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The Material Realities of Ancient Travel Journey in Proverbs 1-9

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I. Introduction

Proverbs scholars have suggested various contexts for Proverbs 1-9. The proposals may be divided into two major categories: metaphorical-conceptual and socio-historical. Scholars like Norman Habel and Raymond Van Leeuwen have put forward metaphorical, abstract and symbolic reading of the collection, the way of wisdom as a journey.[1] Daniel Estes reads the collection in light of Israel's pedagogical tradition on personal formation.[2] Along the same lines,

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[1] Habel argues the "way" is a nuclear symbol in the collection with a satellite system of images. "The way of wisdom is revealed to the journey of life with wisdom as our guide, a mode of traveling through life which Yahweh approves, the foundational order of all creation and more." Norman Habel, "Symbolism of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9," *Interpretation* 26 (1972): 131-57. Van Leeuwen argues for a larger metaphoric system and then just "woman wisdom" or "way" in R. Van Leeuwen, "Liminality and Worldview in Proverbs 1-9," *Semeia* 50 (1990): 111-44; A.W. Stewart, "Wisdom's Imagination: Moral Reasoning and the Book of Proverbs, " *JSOT* 40 (2016): 351-71; S. L. Harris, *Proverbs 1-9: A Study of Inner-Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: GA, Scholars Press, 1996).

[2] Daniel Estes, *Hear, My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9* (Grand Rapids, MI: IVP, Apollos, 1997). Loader locates this in the "scribal culture seeking to equip Jewish youth with an education steeped in the heritage of the fear of the Lord" in J. A. Loader, *Proverbs 1-9* (Leuven/Paris/Walpole: Peeters, 2014), 19.

Yoder and Murphy argue how the collection talks about the shaping of erotic desire and proper sexual conduct.[3] Interestingly enough, Yuan uses drama as conceptual framework and the journey in the pursuit of wisdom as script.[4]

On the socio-historical approach, Yoder locates the collection together with Prov 31 in the context of Israel's late Persian period as they reflect the socio-economic realities on marriage with foreign women and women at work.[5] Tova Forti argues in the same vein that the Strange Woman ought to be placed within the didactic framework and identified as "mundane, seductive, adulteress married woman who threatens the safeguarding of family nucleus and stability of the social order rather than a metaphor, a symbol or allegory of foreign cult."[6] Katharine Dell and Nili Shupak investigate the collection in light of its traditio-historical Egyptian counterpart as it relates to education in Israel's court, school or family.[7] Norman Whybray observes and describes the material background of a "city life" in the collection.[8]

As the survey above demonstrates, at least two scholars (Habel and Yuan) have identified the theme of a journey as a conceptual metaphor

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[3] Christine R. Yoder, "Shaping Desire: A Parent's Attempt: Proverbs 1-9, " *JP* 33:4 (2010): 54-61. R. E. Murphy, "Wisdom and Eros in Proverbs 1-9," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): 600-603.

[4] K.W. K. Yuan, *An Analysis of the Motions and Emotions in the Drama of the Pursuit of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9* (PhDiss., University of Aberdeen, 2016).

[5] Christine R. Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1-9 and 31, 10-31*, BZAW 304 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001). Camp also places Lady Wisdom of this collection as symbolism in early post-exilic period in Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, Bible and Literature Series 11 (Decatur, GA/Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985).

[6] T.L. Forti, "The Isha Zara in Proverbs 1-9: Allegory and Allegorization," *Hebrew Studies* 48 (2007): 89-100.

[7] Katharine J. Dell, "Proverbs 1-9: Issues of Social and Theological Context," *Interpretation* 63 (2009): 229-40; N. Shupak, "Female Imagery in Proverbs 1-9 in Light of Egyptian Sources," *Vetus Testamentum* 61 (2011): 310-23; Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[8] R. N. Whybray, "City Life in Proverbs 1-9," in *Jedes Ding hat seine Zeit: Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalishen Weisheit, Diethelm Michel sum* 65, eds. R.G.Lehmann, E. Otto and A. Wagner, BZAW 241 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 243-50. Norman Whybray's work focuses on the "city life" rather on the journey.

in the collection. Although this article builds on the theme of journey, it differs from the scholars mentioned above because it locates the collection in its socio-cultural context of ancient travel and journey of a young man[9]. This reading highlights the material realities of ancient Near Eastern travel.

