark is captured by the Philistines. And consequently, אֵי-כְבוֹד where is the glory? God's hypostasis was taken into exile.

### **2.3 Summary To Biblical Hypostasis**

From the examples given (though more examples could be adduced) we may determine that the attributes were hypostases for several reasons. First, Glory and Spirit were both regarded as more than abstracts. They could move, act, feel, dwell, and even be taken forcefully into exile. Secondly, they offered the worshipper a point of contact to the transcendent. God was thought to be accessible through each of the agents and *his* power was manifest through them though God himself was not present and not accessible.

Therefore, our conclusion of the examples of biblical hypostases is that the biblical writers understood there to have been an intermediary between God and man. Hypostasis was not a phenomenon reserved for the pagan nations, or writings which were never included in the Bible. What is important to remember about the Bible in comparison to hypostases outside of its pages, is that the hypostases never take God's place. They act for God, are addressed by people, and can suffer grief. They are in all senses equated to God. However, we never see where the worship of the hypostasis supercedes the worship of YHWH. Monotheism never becomes polytheism in the Bible. The worship of the hypostasis did not result in forgetting YHWH, the originator of the hypostasis.

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<sup>108</sup> see J. Levenson, *Zion Theology* (1992).  
Douglas M Hamp

### 3 HYPOSTASIS IN THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD

We now return to where the problem became the most apparent: the Second Temple Period. This period was full of speculation about the coming one, the anointed of God, and the coming of God himself into the arena of mankind. The new age would be free of Israel's enemies and God would reign. Here the main objective is to examine how monotheists, as seen in the text of the Apocalypse of Zephaniah, could believe that God could be worshiped via proxy. That is to say, how could an entity, which seemed to be created, be allowed to receive worship, honor and praise like God?

Towards the end of the Second Temple period, vivid examples of worship ascribed to some type of intermediary between God and man can be observed. The instances of hypostasis are not found only in one type of literature. Rather, they are in various texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls,<sup>109</sup> and in books of the New Testament. The Targumim, the Aramaic translations of the Bible, also have examples of hypostasis. And finally, rabbinic literature<sup>110</sup> lists several occurrences.

Like the texts studied already, in which another was praised alongside of God, so too, in this period, the worshippers did not abandon their fidelity to the God of Israel nor did they consider the accompanying entities to be new gods. Rather, they were considered hypostases of God. In order to gain a better understanding of just how widespread the belief in hypostasis was, a survey shall be conducted in this section dealing with several examples from each sub-category briefly rather than exploring each one in depth. As will be demonstrated, hypostasis was present in many different genres of literature and thus existed in many circles of worshippers. Like the phenomenon in the First

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<sup>109</sup> See: R. Eisenman & M. Wise, (1992).

<sup>110</sup> Midrash haggadol, specifically deals with the problem of how to understand the various manifestations of God without creating new gods. Here the Glory, like in Ezekiel and Zechariah, and the Shekinah (שכינה), that is the *presence* or *dwelling* of God, have nearly become independent of God. "R Eliezer said: 'He who translates a verse (from the bible) literally is a liar. He who adds to it, commits a blasphemy... if he translated: 'And they saw the God of Israel', he spoke an untruth; for the Holy One...sees but is not seen. But if he translated: 'And they saw the glory of the Shekinah of the God of Israel' he commits blasphemy; for he makes three, viz. Glory, Shekinah and God.'"

Temple Period, cultic objects and God's attributes were invoked alongside God and served as a substitute God.

### **3.1 Ben Sira**

Ben Sira chapter 24, written circa the early second century BC,<sup>111</sup> is perhaps the first text to equate Wisdom with Torah.<sup>112</sup> It is a text which seems to have influenced Baruch,<sup>113</sup> discussed in more detail below. In the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter, Wisdom is said to praise herself and to take glory in the midst of her people and in the midst of the Most High. "Wisdom will praise herself and will glory in the midst of her people. In the assemble of the Most High she will open her mouth, and in the presence of his host she will glory." (24:1-2). The self-praise of Wisdom is a very striking motif in the text, and as we shall see, is pregnant in Proverbs 8. Also, like Proverbs 8, Wisdom speaks in the first person. She is said to have had an active role in the creation of the world. She is said to have been enthroned ("I dwelt in high places, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud.") and the one who travels the heavens "Alone I have made the circuit of the vault of heaven." (24:4-5a). This is the speech of hypostasis in that Wisdom is speaking in the first person like the speech of Ištar (as seen below in 4.1), and claims to have roles which belong to God. She alone travels the heavens and is enthroned. Likewise, she is praised, receives glory and even has her own people.

### **3.2 Baruch**

The poem of Baruch, written in Palestine, circa the late second or the early first century BC,<sup>114</sup> is also a pertinent text for our study. In this text, Wisdom is identified with the Torah and is compared to Job 28 in which Wisdom is a mystery unsearchable.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Harrelson, W., (1992), p. 159.

<sup>112</sup> R. E. Murphy, (1990), p. 76.

<sup>113</sup> See D. G. Burke, (1982).

<sup>114</sup> W. Harrelson, (1992), p. 159.

<sup>115</sup> "Who has found her place? And who has entered her storehouses?...Who has gone up into the heaven, and taken her, and brought her down from the clouds?...No one knows the way to her, or is concerned about the path to her." Baruch 3:15,29,31 – translation G. W. E. Nickelsburg & M. E. Stone, (1983). See discussion of Amon for parallels of being "hidden".

He found out the entire way of Wisdom,  
Gave it to his servant Jacob,  
To Israel, his beloved one.  
And then she appeared on earth,  
And became like a mortal one.  
(Baruch 3:37-38)

This text plainly exemplifies the hypostatic tendency of the Second Temple Period. It speaks of an attribute of God that became an entity – like a human being! This attribute, which according to Harrelson,<sup>116</sup> is based on Proverbs 8, is apparently some type of heavenly being. It is Wisdom, and not God, as is so often expressed in the Bible<sup>117</sup>, who is to come and dwell on the earth. Thus, we see that the author understood God's attribute as the agent by which God would come. Furthermore, this agent would be manifest in the form of a mortal. Harrelson's explanation of Baruch substantiates the previous conclusion.

If we take the Ethiopic reading at face value, it goes far toward portraying Wisdom as a heavenly being. The expression *wa-kona kama sab* 'can only be translated, 'and became like a human being', or... 'like a mortal one'. Wisdom is not only a personified being, she is one whom the deity has come to know completely, and who has appeared as a mortal among mortals. Many interpreters have understood the text to be a modification by Christian editors, thereby causing the text to support the Incarnation. But it is certainly not a Christian incarnation text in its Ethiopic reading, for the portrayal is of a divine or semi-divine being who, intimately known by the deity, now has her place within the human community as well."<sup>118</sup>

Thus, hypostasis in the eyes of Baruch's author, was to be realized in a concrete way. The manifestation would be even more striking than what we saw in the Evil Eye; the hypostasis could definitely act and perform in the physical world, though possibly invisible. The view of Baruch's author is that the hypostasis of God, in this case Wisdom, would be made manifest in such a way that God would dwell with man and man would see it like a mortal.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Harrelson, (1992).

<sup>117</sup> See. Ex. 28:5; 29:45,46; Num 35:34; Eze. 43:7,9; Zech. 2:10,11.

<sup>118</sup> Harrelson, (1992), p.159.

<sup>119</sup> See the first chapter of *The Gospel of John* for parallels.

### 3.3 The Wisdom Of Solomon And I Enoch

The Wisdom of Solomon, written most likely in the time of Pompey (63-48 BC),<sup>120</sup> is presumably based on the text and more importantly the dubious □□□□, of Proverbs 8:30.<sup>121</sup> The author speaks of Wisdom as the inventor of all, thus assigning the work of creation with her in contrast to God. "For she that is the artificer of all things taught me, even wisdom." (*Wisdom of Solomon*, 7:21) The author continues by listing the various attributes of Wisdom, which seem to point to a hypostatization of her.

For there is in her spirit quick of understanding, holy, Alone in kind, manifold... All-powerful, all-surveying, And penetrating through all spirits... For she is a breath of the power of God, And a clear effluence of the glory of the Almighty... for she is the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness. And she, though but one, hath power to do all things... (*Wisdom of Solomon* 7:22,25-27a)

ἔστιν γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ πνεῦμα νοεροῦν ἅγιον μονογενεῖς πολυμερές... λεπτόν εὐκίνητον τρανὸν ἀμόλυτον σαφές ἀπήμαντον φιλάγαθον ὁξὺ... ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστιν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμεως καὶ ἀπόρροια τῆς τοῦ παντοκράτορος δόξης γὰρ ἐστὶν φωτὸς αἰδίου καὶ Ἔσοπτρον ἀκηλίδωτον τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνεργείας καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ μία δὲ οὐσα πάντα δύναται καὶ Μένουσα..

The author of the Wisdom of Solomon, basing much of his work on Proverbs 8, has taken a stand on the enigmatic word *amon*. He understood the word to have the meaning of master craftsman or as it is in LXX, *arranging all things*. There is no hint of the alternative meaning “nursling” (see discussion below) for the word *amon*. Wisdom was understood to be a hypostasis.

The language used here describes an entity that is nothing short of divine and equal to God. First, the author describes how she is equal to God. She is all powerful, all knowing, alone in kind. The author here is making giant claims about Wisdom. She, like YHWH, is omniscient and omnipotent. To be omnipotent is to claim equality with God. She is also alone in kind. So we can see, that the author did not intend to create another god, but understood Wisdom to be God. She was an aspect of God which was self-existent.

Next the author demonstrated how Wisdom was still connected to God. She was semi-independent in that she was the breath of his power, the effluence

<sup>120</sup> L.H. Schiffman, (1987), p.237.

<sup>121</sup> See Nickelsburg and Stone, (1983).

of his glory and the mirror of his power. Thus, the author showed that though Wisdom was in her own right omniscient and omnipotent, there was nonetheless a nexus between God and Wisdom.

Charles notes that according to the author of the *Wisdom of Solomon*, just as “the serpent was not really a serpent but the devil, the cloud was not really a cloud but the form which Wisdom assumed.”<sup>122</sup> This is a salient example of Wisdom taking on a physical and visible form. Thus in the Second Temple period, Wisdom, God’s hypostasis, was regarded to have had an explicit role in the days of the Exodus; for the Second Temple person it was the Wisdom of God which worked in the world and not God directly.

Proceeding to chapter nine of *The Wisdom of Solomon*, we see Wisdom seated on the throne of God, (reserved for God), and, in the similitudes (Enoch), reserved for the Son of Man. The author, via prayer, gives a picture of the role which Wisdom has.

O God... and Lord of mercy,  
Who by your word have made all things,  
And in your wisdom fitted man...  
Grant me Wisdom, consort to your throne  
(*Wisdom of Solomon*, 9:1,2,4)<sup>123</sup>

In this text the author shows how word (λόγος) and wisdom are synonymous and how wisdom sits by God on his throne. Thus, here she shares in the glory of sitting on God’s throne and above it is she who has power to do all things. All the divine qualities (e.g. omniscience, omnipotence, holiness, etc.) are hers and yet she is the effluence of God’s glory.

Likewise, in the Similitudes (Enoch), a heavenly figure is ascribed qualities equal to God, and like in *Wisdom*, is seated on the seat of glory, a place reserved for the divine. Thus the elect one is a heavenly-divine figure but also the one who will come to dwell among the people. Interestingly, in Zechariah 2:10-11 (in the English version), it is none other than God himself who would come to dwell among the people. This text illustrates how God’s representative, the one who is imbued with his qualities and characteristics, the one who shares in his glory, will come to fulfill God’s promise to Israel. And so, God would come and live among the people albeit via his hypostasis.

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<sup>122</sup> Charles, R.H. *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, (1913), p. 547.

<sup>123</sup> Jerusalem Bible London, (1966).

On that day, my Elect One shall sit on the seat of glory  
and make a selection of their deeds...  
On that day, I shall cause my Elect One to dwell among them...  
I Enoch 45: 3-4

In both texts, a heavenly figure is with God on his throne and shares in his divine power. In the Wisdom of Solomon, it is God's attribute, Wisdom that is the hypostasis. In I Enoch, the Elect One, some prehistoric figure, acts as the hypostasis. I propose that the Elect One is a hypostasis because it is the one by which God will act in the world. The Elect One will make a selection of their deeds. He will be the staff upon which the righteous lean (I Enoch 48:4). And most importantly, he, like God will receive praise and worship. "All those who dwell upon the earth shall fall and worship before him." (I Enoch 48:5).<sup>124</sup>

### **3.4 Summary and Conclusion**

Having completed our survey of Second Temple literature, we should now be able to conclude that there was indeed a continuum of hypostatic thought which ran from some of the earliest times of Israelite religion through the Second Temple period. The claim made by many scholars that foreign influence, during both the Old Kingdom and the Second Temple period, was the cause of the appearance of godlike creatures can now be strongly questioned. In light of the evidence, we can securely put forth the claim that what appears to be the influence of a pagan religion creeping into Israelite/Jewish religion is actually a part of the underlying thought process which existed for many centuries.

This is not to suggest, as mentioned before, that Israel lived in a vacuum. Foreign influence without doubt had a pull on the mind of the ancient writer. Nonetheless, instances in which an entity is sharing in God's roles and his glory, need not be seen in the light of polytheism for hypostasis in Israel never became

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<sup>124</sup> The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs offers a parallel to I Enoch. Like Enoch, the Testament speaks of a man, a descendent of Abraham who shall be worshiped like God. "Levi, your posterity shall be divided into three offices as a sign of the glory of the *Lord who is coming*...[emphasis mine] His presence is beloved, as a prophet of the Most High, a descendant of Abraham our father. (8:1-15) ...And his star shall rise in heaven like a king... And he shall be *extolled* by the whole-inhabited world. This one will shine forth like the sun in the earth, he shall take away all darkness from under heaven, and there shall be peace in all the earth." Again, the figure receives praise and has powers like God.

a matter of incorporating new gods and consequently introducing a pantheon of gods into its cultic practice.<sup>125</sup> The hypostasis, though understood as a semi-independent entity, was not allowed to become greater than the original God, which Parpola suggests, was the greater part of the prophets' complaint. "The bitter attacks of biblical prophets against idolatry and the worship of heavenly bodies and foreign gods have in my opinion to be seen in this light – as attacks against the nations' excessive worship of divine powers at the cost of God himself, which was seen as the root cause of her demise, not as attacks against the contemporary concept of God as such which did not differ essentially from its Assyrian counterpart."<sup>126</sup> Israelite religion was able to maintain its standing on monotheism while at the same time, believe that an entity, equal to God, independent of Him and yet connected to Him, was the way by which one addressed Him.

Hypostasis is a phenomenon which existed in Israel and beyond its borders. It was a means by which ancient man had immediate access to a god and was an integral part of ancient man's cultic framework. The notion that an object or attribute could function as an intermediary was very prevalent and widespread, which was also realized in the form of the Evil Eye. In whatever way manifested, it was regarded as an entity, separated from the original deity or person, which could bring pain and pleasure and could itself be pleased or suffer loss. The occurrences in the Bible parallel those found outside its borders. And thus, with these observations and conclusions in mind, we are now ready to ask whether or not Proverbs 8 contains a hypostasis.

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<sup>125</sup> "And even if such hypostases occasionally developed into independent divinities, this was unable to take place within the domain of the genuine religion of Yahweh." H. Ringgren, (1966), p. 307.

<sup>126</sup> S. Parpola, (1997), p. XXVI.

## 4 Proverbs 8 and Wisdom

Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth; while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there: When he set a circle upon the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when the fountains of the deep became strong, when he gave to the sea its bound, that the waters should not transgress his commandment, when he marked out the foundations of the earth; then I was by him, as a master workman; and I was daily *his* delight, rejoicing always before him, rejoicing in his habitable earth; and my delight was with the sons of men.

יְהוָה קָנַנִי רֵאשִׁית דְּרָכָו קָדָם מִפְּעֻלָּיו מֵאֵז:  
 מֵעוֹלָם נִסְכַּתִּי מִרֵאשִׁית מִקְדָּמֵי-אָרֶץ:  
 בְּאֵין-תְּהוֹמוֹת חוֹלַלְתִּי בְּאֵין מַעֲיֵנוֹת נִכְבְּדֵי-מַיִם:  
 בְּטָרָם הָרִים הִטְבְּעוּ לִפְנֵי גִבְעוֹת חוֹלַלְתִּי:  
 עַד-לֹא עָשָׂה אָרֶץ וְחוּצוֹת וְרֵאשִׁית עֲפָרוֹת תְּבַל:  
 בְּהִכְיֵנו שָׁמַיִם שָׁם אָנִי בְּחֻקּוֹ חוּג עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם:  
 בְּאִמְצוֹ שְׁחָקִים מִמְּעַל בְּעֵזוֹ עֵינֹת תְהוֹם:  
 בְּשׁוּמוֹ לַיִם חָקוּ וַמַּיִם לֹא יַעֲבְרוּ-פִיו בְּחֻקּוֹ  
 מוֹסְדֵי אָרֶץ:  
 וְאֶהְיָ אֶצְלוֹ אֲמוֹן וְאֶהְיָ שֹׁעֲשֵׂים יוֹם יוֹם  
 מִשְׁחַקְתָּ לִפְנָיו בְּכָל-עֵת:  
 מִשְׁחַקְתָּ בְּתַבַּל אֶרְצוֹ וְשֹׁעֲשֵׂי אֶת-בְּנֵי אָדָם:

There are several reasons to understand Proverbs 8:22-31 (specifically) as an example of hypostasis and not a mere personification. First of all, Wisdom, an attribute of God, speaks to mankind in ways which are reminiscent of divine speech in other ANE texts. Secondly, Wisdom claims to have been with God during the creation of the world and perhaps to have shared in the act of creation itself.<sup>127</sup> Thirdly, many interpreters of the Second Temple period understood Wisdom as a hypostasis of God, which helped in the creation of the world. (In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, Wisdom is portrayed as sitting next to God's on his throne.)

Wisdom is an attribute of God which is discussed at great length in the Bible. Of the passages in which Wisdom is used in relation to God, some would seem to suggest that the particular author imagined this attribute to be something

that was more than a term describing God. The author(s) ascribed Wisdom a quasi-independent existence. She also had a claim to having participated in the creation. It also claimed to be in close relation to God. When others describe it (Job 28),<sup>128</sup> it is suggested to be something that is unsearchable. Only God himself knows where to find it (Job 28:23). In short, Wisdom, like other attributes of God, such as Glory, Name, and others, is portrayed in ways that make the modern as well as the ancient interpreter ponder: could this in fact be a deliberate attempt on the author's part to convey a deeper meaning? Is the author hoping to communicate to his reader that underlying the idea of monotheism existed the reality of hypostasis?