Proverbs scholars agree that striving to find the exact dating of individual aphorisms and poems is an impossible endeavor. Fortunately, there is consensus on the *terminus a quo* as Solomonic period, *terminus ad quem* in the Persian and even Hellenistic periods.[10] Consequently, the comparison of ANE travel journey and Proverbs 1-9 in this article will be more broad than specific. While this undertaking may be criticized for being artificial and encyclopedic, this general analysis best reflects Proverbs 1-9 more accurately, for the collection itself is ambiguous on specific socio-historical context. The collection seems to refrain from using precise socio-historical language. Instead, the collection uses generic terminology like: father, son, woman, city, husband, way, etc. The use of this generic language is purposeful to make universal applications possible. Hence, it is undermining the generic nature of the collection if the effort of ANE correlation is too definitive. Also, the practice and customs of ancient travel should not be viewed through the same lens as modern travel, where improvements and practices are expeditious and variegated through the rapid advancement of technology.

Therefore, the article will first provide a general account of ancient customs and practices on travel. Second, it will sketch how Proverbs 1-9 depicts the travel situation, experiences, and journey of the son.

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[9] Yanis Pikoulas differentiates "ancient travel" as opposed to "moving" as "a temporary move of a person from his home to another, remote place where he has to stay overnight—regardless of the reasons for such a move or the form of transport used by the traveller." Y. A. Pikoulas, "Travelling by Land in Ancient Greece," in *Travel, Geography and Culture in Ancient Greece, Egypt and the Near East,* eds. Colin Adams, Jim Roy (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007), 78-87.

[10] Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance,* 39-72; Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, 233; Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs 1-15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 37.

II. General Description of Travel and Journey in Ancient Near East

Historical and geographical researches have increased our knowledge of ancient Near Eastern people, culture, life and civilization. We now know ancient human mobility and connectivity was more common than we first thought. Travel accounts and memoirs increased in numbers as human civilization progressed over time. Frequency and prevalence of travel went from rare to common and from simple to complex, as transportation facilities, physical realities and safety measures improved over time.[11] Although ancient modes of travel included both land and sea,[12] the following discussion will only cover ancient land travel.

1. Travel and Road Conditions

Historians, geographers and archaeologists maintain that pre-Roman roads are hard to define, specific and certain because they have been covered by outstanding and extensive Roman road engineering.[13] Nevertheless, they conjecture three types of ancient roads: international roads, intra-regional roads and local paths/tracks.[14] Wherever there were towns/cities, wells and stations, roads or tracks may also be found. The term "road" in the Third and Second millennium BCE may be thought of as "an unpaved route" like a dirt track. Regional roads

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[11] David Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 5. Also, John Baines warns against anachronism on the word "travel" in John Baines, "Travel in Third and Second Millennium Egypt," in *Travel, Geography and Culture in Ancient Greece, Egypt and the Near East*.

[12] Although travel by sea was faster than travel by foot, sea travel incurred more logistic restrictions like ship frequency and destination. *See* R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), 131.

[13] A. Kloner, and B-D. Chaim, "Mesillot on the Arnon: An Iron Age (Pre-Roman) Road in Moab," *BASOR* 330 (2003): 65- 81.

[14] Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography,* trans. A. F. Rainey (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962/1967), 39; D. H. French, "A Study of Roman Roads in Anatolia: Principles and Methods," *AnSt* 24 (1974): 143-49. French provides different categories of "road" on page 144.

were also unpaved.[15] However, at the earliest period street paving were observed in the towns/cities[16] leading to temples and sanctuaries.[17]

In the Iron Age and onwards, while there was an increased evidence of wheel carriage, foot travel was still the most common mode of travel.[18] At this time, ancient roads had improved for there were more evidences of paved city streets. Casson describes paving during this period like that of the later Romans: "as having a foundation layer of bricks set in asphalt, and upon this a surface of heavy limestone slabs, each a little over forty-one inches square, with the joints between them sealed with asphalt."[19] Hence, in the late Iron age, "the main routes were carefully kept up, (and) were marked with road signs at given distances, and every six miles or so there was a guard post which offered not only protection but the opportunity to communicate with the next down the line by means of fire signals. Along roads through desert, there were wells and small forts at appropriate intervals."[20] Furthermore, "roads in ancient countries other than Israel mostly ranged in width from one lane to three lanes, with two-lane roads of 3-4 meters being the most common."[21] Roads and cities were connected for practical and commercial reasons. Roads passed *by* the cities not *through* it for cities were often in higher elevation. A traveler would have to "turn aside" through an access road to enter a city.[22]

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[15] Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 26.