#### **4.1 The Identity of Wisdom**

That Wisdom, an abstract idea, is speaking in chapters one and nine, is not surprising. The poet often employed such language to strengthen his teaching as demonstrated above. However, chapter 8 goes beyond the other two chapters (Prov. 1,9) in which Wisdom speaks. In chapter 8, Wisdom makes the claim of divinity, not just to follow her teaching, observable by the precise language which she employs.<sup>129</sup> Wisdom does more than call men to righteous living (Prov. 1:22); her use of "I" parallels divine speech found in other ancient texts such as the Self Praise of Ištar in which Ištar, uses "I" thirteen times.<sup>130</sup> "I, Ištar, am the queen of heaven and(?) earth. I am the queen,..."<sup>131</sup> Prov. 8:14 emphasizes the preferences of wisdom in words reminding one of Isa. 11:2 in which the same attributes (wisdom, understanding, advice, power) are ascribed to the Messianic King,<sup>132</sup> and in Job 12:15 the same qualities are ascribed to God himself.

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<sup>127</sup> See below for discussion of *Amon*.

<sup>128</sup> H. H. Rowley, (1978), p. 184, mentions that Wisdom in Job 28 was regarded as a type of hypostasis for the ancient man. See also: L. G. Perdue, (1995), p. 244. Perdue suggests that "the sources for these descriptions of Wisdom are ultimately mythological, for she is personified as a goddess of insight and life in much the fashion of Ma'at or Isis in Egypt."

<sup>129</sup> Lang, (1986), p. 55. See also: J. S. Webster, (1998), 63-79.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. See also: and L. Bostrom (1990) p. 54.

<sup>131</sup> Foster, (1993), p. 74, "The Self Praise of Ištar" (Old Babylonian text dated circa 2000 1500 BC).

<sup>132</sup> Ringgren, (1947), pp. 97-98.

Furthermore, her speech is no longer isolated to the issue of proper living. The focus has become politics and world rank, Lang suggests. "...the king is someone who depends on Wisdom and her favors... Wisdom takes on a much greater role than that of a teacher... she is also a goddess who judges the rulers and dwells in the presence of the creator god."<sup>133</sup> Wisdom is no longer a standard which men ought to live up to. Rather, it is something which speaks about itself in very uncompromising terms.<sup>134</sup> כחֲמַדִּי (to me is strength/power) is language suggesting that Wisdom is much more than just an attribute of God.

Wisdom's speech is parallel to that of divinities in neighboring cultures. "The Words of Ahiqar," a non-Jewish Aramaic text discovered in a Jewish settlement in Egypt (5<sup>th</sup> century BC)<sup>135</sup> describes how Wisdom came from the gods and has an eternal kingdom. The actual poem seems to have been written between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.

From heaven the peoples are favored;  
Wisdom is of the gods.  
Indeed, she is precious to the gods;  
Her kingdom is *et[er]nal*.  
She has been established by Shamayn;  
Yea, the Holy Lord has exalted her.<sup>136</sup>

This text demonstrates how Wisdom was thought to be an entity of divine stature. Furthermore, she is described as having been *established* and not procreated, which is one of the debates surrounding Proverbs 8. Thus, when approaching the Israelite poem in Proverbs 8, one should be keep in mind that Wisdom in other places was thought of as an independent entity.

The true difficulty of the text lies in verses 21-31 – the crux of our study. In this section, Wisdom describes her ancient past thereby creating a resonance of cosmological motifs. In describing what was not,<sup>137</sup> Wisdom tells of the time before creation – the antecedent to time as it were, which has caused some such as Ringgren (1947), to interpret the passage with the understanding that Wisdom

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<sup>133</sup> Lang, (1986).

<sup>134</sup> Ringgren, (1947), supports this thesis "... the personal form of wisdom is indisputable. Wisdom is a mistress inviting people to a feast. It is possible that this feature, too, has a mythological background..."p. 99.

<sup>135</sup> J. H. Charlesworth, (1985), p. 479.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 499.

<sup>137</sup> See: Bickel (1994) for discussion of non-being.

is a hypostasis. Others such as Lang (1986) have interpreted Wisdom as an ancient goddess. Various other suggestions have been made for the passage. Meinhold<sup>138</sup> understood the poem as principally a literary device to encourage students dealing with temptation especially in sexual matters.<sup>139</sup> The views of G. von Rad and V. A. Hurowitz will be discussed in detail below.

#### 4.1.1 Different Views of Wisdom

- G. von Rad

G. von Rad understands Proverbs 8 as a passage in which a personified primal order celebrates its relation to man and God. He suggests that “the world is not dumb... it has a message...[it] proclaims itself before God...”<sup>140</sup> He indicates that it shares all of the characteristics of the divine. He confirms that “in vv. 22-29 the style of a specific Egyptian divine proclamation has clearly been borrowed and that in vv. 30f the Egyptian idea of a deity caressing personified truth (Ma’at)<sup>141</sup> has somehow, though not without internal modifications, found its way into our didactic poem.”<sup>142</sup> His observation regarding the internal modifications would seem correct. That is perhaps without question. Any text that is imported into the Bible was likely to undergo at least some changes. It should also be conceded that Ma’at is not the most comprehensive explication of Wisdom, in spite of the similarities.<sup>143</sup> However, his solution to the pressing question of “an ‘I’, who is certainly not Yahweh, but

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<sup>138</sup> Meinhold, (1991), pp. 44-45.

<sup>139</sup> R. N. Whybray, (1994a), p. 29. For more views consult bibliography.

<sup>140</sup> G. von Rad, (1970), p. 162.

<sup>141</sup> “Order (Ma’at) is the Egyptian concept of the arrangement and relationship that underlies and governs all aspects of existence...It extends from the elements of nature (the world of the gods) into the moral and social behavior of mankind.” J. Allen, (1988), p. 26.

<sup>142</sup> G. von Rad, (1970), p. 153.

<sup>143</sup> Ma’at was thought to be the governing force or deity throughout the world. The individual was important to the cosmic order. Hence the individual, by keeping Ma’at (V. A. Tobin, (1989) p. 7 personally, acted for the good of the cosmos as a whole. Interestingly, we are reminded of Wisdom passing along the streets in Prov. 8, calling men to follow her. She petitions them to seek her and find understanding. ‘By her kings reign...’ Similarly, by upholding Ma’at long life will be granted. “According to later texts, Ma’at is as old as creation but does not predate it. Since creation she has lived among human beings. Having come to them from the gods, she has been entrusted to them, and the human act of presenting Ma’at returns her to the gods.” (Hornung (1992), p. 135.) Moreover, Wisdom is depicted in Proverbs (3:16) as holding long life in her right hand. (For discussion of holding life in the right hand, see: Ringgren, (1947), p. 147. This is identical to that of the Egyptian gods who literally hold the Ankh, the symbol of life in their right hand.

nevertheless summons men to itself,” is perhaps less convincing. He claims that “it has no divine status, nor is it a hypostatized attribute of Yahweh...”<sup>144</sup>

Von Rad’s conclusion regarding its identity is precisely that it is a non-entity. “Whether we render it as ‘primeval order’ or ‘world reason’ or as the ‘meaning’ created in the world by God or as the ‘glory’ reflected back from the world, in every case it is spoken of in the form of a graphic personification.”<sup>145</sup> In other words, the primordial world is being personified in this poem, vis à vis Egyptian ideas, as a purely didactic poem. Wisdom is an abstract notion quite separate from the idea of Ma’at (as a notion and goddess) and from Lang’s position (it is the remnant of an ancient mythological past). Thus, he concludes that Wisdom is the world personified for the sake of pedagogy.

The fact that Proverbs 8 appears in a collection of didactic works indicates that it was used as a teaching tool. However, that does not negate the possibility, in my opinion, that the poem may have been used *prima facie* for teaching yet have been written with hypostasis in mind. In light of the evidence presented so far, I would argue that it is not only possible but also likely. Taking into consideration the long and widespread history of hypostasis in ancient Mesopotamia *and* Israel, the hypostatization of the divine qualities is almost to be expected. Just like in the realm of law where ‘precedence’ reigns, so too, therefore, the hypostases in biblical and extra-biblical texts greatly add to the likeliness that hypostasis can also be found in Proverbs 8.

- V. A. Hurowitz

The most recent conjecture concerning the interpretation of the passage is offered by V. A. Hurowitz.<sup>146</sup> In his article he makes the claim that *nursling* is the *only* contextually valid meaning of נִרְסֵלָה. He concedes, however, that there may have been secondary meanings and wordplays, though the possibilities are only slight in his opinion. He cites many other scholars’ work on this passage and their conclusions. The thrust of his claim is that “when confronting a

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. p. 157.

<sup>146</sup> V. A. Hurowitz, (1999).

polyvalent word the ultimate task is to determine which single meaning best suits that context in which it appears.”<sup>147</sup> While this makes good sense and his proposal is well supported, his claim that all other suggestions are without substance and contrived<sup>148</sup> is rather strong. It should be conceded that the specific context of the passage is what has kept equally good scholars from assessing its ultimate meaning.

Hurowitz also claims that because of the employment of ‘birth’ verbs, וּלְבַרְא, one of the dubious lexemes, must be understood as *create*. He makes this claim based on the context of the passage. His assessment is logical and well founded, however, context cannot be established unless the individual words are well understood. The difficulty with Proverbs 8 is that some of the key words needed for its interpretation are uncertain. Furthermore, scholarship cannot be sure of when the poem was written.<sup>149</sup> If it were a text with regal names and places, perhaps a definitive answer could be derived. However, no one really knows *exactly* where and in what environment the wisdom literature developed. Therefore, claiming that the context demands such and such is difficult to support.