[16] Raphael Greenberg, "Life in the City: Tel Bet Yerah in the Early Bronze Age," in *Daily Life, Materiality, and Complexity in Early Urban Communities of the Southern Levant: Papers in Honor of Walter E. Rast and R. Thomas Schaub*, ed. Meredith Chesson (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

[17] "Paved roads were a rarity, but they did exist in Assyrian times, especially for processional ways that led to temples and were used during religious festivals" in S. Berman, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (New York: Facts on File, 2003), 209; H. D. Baker, "Urban Form in the First Millenium BC," in *The Babylonian World,* ed. Gwendolyn Leick (London: Taylor & Francis, 2007), 66-77.

[18] Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, 49.

[19] Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World,* 50.

[20] Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World,* 50. Currid, however, writes that up-keeping of roads was prevalent only during the Roman period in Currid and Barrett, *ESV Bible Atlas* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 39.

[21] Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 19.

[22] Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 42.

2. Road Naming and Road Markers

There were at least two major methods in naming ancient roads. The first method was more descriptive rather than giving proper names. The most common was when a thoroughfare received its name from its *terminus* like "the Uruk Road," "the way to Shur," "thoroughfare of the gods," "the way to Edom," that is, the road that leads to Edom.[23] The second method was to name the road according to its function or travelers, like "the king's highway," "the byroad," "the way by the sea," "the road of the new year's festival."[24]

David Dorsey argues that in the Iron Age, "there were un-inscribed markers like a heap of stones, like 'shrines of Hermes' which were set up at crossroads and boundary lines."[25] As it is, the "road markers" were landmarks, using pile of stones with distinguishing features or characteristics.[26] Casson writes about how passersby "upon seeing the heap of stones, poured out their oil libation, fell down on their knees, made obeisance and then moves on."[27] Dorsey connects this practice with Israel's road markers as recorded in Jeremiah 31:21; 2 Kings 23:17; Ezekiel 39:15. The purpose for these markers is to provide guide markers for travelers as they return by it.[28]

3. Purpose of Travel

In the later period, the occasions and purposes of travel have increased into many kinds.[29] To being with, commercial travel by

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[23] Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible*, 41.

[24] Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 47-48.

[25] Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 50-51.

[26] Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 50-51.

[27] Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, 71.

[28] Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 51.

[29] Biblical sources show that that Israelites or non-Israelites travel for various reasons. For example, obeying a divine call (Gen 12, Abraham), attending a funeral or burial (Gen 35:27, 50:12-14; 1 Sam 25:1), journey to visit a kin (Gen 37:13-17), journeying to a sheep-shearing (Gen 38:13), travel to work (Gen 37:13-17), to pursue a potential mate (Judg 14:5-7), to attend a wedding (Judg 14:8-10), escaping famine, and others.

merchants constituted the majority—trading gold, silver, tin, copper, textiles, lapis-lazuli, iron, etc.[30] Next, there were movements of messengers, officials, dignitaries, armies or military.[31] After that, religious pilgrimages and festival participants, which have only increased in frequency in the later years, joined the traveling circuit.[32] Lastly, people began traveling for purposes of expeditions, educational journeys and even holiday travels.[33]

Most noteworthy in the latter period is travel to find healing. This is important as will be shown later. Casson writes about this:

> So far as numbers were concerned, no single category of traveler came near matching the throngs en route to the great festivals. But they were merely occasional. They took to the road only at certain times during certain years. A substantial category which might be seen on the roads day in and day out was made up of the sick or infirm wending their way to the sanctuaries of the healing gods, of Ascelepius in particular. Such places were generally set in surroundings carefully chosen for their pure air and water and natural beauty; often there were mineral springs on the site. Here patients found not merely treatment but facilities for rest and diversion, which the keen Greek mind recognized as being as essential part of nursing the sick.[34]

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[30] M. C. Astour, "Overland Trade Routes in Ancient Western Asia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East,* ed. Jack Sasson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995), 1401-20; C. Michel, "The Old Assyrian Trade in the light of Recent Kültepe Archives, " *JCSMS 3 (*2008): 71-82.