It is commonly accepted by scholars, however, that Israelite Wisdom literature had significant Egyptian influence.<sup>150</sup> Egypt, then, would be an important contextual background for Proverbs 8 and therefore, any interpretation should be examined in light of this.<sup>151</sup> Thus, (to be brought forth) וּלְבַרְא, one of the “birth related verbs” so strongly claimed by Hurowitz as a contextual marker, might be understood with its Egyptian counterpart in mind.<sup>152</sup> In at least one

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid. p. 392.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid. p. 400.

<sup>149</sup> W. F. Albright (1969) p. 13 suggests that the date of Proverbs is probably entirely pre-exilic, “but that much of the Book was handed down orally until the fifth century BC.” He says at or around the time of Solomon is a possible date of origination.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> As will be discussed more fully, I am not proposing that Proverbs 8 is derived from Egyptian mythology. I am, however, suggesting that loanwords and motifs may have been employed and therefore, we should understand how they were used in Egypt.

<sup>152</sup> The idea of *brought forth* is also found in Enuma Elish “When no gods at all had been brought forth...” Tablet I:7 (Foster, 1993, p. 354). The difference is that Amon was not thought to have been born, but emerged from the waters as the creator god, having no equal.

creation text in ancient Egypt, the creator god Amon, emerged from water, which has a semantic correlation to אָמֻן (was brought forth). “Amun, who emerged from the Waters that he might lead mankind...”<sup>153</sup>

Though there may not be any connection between the two texts, the point is that Hurowitz’s claim to have solved the exegetical dilemma based on context does not answer everything. Admittedly, his attraction to the interpretation of nursling is very possible, but it is not proven beyond the shadow of a doubt simply on a contextual basis. For we have seen that the Egyptian creator god was thought to have emerged from waters – an idea akin to “to be brought forth”. And if Egyptian influence played a part in Proverbs 8, then אָמֻן might be a plausible parallel to divine origination.

The meaning of *amon* I suggest below also fits the parallel of the verse, which is important to show how it really works in the context – contrary to Hurowitz’s dogmatic claims. Parallelism is one of the main tools used by the Biblical poet.<sup>154</sup> It is an extremely useful tool in scholarly analysis for determining the meaning of uncertain lexemes. It is also the litmus test for crazy suggestions. And so, we will test my interpretation against the two words that are in parallel to *amon*.

The first word in parallel with *amon* is שְׂשׂוּעִים. Various Bible scholars have suggested it to be indicative of only children. This is not the case, however, in light of its usage in the Bible. The root appears in nine verses. One of which is clearly used in relation to a child (Jer. 31:20). The passage in Isaiah (5:7) refers not to a child but to the men of Israel. Isaiah suggests that “the men of Judah his pleasant (שְׂשׂוּעִי) plant.” Which is to say, that God’s delight is found in those men. The other verses, excluding Proverbs are found in Psalm 119. There the Torah is described as being the poet’s delight. There is no indication of children in any of the verses in Psalm 119:24,77,92,143. The author’s multiple use of the lexeme in Psalm 119 to describe the Torah is actually parallel to Proverbs 8:30-31. When one considers the synthesis of Wisdom and Torah in the Second Temple Period, the observation is even more striking.

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<sup>153</sup> J.P. Allen. *Genesis in Egypt*, Yale, Connecticut, (1988), p. 52

<sup>154</sup> For discussion on the prevalence of Biblical parallelism see: J. L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History*, Yale, (1981).

In light of its usage, therefore, we may conclude that שַׁעֲשָׁעִים is in perfect parallel with וְאֵתֵּיךְ אֶצְלֵי אֱמוּנָה and the suggested interpretation. Wisdom as a hypostasis was next to God – hidden/creator, and like the Torah (also a hypostasis in later literature) was God’s delight. Thus, there is no reason to assume that the word it has any relation to children in this passage.

Likewise, the lexeme מִשְׁחָקָה (to play, laugh, make merry) substantiates the suggested meaning of *amon*. It does not refer exclusively to child’s play any more than שַׁעֲשָׁעִים. In the 37 verses in which it appears, only one (Zech. 8:5) refers to the play of children. Some refer to Samson playing before the Philistines (Judges 16:25,7), David dancing before the ark (II Sam. 6:5), God laughing at the son’s of men (Ps. 2:4) and more. Again, there is no hint that this word needs to be understood as that of children’s play, therefore making Wisdom out to be God’s child. We could claim the opposite based on its usage in Psalms. God, the deity, laughs at men just like Wisdom, a divine hypostasis laughs before God and with the sons of men. Thus מִשְׁחָקָה is also an excellent parallel to the suggested meaning of *amon*.

In summary, we have seen that the identity of Wisdom was more than simply a personification as Von Rad suggests and is not merely the embodiment of a nursling personified as V. A. Hurowitz suggests. In light of the divine speech of Wisdom – parallel to that of Ištar and the parallel to the poem of Aḥiqar in which Wisdom is of heavenly origin, postulating Wisdom to be a hypostasis is very plausible. Searching for the context in which the poem was written is also believed to be insightful and will hopefully shed light on some of the individual lexemes employed thus clarifying Wisdom’s identity.

#### **4.2 In Search of Meaning – Qānāh**

The first term of importance, קָנָה(qānāh), is found in 8:22 (יְהוָה קָנָה רַאשִׁית דְּרַבּוֹ) “The LORD possessed (?) me in the beginning of his way”. This word in Standard Biblical Hebrew means to buy or purchase.

Occasionally it means to acquire, and rarely to create. H. Ringgren gives a review of the various ancient sources regarding this passage.

Most modern scholars render it (בָּרָא) by ‘created’ but others deny that the verb can have this meaning and translate it instead as ‘acquired’ or ‘possessed’. The ancient translations have already understood בָּרָא in two ways. The one group translating it as “acquired’ or possessed”, is represented by Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion and the Vulgate (*possedit*), the other group, preferring the meaning ‘created’ includes the Septuagint, the Peshitta and the Targum (בְּרָא).<sup>155</sup>

In Gen. 14:19, 22 בָּרָא must mean ‘creator’ and in Ps. 139:13 ‘created’ or ‘formed’. In addition to the sparse examples in the Bible, the word is also found in Ugaritic as one of Athirat’s epithets. She, as the consort of El, is called the ‘creator (or begetter) of the gods (*qny ilm*).<sup>156</sup> Thus, there is certainly no denying that בָּרָא could and sometimes should have the meaning “to create.” A point of debate is found in Exodus 15:16 עַד-יַעֲבֹר עִמָּךְ יְהוָה עַד-יַעֲבֹר עִם-זֶה קְנִיָּתְךָ. Should this be translated as *the people that you created*, or *the people that you redeemed*? Ruth 4:4 sheds light on this mystery. In that passage, בָּרָא (redeemed) and קָנָה (got) are juxtaposed thus creating a semantic equivalence.<sup>157</sup> Therefore, YHWH’s actions in Ex. 15:16 would seem to be that of *redeeming*, or *acquiring* his people and not referring to the time of their creation at YHWH’s hand.

The question now at hand is whether or not *Wisdom literature demands* this meaning. When one considers its usage in Proverbs, the Ugaritic usage would seem to become secondary. The actual phrase, to acquire wisdom (בָּרָא חָכְמָה) is used twelve times in the entire corpus of Proverbs. Converse to the obligatory rendering of בָּרָא as creator and created in Gen. 14:19, 22 and Ps. 139:13 respectively, in every other occurrence in Proverbs it *must* be rendered as *acquire*. Proverbs 4:7 illustrates wonderfully the usage of the word. In this particular text, the אב--father, teacher (?) is telling his son or pupil to *get* wisdom. He is clearly not telling him to *create* wisdom.

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<sup>155</sup>H. Ringgren., (1947), p. 94.

<sup>156</sup>CTA 4.1.23; 4.3.30; 4.4.32;

<sup>157</sup> See: W. H. C. Propp, (1999), p. 539.

Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. Prov. 4:7

חִכְמָה קָנָה חִכְמָה וּבְכָל-קִנְיָנֶיךָ  
קָנָה בִינָה: רֵאשִׁית

Consider also the following two texts which are representative of Proverbs. Notice the parallelism between wisdom (חִכְמָה) and understanding (בִּינָה) in all three texts. They are both understood to be something which is acquirable by man; there is no hint of ‘create’ in these texts.

Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. (Prov. 4:5)

אַל-תִּשְׁכַּח וְאַל-תֵּט מֵאִמְרֵי-פִי  
קָנָה חִכְמָה קָנָה בִינָה

How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! Yea, to get understanding is rather to be chosen than silver. (Prov. 16:16)

קָנָה-חִכְמָה מִזֶּה-טוֹב  
מִחֲרוֹץ וּקְנֹת בִּינָה נִבְחָר מִזָּבָבִים:

Whybray suggests that the actual meaning of Prov. 8:22-31 is less centered on the creative act and rather the idea that “Yahweh’s attribute of wisdom ‘existed’ prior to its expression in his acts of creation.” He continues by saying, “the meaning ‘possess’ for *qānāh* is entirely suitable and is in keeping with the author’s usage in 1:5, 4:5,7. Yahweh ‘possessed’ wisdom as an attribute or faculty integral to his being from the very first, and ‘in [with, or by] his wisdom founded the earth’ (3:19). This seems to be the more probable interpretation, even when full allowance is made for the mythological echoes in the poetic imagery of personification.”<sup>158</sup> Thus, the meaning of the word *qānāh* does not need to be understood as create. Though that is a possible definition, the usage of *qānāh*, in Proverbs is always to *acquire*.<sup>159</sup> And so *acquire* or *get* will be chosen as the preferable translation of the word rather than *create*.

<sup>158</sup> R.N. Whybray, (1995), p. 77.

<sup>159</sup> V. A. Hurowitz suggests that if *acquired* is the proper understanding, then God acquired Wisdom as his maidservant or wife. V. A. Hurowitz, (1999), p. 394.

### 4.3 The Riddle of Amon

The second and perhaps more crucial word in question is אָמוֹן (*amon*). This word has a longer and more complicated history than קָאֵן (qānāni) and consequently is where the bulk of our research lies. The word with the same pointing appears some nineteen times in the Bible. It appears sixteen times as a proper name,<sup>160</sup> twice it would seem to refer to the Egyptian god Amon and once in Prov. 8 with disputed meaning. The two proposed meanings for this word are ‘master workman, craftsman’ and ‘little child, ward’.<sup>161</sup> *Craftsman* has the support of the principal ancient versions, LXX, Vulg., Syr., and Targ., and also a strong exegetical tradition (cf. Wisdom of Solomon, Ben Sira and Baruch). The latter is interpreted in light of Lamentations 4:5 (הָאִמּוֹן) where the word is pointed differently (*šureq waw* instead of the *holem waw*) and carries the meaning of foster mother or father,<sup>162</sup> i.e. nurse or one who cares for a child.<sup>163</sup> (Cf. BDB in situ.)

Avi Hurvitz<sup>164</sup> has also tackled this challenging word (*amon*) in search of a definitive answer. The premise of his work is that there are two ways to

<sup>160</sup> “The name Amon is not necessarily to be linked with the name of the Egyptian deity. If the name were inked to the god Thebes, this fact need not reflect a political tie between Judah and Egypt. Manasseh had accompanied Assurbanipal to Egypt in 667 BC, thus the name could have been chosen in honor of his suzerain’s victory over Taharqa... The name may have been of Hebrew origin... Solomon and Ahab had close ties with Egypt...” R. J. Randles, *The Interaction of Israel, Judah, and Egypt: From Solomon to Josiah*, Ann Arbor, (1980), p. 222.

<sup>161</sup> Other suggestions have been made but have not been taken seriously by most scholars. Scott suggests the reading of אָמוֹן (*omen*) “binding”. R.B.Y. Scott, “Wisdom in Creation. The ’AMON of VIII 30”, VT 10 (1960), 219-222. De Boer suggests that it be understood as “mother official” or “queen mother”. P.A.H. De Boer, “The Counselor in: Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East”, VT.S 3, ed. Martin Noth and D. Winton Thomans, (1955), 69-71. C. L. Rogers offers strong evidence in support of reading אָמוֹן craftsman but suggests that the antecedent is not Wisdom but the Lord. By switching the syntax of the phrase, Rogers suggests, the author has indicated that it is actually God and not Wisdom who is the Master Builder. C. L. Rogers III, “The Meaning and Significance of the Hebrew Word אָמוֹן in Proverbs 8:30”, ZAW 109, (1997), 208-220. A similar suggestion is made by M. Dahood, “Proverbs 8:22-31”, CBQ 30, (1968), 513, 518-519. See also Paul Peter Zerafa, *The Wisdom of God in the Book of Job*, (1978), 180.

<sup>162</sup> “R.B.Y. Scott in his 1960 article offered a new interpretation of ’amôn in v. 30. The word should be not ’amôn but ’omên, which as has been stated can mean foster-father or guardian; but the verb ’āman can also mean to support or guide. R. N. Whybray, (1995), p. 77.

<sup>163</sup> “A foster-child; so Rashi and many moderns compare Lam. IV 5. Others regard it as a form of the word in Cant. Vii. 2, translated skilled workman.” A. Cohen, *Mishlei*, (ed.), London, (1946). See also: O. Keel, *Wisdom Plays Before God*, (1974). In this work he examines scenes in which Ma’at, daughter of the sun-god, stands before him and amuses him.

<sup>164</sup> See Hebrew Bibliography.

understand the word – the meaning of the root and morphological considerations. He cites the two, already discussed meanings and correctly notes that the two meanings are both attested in the Bible. He then considers the morphological question of which form fits better. His conclusion is that the word is of the noun form *qatôl*, a form which signifies a type of worker or profession. He offers several types of examples in favor of this conclusion and ends by stating that in contrast with meanings proposed other than the two primary meanings, the meaning should always be sought from what is currently in the Bible. Thus, Wisdom was a type of worker, like the *ummanu* of Akkadian. His recommendation is well founded and has produced a convincing argument. Nonetheless, considering that *amon*, in his words is itself of foreign origin, something that is by no means rare in the Bible, a further nuance should be sought.

#### 4.3.1 Egyptian Loanword?

I believe that there may exist another plausible meaning to the word. This other possibility is one that apparently no biblicalist<sup>165</sup> or Egyptologist has explored and therefore, should at least be considered.<sup>166</sup> I believe it to be important since demonstrating that the Egyptian meaning was understood by the Israelite author will strengthen the thesis of hypostasis in Proverbs 8.

Various researchers have suggested that there might in fact be a connection between Ma'at and Wisdom according to O. Keel (1974). However, there seems to have been no one who has suggested the meaning of the word in relation to the Egyptian language. There lie several reasons behind my suggestion of *amon* as an Egyptian loan word. First, the depiction of Wisdom in Second Temple literature is that she is a being equal to God both in stature and in the role of creator of the world (Wisdom of Solomon, Ben Sira, Baruch). The

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<sup>165</sup> This would seem to be a completely new idea. Personal communication with Professor Shirun and Racheli Shlomi indicated that this idea was never suggested. A review of secondary sources proved the same.

<sup>166</sup> The potential relationship should be explored for several reasons even though a conclusive definition may not be reached. Thus, further research is deemed necessary for a thorough investigation.

parallel between the epithet of Wisdom and the Egyptian god Amon<sup>167</sup> is notable. The idea of being hidden as a central quality of Wisdom is unmistakably expressed in Job 28 and later in Second Temple sources (as listed above). 'Hidden' is inherent in the word *amon* in Egyptian.<sup>168</sup> That is, *amon* does not only refer to the god, but to an actual word, which will be explained below. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, interpreting the word as a term found in Egyptian would not require any change in the pointing of the word. The traditional of pronunciation or vocalization of this word accurately reflects what I take to be its Egyptian original. And finally, since most scholars agree that Israelite Wisdom literature had strong ties with its Egyptian counterpart common traits and language, perhaps, should be expected.

V. A. Hurowitz has emphasized the need to attend to context here.<sup>169</sup> But attention to context alone is not enough. I agree with him in this respect but am not convinced that the context of Proverbs 8 in and of itself will unlock the meaning. Rather, I am persuaded, that in light of the evidence and consensus among scholars, Egyptian influence is the background in which Proverbs 8 was written; understanding this influence will shed light on the terms and motifs incumbent in the passage. Therefore, we shall now look briefly at examples of Egyptian cosmology.

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<sup>167</sup> *Amon* was one of the creator gods and his cult was strong in Israel well into Iron Age II (ca. 1000 to 586) "...it would seem that *Amun-Re* the Egyptian god who had been in the background and was involved in everything, did not lose importance immediately and probably never lost it completely. Scarabs with his name or with the cryptogram of his name were still being made in Iron Age II." (Keel, (1992), p. 134). And furthermore, "The presence of the 'angularly stylized' group of seals, an ongoing use of Amun scarabs, and the presence of the 'striking god' in Gezer all show clearly that the cultural influence of Egypt remained considerable during Iron Age IIA, at least along the southern Palestinian coastal plain." p. 178. O. Keel, & C. Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, Fribourg, (1992).

<sup>168</sup> See: J. Assman, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom*, (1995), p. 140. (Transcendence and Personification, P. Leiden J 350 IV, 12-21).

<sup>169</sup> V. A. Hurowitz, (1999), p. 392.

#### 4.3.1.1 Egyptian and Israelite Wisdom Traditions

Egyptian influence on Israelite Wisdom literature is widely accepted by most scholars.<sup>170</sup> The affinities between Egyptian and Israelite Wisdom literature were first recognized by W.O.E. Osterley in 1929 in his publication of *Amenope*.<sup>171</sup> The strong Egyptian influence in no way denies the possibility of other sources. Whybray (1995) notes that there has been emphasis in the modern study of Proverbs to explore other Semitic literature. Nonetheless, in light of the evidence, the relation between Israel and Egypt remains stronger than that of surrounding nations.

R. J. Randles, in his Ph.D. dissertation, points to many of the artifacts found in Israel during the first temple period.

Egyptian alabaster jars, statuettes, and faience figurines found in Israelite towns attest the high level of trade with Egypt during the 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The Hebrew measures *ephah* and *hin* were borrowed from Egypt as their names indicate. The 8-shekel weight, equivalent to the Egyptian *deben*, became the standard in Judah in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century. The hieratic numerals on these weights confirm this ratio and the use of the *deben* as the standard. Further, the appearance of hieratic numerals on ostraca from Samaia, Arad, and Mesad Hashavyahu indicate the growing use of Egyptian numerals in Hebrew writing.<sup>172</sup>

It is important to realize here that these discoveries are dated to a time after Egypt's empire; her days of cultural dominance were over but intercourse between the cultures continued into the Third Intermediate period (715 BC)<sup>173</sup> contemporary with Hezekiah in Israel, which according to some scholars (Albright, Whybray, Shuback, Scott) was the era in which some of the Proverbs were written.