[31] "The rise of the early empires and their centralized organizations were based on quick information by letter and messenger. The mechanization of armies, which began with the introduction of the horse-drawn war chariot about 1500 BCE demanded something better than a primitive track. A messenger service needed stations and rest-houses for men and beasts and supplies of water along the way at fairly regular intervals. The merchant followed the extension of power and his demands created a more stable and solid form of means of communication. " Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology*, 132; W. Heimpel, "Towards an Understanding of the Term Sikkum," *RA* 88.1 (1994): 5-31.

[32] The oldest and most important of the four great festivals were the Olympic Games in Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World,* 77.

[33] C. Adams, "'Travel Narrows the Mind': Cultural Tourism in Graeco-Roman Egypt," in *Travel, Geography and Culture in Ancient Greece, Egypt and the Near East*, 161-84.

[34] Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, 82-83, 134. Travelers also pursue oracles as Apollo was the fortune-telling god par excellence.

4. The Dangers and Threats

Two major factors posed a challenge to ancient travel: the natural and human factors. The natural factors included the lack of water, sand storms, bad weather and trackless roads. Forbes writes:

> Land traffic may hate and avoid the ascent and descent of hills and mountains for its real enemies are extreme cold and heat. Cold has made the extreme northern and southern regions of the earth sparsely populated, the road-building becomes costly and uneconomic, generally speaking. The heat of the tropics and its deserts and dense jungles were formidable obstacles to ancient traffic…[35]

Another challenge for ancient travelers was "to contend with bandits, infiltrators and wild beasts along the roads… the hazards of men and beasts were ubiquitous."[36] Consequently, ancient travel was not for the weak and simpleton. It took strong motivation and preparation to travel. Casson describes the dangers further:

> Our scanty sources of information do not often mention highwaymen, but there were no doubt as much a plague as pirates. Whatever police forces a city-state maintained were for keeping order within the town walls; the open country to all intents and purposes was a no-man's land. The travelers' only recourse was to move in groups or to take along plenty of slaves; they were as much as bodyguards as body servants… As a consequence, those leaving on journeys tried to hold the money and valuables they took to a bare minimum.[37]

5. Travel Inns and Taverns

Ancient travel took days or weeks to reach one's final destination. "Travel by horse or mule was about three miles per hour in normal terrain. A person could travel 25-30 miles in a day on horseback."[38] The

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[35] Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology*, 131.

[36] B. J. Beitzel, "Travel and Communication," *ABD* 6:644-48.

[37] Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, 73.

[38] Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 12-13.

duration of the travel depended on its purpose; it could vary between a few days to several months or even longer.[39]

As one meets the problem of limited daily headway, and the non-monetary economy, food cannot be carried when travelling. Hence, the traveler is at the mercy of the residents of the town or city for accommodation and respite.[40] Hence, private hospitality was necessary and practiced.[41] Only when travel became extremely common in the later years, public taverns or inns were introduced.[42] Ancient Assyrian *bīt mardīti* (lit. distance house), a modern translation as "roadside provisioning center,"[43] was an ancient Mesopotamian term for "way station" or "country inn." It designated a house or an establishment located along a major route.[44] They were situated at intervals of a day's journey. It was a place for exchange of correspondence, rest, food, drink both for travelers and animals. More importantly, public taverns and inns were dens of the prostitutes.[45] Casson writes:

> Mesopotamian public houses go back to at least the first half of the Third Millennium BCE, but supplying beds for strangers was more or less incidental, since their chief business was supplying drinks and women. The tavern-keepers themselves were mostly women; barmaid and madam must be the second and third oldest female professions. Drinks were date-palm wine and barley beer, and there were strict regulations against watering them… Decent people did not patronize taverns. A lady who had retired from the priesthood, for example, if caught entering one, was burned alive; the assumption was the paths was going there to fornicate.[46]

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[39] W. Hallo, "The Road to Emar," *JCS* 18.3 (1964): 57-88.

[40] Baines, "Travel in the Third and Second Millennium Egypt," 5-30.

[41] In Gen 18, Abraham was adamant to provide hospitality to the three men by providing cake and milk. In Gen 19, we see Lot offers hospitality to angry mobs at the expense of his daughter's virginity.

[42] N. Veldhuis, "A Multiple Month Account from the Gu'abba Rest House," *ZA* 91:1 (2001): 85-109.

[43] S. Z. Aster, "An Assyrian *bīt mardīti* Near Tel_Hadid?" *JNES* 74.2 (2015): 281-88.