The cultural contact remained for several reasons, according to Randles – military collaboration being one of them. “Continuing cultural contacts between Palestine and the Egyptians stemmed from Egypt's proximity, its participation at Qarqar, and its potential as a permanent ally. From numerous cowry shells found

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<sup>170</sup> Whybray, (1965), p.71. “...no real difference is discernable between the fundamental ideas and aims of the discourses and those of the Egyptian instructions. Both were composed for use in the same kind of scribal school, an institution which the Israelites had borrowed, together with its curriculum, from the Egyptians.” See also: chapters 1-2. For further reading see: G. E. Bryce, *A Legacy of Wisdom*, London, (1979). Bryce has collected a great amount of sources for comparison.

<sup>171</sup> R. N. Whybray, (1995), p. 116.

<sup>172</sup> R. J. Randles, (1980), p. 270.

among Egyptian artifacts in tomb 218 at Lachish, Tufnell has proposed that a colony of Libyan or Nubian soldiers may have settled at that town following the invasion of Shoshenq I. The contents of tombs 218 and 223 attest a major Egyptian influence at Lachish during the ninth and eighth centuries BC.”<sup>174</sup> Thus, there is now no doubt that there existed political and economic ties between the two countries. The question now remains, were there Wisdom literature ties also?

Though it is difficult to surmise precisely how much contact there actually was between the two cultures, there is no almost doubt that they influenced one another to some degree. Shuback notes that the majority of this particular influence was in the direction of Egypt to Israel<sup>175</sup> the opposite direction being also possible. However, there were Semitic words that made their way into Egyptian texts and were completely normalized into the language.<sup>176</sup> Semitic words were used in almost all textual genres. Of the 500 texts that were surveyed in Hoch’s 1994 study, an average of 7.1% Semitic words were used. School texts had the highest ratio (38.8%) of Semitic words followed by religious texts (3.3%) and lastly by Wisdom texts (1.6%). This proves that even in the realms of Religion and Wisdom literature the Egyptians were using loanwords from their Semite neighbors. Hoch states:

Religious words are found in hymns, prayers, and in the Book of the Dead. Some of the songs were part of the official cult (P. Berlin 3035; KRI IV 30,6) and others are personal psalms (O. lit. DeM 1406, H.O. 97). Almost all deal with Egyptian deities (a prayer to Amun – H.O. 7 3). It is particularly surprising to find Semitic words in personal prayers (*ha<sub>2</sub>=ma=-n=ra* [no. 311] in Deir el-Bahri graffiti); the foreign words occurring in these texts were presumably fully naturalized loans (and not used as foreign vocabulary).<sup>177</sup>

Hoch’s study is significant in that it shows how foreign words were naturalized into the speech of even the pious Egyptian, who may not have had first hand contact with Semites. Therefore, when we come to Proverbs 8 we

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<sup>173</sup> J. E. Hoch, (1994), p. 4.

<sup>174</sup> R. J. Randles, (1980), p. 145.

<sup>175</sup> “Our study has led to the conclusion that where the contact between Biblical and Egyptian wisdom literature is concerned, it was Hebrew that was influenced by Egyptian and not vice versa.” N. Shuback, (1993), p.348.

<sup>176</sup> Hoch, (1994), p. 477.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p. 476-7. For further examples of loanwords see: T. O. Lambdin, (1953).

should keep this observation in mind: foreign words in religious texts is a phenomenon shared by both Israel and Egypt and they were employed in personal prayers and psalms. The cultural and linguistic ties between the two in which a sphere of loanwords<sup>178</sup> was established, affords us with a plausible explanation of the enigmatic word *amon* in Proverbs 8. This is instructive in light of Shuback's study which found that there was a unique relationship between the two cultures in the realm of Wisdom literature – a realm not shared by any other.

...the evidence accumulated in our study is sufficient to show that the Hebrew authors were closely acquainted with at least part of the Egyptian wisdom literature. Egyptian phrases and words, found in no other wisdom compositions in the ancient Near East, left their imprint on the Biblical wisdom literature...<sup>179</sup>

Furthermore...

The first contacts between Hebrew and Egyptian culture probably took place during the reign of Solomon, who is reported to have established close ties with Egypt...These relations with Egypt were maintained during the reign of Hezekiah, to whose circle the compilation of the Proverbs of Solomon is ascribed (Prov. 25:1).<sup>180</sup>

Thus, Egyptian influence on the Israelite school of wisdom can hardly be doubted. Moreover, the Egyptian influence outweighs the rest of the ANE in the realm of wisdom literature.<sup>181</sup> And since Wisdom appears in the text as having been with God in the beginning, it stands to reason that the creation typology<sup>182</sup> has also been influenced.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Further evidence for the borrowing and naturalization of Semitic loan words is found in 'm=q "to have sexual intercourse". It is hard to imagine that the Egyptian's lacked their own word for such action. Perhaps the Semitic equivalent was more precise. Nonetheless, this shows that words were used in many different contexts, cf. Hoch, (1994), p. 466.

<sup>179</sup> N. Shuback, (1993), p. 353.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> "In a detailed study of the occurrence of winged serpents in Egypt and the Near East, concluding that the seraphim of Isaiah's vision (Isaiah 6:2-7) most closely fitted Egyptian motifs. The uraeus or cobra was the symbol of royal diadem. Yahweh, the ultimate king, would understandably have attendants being about him, and this Egyptian royal symbol was precisely made to order...The appearance of these winged serpents in Isaiah's vision seem to be another example of those cultural contacts between Judah and Egypt..." Randles, (1980), p. 203. Randles observations show that Egypt impacted texts as late as Isaiah.

<sup>182</sup> The primordial status of the world – before any creative act transpired, as portrayed in Genesis, is summed up in a mere verse (Gen. 1:2 הָאֵרֶץ הַיְהוּדָה תָהוּ וְנָבָה וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ יְהוָה רָחַף עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם אֱלֹהִים בְּרָחַץ עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם Though the cosmology of Genesis has affinities with Egyptian cosmology, the Genesis writer did not elaborate what happened or what was before the divine fiat. The Egyptian theologians, however, like the author of Prov. 8, elaborated greatly on what took place

Wisdom says *I was brought forth* (אָמֹן אָמֹן - Proverbs 8:24, 25) and then later *amon* next to God. The emerging of the god Amon from the Nun is very similar in thought to אָמֹן אָמֹן (*to be brought forth* or *to be born*). It would seem that our author was employing a pun<sup>184</sup> – that is, אָמֹן אָמֹן אָמֹן אָמֹן (Prov. 8:30) means not only was Wisdom ‘*amon*’ in its biblical sense, (*nursling*,<sup>185</sup> *Master Craftsman – worker*<sup>186</sup>) but that she was ‘*amon*’ in the Egyptian sense. Wisdom as *amon* - אָמֹן אָמֹן (was brought forth) as a hypostasis and was *amon* (with the Egyptian meaning) *hidden* and *creator*.

Cosmology has a close affinity to Wisdom literature as noted by various Bible Scholars.<sup>187</sup> Therefore, understanding what occurred in Egyptian and Biblical creation accounts helps to clarify the cosmological motifs found in the Wisdom literature of Proverbs 8. The Egyptian writer, like that of Proverbs 8 understood there to have been a definite prelude to creation, an idea not elaborated in the Genesis account. Likewise, several of the creator gods, who are claimed to be the first of the gods, were regarded as having *emerged* from the Nun<sup>188</sup>. This idea is similar to the word אָמֹן אָמֹן in Proverbs. With this understanding of Egyptian cosmology and its similarities to the Proverbs creation account, perhaps the question may now be asked: Could אָמֹן אָמֹן, in Proverbs 8:30 have been an Egyptian loan word? A word understood and used by an Israelite writer – in the kings’ courts which were heavily influenced by Egypt<sup>189</sup> -

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in the time preceding the First Occasion. In their minds, there existed a prehistory to the creation of the world, a sort of prelude to the First Occurrence. The prelude to the First Occurrence typically detailed the emergence or becoming of the creator god(s).

<sup>183</sup> Whybray, (1995), p. 114.

<sup>184</sup> The ancient use of bilingual puns is attested in other literature as well. J. N. Sanders (1962), p. 942, suggests that the author of the Gospel of John may have also employed a pun in 1:17. “The use of the verb ἐσκήνωσεν “dwelt,” may be a kind of bilingual pun, since it contains the same root consonants as the rabbinic technical term *Shekinah*, the manifestation of the divine presence. Likewise, the word Logos was replete with multiple nuances. “Very likely, the word [logos] was chosen for its wide meaning, encompassing as it did both Hellenistic and Hebraic shades of meaning.” R. Kysar, (1992), p. 923. See also: Y. Zachovitch, (1999) on double meanings

<sup>185</sup> It is possible that the writer knew of the meaning *nursling*. V. A. Hurowitz (1999), pp. 398 - 99)

<sup>186</sup> See: Avi Hurvitz, (1994).

<sup>187</sup> Whybray, (1995), p. 114.

<sup>188</sup> Nun, “...*nw*, translated as ‘Waters’ or ‘Primeval Waters’ ...reflects the Egyptians concept of the universe as a limitless ocean of dark and motionless water...” Allen, (1998), p. 4

<sup>189</sup> RBY Scott, (1993), pp, XXIV and XXXIII. “His [Solomon] orientation toward the Egyptian court, from which came his principal wife and possible his state secretary with the Egyptian name, seems apparent and court Wisdom was an old tradition in Egypt. The Joseph story with its

as a word that conveyed a double entendre. That is, could *amon* be understood *prima facie* as nursling or master craftsman\worker, and have a secondary connotation of *hidden* and or *creator*, as in Egyptian? Or might it simply have only the second option contrary to V. A. Hurowitz’s conclusion? There are close affinities in transliteration, sonority and meaning between the Egyptian word *ʾimn* and the ‘hiddenness’ of Wisdom in Job 28,<sup>190</sup> (which is the only other place in the Bible where Wisdom is described in personified - (hypostatic?) terms). N. Shupak’s study found a conclusion which greatly supports the findings of this study – that is, Egyptian wisdom literature left its mark on Israel and can be seen in the Wisdom tradition in the Bible.<sup>191</sup>

#### 4.3.1.2 Amon: Hidden and Concealed

Having concluded that there exist strong ties between Egypt and Israel that allow for the possibility that *amon* was a loan word, let us now look at Job 28:20-21. In this text Wisdom is said to be hidden and unsearchable. No one, not even death and □□□□ know where it is to be found. It is completely concealed.

From where then does wisdom come?...  
It is **hidden** from the eyes of all living,  
And **concealed** from the birds of the air.  
(emphasis mine)

וְהַחֲכָמָה מֵאֵין תְּבוּאָה...  
וְנִעְלָמָה מֵעֵינֵי כָל־חַי וּמְעוֹף  
הַשָּׁמַיִם נִסְתָּרָה:

Compare Job 28 with a passage describing Amon, the great-hidden god. Notice and keep in mind that in Job 28 (one of the central passages of Wisdom), wisdom

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Egyptian setting and embodiment of the Wisdom spirit is in keeping with this... The contemporary testimony of the prophecies of Isaiah supports this view. The ruling circles of Jerusalem were then in close contact with Egypt and underwent strong Egyptian political and cultural influence. They counted on the pharaoh’s support in a general revolt against Assyrian domination... Again, he poured scorn on the sages of Egypt on whom the wise men of Judah were modeling themselves. It seems clear that the reference is to the royal counselors, the official, politically minded wing of the Wisdom movement of the time.”

<sup>190</sup> An important clue for the notion of Wisdom as ‘hidden’ is found in a text by R. Jastrow, (1992). The sanctuary in col. 2 could be part of the Siwa Oasis and/or “the hidden seat of wisdom itself, something in the tenor of Job 28.” Cf. I. Shirun-Grumach, (1996), p. 412. See also: G. Posener / J. Saint Faire Garnot (1962), p. 156.

<sup>191</sup> N. Shupak, (1993), p. 353.

is unsearchable, concealed and hidden from man, and death. Thus, the epithet of *hidden – concealed* is one of the keystone qualities of Wisdom. And in the Egyptian text, the god Amon, is likewise described in such terms. His principal epithet is the *hidden one – ‘amon’* in Egyptian means *hidden, concealed*. The point must be made before continuing: the *amon* of Proverbs 8 is not thought to be the Egyptian god Amon. Rather, I am suggesting that *amon* in Proverbs is synonymous with the meaning of Amon’s name (*hidden, concealed*).

One is Amun, who keeps himself concealed from them  
Who hides himself from the gods, no one knowing his nature  
He is more remote than heaven  
He is deeper than the underworld.

None of the gods knows his true form  
His image is not unfolded in books  
Nothing certain is testified about him.

He is too secretive for his majesty to be revealed  
He is too great to be inquired after  
Too powerful to be known.

(Zandee, Hymnen, 75-86; AHG no. 138.<sup>192</sup>)

Not only is the meaning of *amon* similar, (a more detailed discussion will follow), so too is the transliteration to Hebrew or other alphabetic systems of writing (Coptic or Greek). The Egyptian Hieroglyph  is rendered  in Greek and *amoun* in Coptic. True to the ambiguity of pronunciation, Egyptologists transcribe the word both as *amun* and *amon*. The actual pronunciation is thought to be more of an /ō/ sound which is reflected in transcriptions. Thus, אָמוֹן is a very good transcription of the Egyptian word into the Bible.<sup>193</sup> We can test the reliability of the transliteration by way of studying other Egyptian words which have been imported into Israelite writings since there are other words with an Egyptian origin which have made their way into the Hebrew Bible.

J Muchiki makes some important observations regarding the use of Egyptian words in NW Semitic languages. He explains methodology involved

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<sup>192</sup> From: J. Assman, (1994), pp. 140-141. (Cf. P. Leiden J 350 IV, 12-21). Some lines of text were not included in my presentation.

<sup>193</sup> For examples of *amon* in Hebrew inscriptions see: Yoshiyuki Muchiki, (1999).

when deciding if a lexeme, found in Israelite inscriptions and the Bible, is of Egyptian origin.

1) The word should show proper consonantal correspondences, (2) It must also correspond well to Egyptian in meaning, and the meaning should fit the context of the Semitic text. (3) The possibility of it being a Hamito-Semitic cognate must be carefully examined, because the cognates have often undergone secondary changes *e.g.* Eg *ḥb* “heart” and Heb. לב Akk *libbu*. (4) The Egyptian word should be attested at least since the Middle Kingdom. If the word is attested in Egypt since the Old Kingdom, because of the great time span in which the word could be borrowed, it is more likely to be an Egyptian loan word. (5) If the word is commonly attested in Semitic documents, and has been given a Semitic form, it is more difficult to distinguish a loan word from a cognate. However, if the word occurs only in the context of Egyptian contact, the possibility of an Egyptian loan is high.<sup>194</sup>

Thus judging from the five precepts (three will not be considered in this discussion due to the magnitude of the researched involved in solving such an issue), we can see that there is a good possibility that *amon* could indeed be related to Egyptian on linguistic terms. The word shows a clear consonantal correspondence; it arguably corresponds to the Egyptian meaning; the word is well attested from the Old Kingdom and beyond; and finally, the context in which אמן is found has an Egyptian background.

The divine name Amon was a word used in everyday speech in Egypt. The name of the god *Amon* was used as a verb and an adverb. As point of reference, we may look at *Atum*,<sup>195</sup> which was both a name and a regular word analogous to the semantic range of the name “Jacob”<sup>196</sup> in the Bible. S. Bickel speaking on the name of Atum, notes that “Son nom dérivé du verbe *tm* qui signifie aussi bien ‘compléter’, ‘achever,’ que ‘ne pas exister’. Plusieurs essais

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>195</sup> The word is derived from the root *tm*, which, interestingly, is a common root in Semitic languages. Some of the definitions cf. Brown Driver Briggs, embody the same meaning as that in the Egyptian: *be completed, finished, come to an end, cease; be consumed, exhausted, spent; completeness, fullness, etc.*

<sup>196</sup> “Jacob” is attested both as a name and verb. אֶל-חַבְשֻׁחוֹ בִּי כָל-אִחַי עָקוּב יַעֲקֹב וְכָל-הָעַרְבִי יַחְלֹךְ  
Nowhere is the person of “Jacob” mentioned in this text. Rather, the word “Jacob” appears in the Hebrew as the imperfect of root *ʿqb* (to assail insidiously, attack, deceit, reach for the heal). There is absolutely no difference between the *qal* imperfect of *ʿqb* and the name Jacob. The pointing is exactly the same. וַרְבֵּקָה אֶהְבֶּת אֶת-יַעֲקֹב “And Rebecca loved Jacob.” (Gen. 25:28) This demonstrates that in ancient Hebrew a verb, used in everyday normal speech, also served as a name. The same custom is common in many languages, Egyptian not being an exception.

de traduction ont été proposes: ‘l’indifferencie’, l’inexistant’, ‘celui qui achève.’”<sup>197</sup>

So too, the name Amon is derived from a word which was used in other contexts. The word *amon* is found throughout the history of the Egyptian language. The Pyramid texts provide the earliest evidence of the word in various contexts. There would seem to be two primary meaning of the word of the root *ʾmn*. The first, according to its usage is *secret; secret place* (noun), *to conceal or hide* (verb) and *secret, hidden*, (adj.).<sup>198</sup> The other is however, very interesting. It catches our attention and only increases our suspicion that there was a connection between the Egyptian word *amon* and the Proverbs’ *amon*. The other meaning is *to create*. Of these *ʾmn*, –  is divided into two. The first is: *to form, fashion, shape mould, to set up*, (‘bilden’); and the less common: ‘to create’, ‘make’, (‘schaffen’).<sup>199</sup>

The following is a Pyramid text thus demonstrating that the word carried the meaning *create/creator*<sup>200</sup> at a very early stage in the language.

#### PT 506:1095

...I am *Zwnṯw*, the coffer of the sky; I am the double maker, the spirit of the Kings of Lower Egypt; I am the **creator** who **created**<sup>201</sup> this land; I am he who...the Two Lands...

The other meaning, much more common than that of *create*, is, as noted already, to *hide* or *to be hidden*. In this example it is used in association with a snake. The important relevance for this study is that it can be utilized in many situations, not only with the god himself.

#### PT 293:434

Get back, you hidden snake; hide yourself...<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Bickel, (1994) p. 33. See also Hornung (1971) for a detailed discussion of the translation of Atum.

<sup>198</sup> Some of its other meanings: ‘ein Priestertitel’; ‘als Name der Unterwelt selbst’; ‘rechte Seite’. Erman und Herm (1926). Pyr. D.18. These other words are all transcribed as *ʾmn* but their hieroglyphics are longer than the normal sign which we have seen.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. See also: R. O. Faulkner, (1991), and: L. H. Lesko (ed.), (1982).

<sup>200</sup> See also Reading Book 114,5 as an example of “create”.

<sup>201</sup> Faulkner states in the notes: “For the meaning of *ʾmn* here cf. *Hnmw ʾmn hnmmt* ‘Khnum who created the sun-folk’ Brit. Mus. 826, 10 = RB 114,4.” Emphasis mine.

There are many examples found outside of the Pyramids. D. Meeks lists examples of where the word is found. “‘Durable, permanent’ compare au copte  $\mu\eta\nu\epsilon$ ;... ‘être caché, se cacher’, Helck, Merikare, 77,78;” It is also used to indicate the ‘beyond’, “‘la place cachée’ ou ‘la place qui cachée’, comme designation de ‘l’au delà’.”<sup>203</sup> This is an important indicator that the word had usage in non-cultic settings and was used throughout Egypt’s long civilization.

Thus, we have seen that the lexeme *amon* of Proverbs 8 is very similar to the Egyptian. First of the all, the consonantal correspondence fits. It was transliterated into Hebrew as אָמוֹן. Secondly, the meaning of *amon* “hidden”, “concealed” and “creator” is very plausible in the context of Proverbs 8. Thirdly, the word *amon* is attested in the earliest to the latest stages of Egypt’s civilization. And finally, Proverbs 8 and Israelite Wisdom literature in general had close contact with Egypt. Therefore, it is very conceivable that the word entered Hebrew via Wisdom literature. Again, the purpose of this investigation of *amon* is done since its meaning affects how we ought to view Wisdom in Proverbs.

#### **4.4 Summary and Conclusions to Wisdom and Amon**

The many different opinions concerning the meaning of Proverbs 8 are numerous and diverse. The exegesis of the passage is obscured by the unclear lexemes. Scholars of the ages have proposed sometimes radically different interpretations based on both the internal and external evidence of Proverbs 8. As V. A. Hurowitz (1999) has reminded us, the key to understanding the passage is in the context. His point is important and well taken. In the light of what has been demonstrated, however, the milieu in which the passage was written is equally important. If that can be deduced, then perhaps some of the perplexing words and motifs will become lucid.

In view of the evidence amassed in this thesis, we have deduced that Egypt is in fact one of the important and most likely origins of context. Vocabulary, motifs and certain maxims were borrowed from the Egyptian

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<sup>202</sup> R. O. Faulkner, (1969), Utterance 293, line 434.

Wisdom Tradition and eventually normalized into the Israelite Tradition. Due to this influence, I therefore believe that the Israelite writer used the Egyptian word *amon*, which, for him, was pregnant with meaning – *hidden, creator* (?), and like the god Amon, *was brought forth* from the waters.<sup>204</sup>

Finding an affinity with the *god* Amon and Proverbs 8:30 was not my goal. I don't think that the author of Proverbs believed *amon* in Proverbs 8 to actually be the Egyptian god. Rather, he borrowed the semantic range of the word to more completely describe Wisdom. He was not synchronizing Wisdom and the god Amon, he was only using the Egyptian word *amon*, with it all of its meanings (which may or may not have included the notion of emergence - אָמֹן- like that of Amon emerging from the Nun) to explicate Wisdom as a hypostasis of YHWH.

Furthermore, the present author does not pretend to have said the final word on the debate concerning the meaning of *amon*. However, the explication given here is believed to be a plausible and likely interpretation in light of the Egyptian background of Proverbs. The translation of the phrase, “וְאֶתְּיָה אֶצְלוֹ אֲמוֹן” could be: “I was next to him – hidden/builder-creator.” The above translation based on the Egyptian usage of the word *amon* fits well. It takes into account the description of Wisdom as hidden in Job 28 (and later in Baruch 3), accords well with the notion of *master craftsman* from the Akkadian *ummanu*, and allows room for other nuances<sup>205</sup> found in the Bible according to Avi Hurvitz (1994:647-650).

My conclusion does not try to incorporate the meaning of *nursling* as its primary meaning. There is no way to disprove that the author may have also had that in mind, but it would seem to be stretching the possibilities. Thus, *nursling* is not accepted by the present author as the primary meaning of *amon*, especially

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<sup>203</sup> D. Meeks, (1977).

<sup>204</sup> אָמֹן, taken from אָמֹן (in addition to its birth related connotations), is a word used for seismic and aquatic commotion. See Ps. 77:17. See also V.A. Hurowitz (1999), p. 395).

<sup>205</sup> For a discussion concerning the various meanings the writer might have had in mind see: R.N. Whybray, (1994b) p. 120.

in light of the fact that the theological crisis seems to have been only felt by a minority of interpreters.<sup>206</sup>

Wisdom during the time of the Second Temple was understood to be cocreator with God and to be hidden<sup>207</sup> from everything but God. That is, it was understood to be a hypostasis which helped in creation and yet was to some degree hidden from it. This is precisely the meaning of *amon* in Egyptian – something *hidden* and yet also a *builder, creator*. By understanding *amon* thus, the evidence for hypostasis is very strong – Wisdom being next to God was hidden and also creator – thus understood to be an entity with the power to act.

## **Summary and Conclusion to Thesis**

Our study has been concerned with Hypostasis in ancient Israel. We have sought to discover whether or not this phenomenon was something that was native to Israel or was rather an element imported into her borders. While there is no doubt that hypostasis existed outside of her borders, Israel definitely had its own version of hypostasis. Foreign influence aside, Israel had a native belief that God was a God who could be made manifest in several forms. However, unlike the surrounding pagan countries, the Bible never incorporated these hypostases as entities that should receive praise, worship and honor in God's stead. Rather, they had a place next to him, and according to Proverbs 8 even assisted God in the creation of the world. They did not, however, become the central focus of worship.

Having concluded that hypostasis was an occurrence which existed in ancient Israel and in our core text of Proverbs 8, we may now also conclude that

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<sup>206</sup> C. L. Rogers (1997), p. 216-218) points out that Aquila and some Rabbinic exegetes evidently vocalized the waw with a šureq in order to avoid making Wisdom co creator with God. In this way they avoided a difficult theological dilemma.

<sup>207</sup> See Baruch 3 above

## *Conclusion*

the intermediary figures in the Second Temple Period, were also regarded as hypostases. For after all, they were regarded as entities which came from heaven, sat on God's throne, were endowed with God's power and like God, received worship and praise.

And so the three intentions of this study have been met. It has been demonstrated that God from very early times of the Israelite cult was regarded to have hypostases, despite the strong injunctions against worshipping other deities. The phenomenon of hypostasis was not the incorporation of foreign gods into an Israelite pantheon. The hypostases were regarded as separate entities and yet considered to be YHWH. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22-31 was understood by its author to be a hypostasis – who helped with creation and yet was hidden from it – thus demonstrating that the author, like the other biblical authors reviewed, understood God to have a hypostasis. And lastly the entities of the Second Temple period were hypostases of God mostly native to Israel/Judaism and were not sole borrowings of Greek ideas. Hypostasis was a phenomenon which pervaded many areas of religious life and was a means by which the worshipper could address a distant god locally. Understanding the reality of ancient hypostasis helps the modern person better understand the message of ancient religious texts (non-Biblical), the Bible and perhaps, one's own desire to have a mediator between oneself and the transcendent.

## 5 Epilogue

### *Conclusions for the Believer.*

Proving that hypostasis was a phenomenon extant in the Bible and its surroundings, especially during the Second Temple period, has certain ramifications which are very much applicable today. Opponents to the belief that Christ is God and to the belief in the Trinity have often argued that there is no evidence for anything other than ONE God in the Old Testament. I have heard it said that the belief in Jesus as divine and equal to YHWH is either Greek or of some other pagan origin. This thesis has proven that just the opposite is true. The evidenced amassed has demonstrated lucidly how the ancient Israelite \ Jew believed that God had a hypostasis which was either an independent or semi-independent of God.

Proving the existence of the Trinity is perhaps more of a challenge and has not been one of my fights. However, it is easily deduced from the conclusions concerning Wisdom and the other hypostases; God is manifest in different ways. The Holy Spirit and the Messiah \ Son of Man were figures which were already regarded as hypostases of God well before the texts of the New Testament were written. It was the Church that took the final step of clarification: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit were hypostases of the Godhead. “They were loyal to the working of that formula, including *ousia* and *homoousion* making Father, Son and Holy Spirit modes or aspects of the Godhead. They said that in God there is only one *ousia*, but that there are three *hypostases* Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They held that there are not three Gods, but only one, and that the one is to be found equally and identically in Father , Son, and Holy Spirit. For these three the Cappadocians preferred the term *hypostasis* although they also gave as an alternative term *prosopon* (⇒↑⇐⇔⇐⇔⇐⇔).”<sup>208</sup> Clearly, the Church was only the recipient of a long

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<sup>208</sup> Kenneth, Scott, Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, New York, (1953).

history of hypostasis in Israel. The Church was perhaps one of the first to define God in such terms, but certainly not to regard God as such. The cultic recognition of God's hypostases was acknowledged centuries before, the Church simply applied the terminology.

Thus, in conclusion to this study and its application to the modern believer, it has been demonstrated that when Jesus claimed to be one with the Father, and whoever has seen the Son has seen the Father – these are statements true to God and true ancient Judaism. The Christian conception of God is the same as that of Judaism. God's cultic presence has had a continuum through the ages, only the name has changed. The believers in Jesus never made a man into God, but believed that God became man to act as the intermediary between us and heaven. God's salvation (Yeshua – יֵשׁוּעַ – Jesus literally means *salvation*) came to man in the form of man – similar to God's Wisdom and Glory which were conceived of as real entities, so too God's salvation became incarnate and dwelt among mortals.

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