[44] Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 44.

[45] J. S. Cooper, "The Job of Sex: The Social and Economic Role of Prostitutes in Ancient Mesopotamia,"in *The Role of Women in Work and Society in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Brigitte Lion (Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 209-27.

[46] Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, 37.

However, in the later period, some public taverns existed in major roads and had begun to improve their functional services. When it comes to protection from bad elements, travelers depend on the protection of the townspeople and inns. Consider Casson's words:

> Entree to the house of some important local involved more than just food and shelter—it meant that the visitor had the strong arm of his host to shield him from a small community's instinctive distrust and fear of strangers. Otherwise, in this age which knew no central authority, his sole protection was people's respect for religion, their willingness to abide by heaven's law, which clearly and unambiguously enjoined hospitality.[47]

III. The Depiction of Ancient Travel Journey in Proverbs 1-9

Having provided general characteristics of ancient road and travel, the following discussion applies the above material realities to Proverbs 1-9.

1. The Travel Language in Proverbs 1-9

One of the distinct vocabularies in Proverbs 1-9 is the language of "road" or "way". There are four Hebrew lexemes and they are used alternately.

The nominal word *ḏereḵ* occurs 29 times in the collection and 76 times in the whole book. *ʾōraḥ* occurs 12/20. *maʿgal* is used 7 times and all occurrences are found in this collection.[48] *nᵉṯîḇāh* occurs 5/6.[49] The four words are semantically synonymous. Characteristically, they are often put in conjunctive phrases or in parallel versets and in varying combinations.

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[47] Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, 47-48.

[48] Prov 2:9, 2:15, 2:18, 4:11, 4:26, 5:6, 5:21

[49] Prov 1:15, 3:17, 7:25, 8:2, 8:20

Dorsey made an intensive study on the literal and metaphoric uses of these words. He concludes that *ḏereḵ*, *maʿgal*, and *ʾōraḥ* have literal and metaphoric meaning. They can be read in at least three categories: as a literal road, a journey and, the course of travel.[50]

Consequently, most Proverbs scholars have adopted the third meaning to speak of the abstract moral and ethical milieu of the collection. Weeks reads the language of "path" possessing religious moral connotations for he associates it with the Torah.[51] Forti maintains, "*ḏereḵ* and its synonyms *ʾōraḥ, nᵉṯîḇāh, maʾgal* express a moral road that offers the choice between contrasting modes of life: one path leads to 'righteousness, justice and equity' (2:8); the other is the route taken by 'men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their course (2:5)."[52] Fox reads the collection metaphorically: "'Behavior is a path' is the ground metaphor of Prov 1-9."[53] To be sure, according to Dorsey's study on *maʾgal*, this word occurs only in poetic texts. It is hardly used to speak of path or track but "course of travel."[54] Hence, *maʾgal* supports the metaphorical reading of the text.

However, *nᵉṯîḇāh* is "never used of a journey or a enterprise, and in most instances, designates a road rather than a course of travel."[55] Apart from the four major lexemes, there are "road" or "way" terminologies which specifically speak of the literal road or street such as *šûq* in 7,8, it refers to the market area within a city, normally consisting of a street lined with shops.[56] There are only four occurrences of the word in the

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[50] Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 213. Waltke also gives three definitions in Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15*, 193-94.

[51] Stuart Weeks reads the path imagery associated with Egyptian Instructions. Stuart Weeks, *Instructions and Imagery in Proverbs 1-9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 150, 154.

[52] Tova L. Forti, *Animal Imagery in the Book of Proverbs,* VTSup 118 (Leiden: Brill Academic Publications, 2008), 103.

[53] Michael Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* AB 18A (New York: Yale University Press, 2000), 128-29.

[54] Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 235.

[55] Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 227.

[56] Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel*, 240.

Hebrew Bible and it occurs once in Proverbs. Also, another term is *ḥûṣ* to designate a city street (1:20, 7:12).

In addition, the verb *hālak* (to walk) appears in perfective aspect only once (7:19) in the collection.[57] In 20 occurrences, the collection frequently uses the imperfective aspect, participles, infinitives and imperatives to simulate the movement and motion of travel as "in the process" or as not completed at the point of reference. In other words, the Proverbs 1-9 collection seems to rhetorically project a narrative movement and development rather than a static conceptual and didactic discourse.

In sum, the suggested moral and ethical aspect of the "way" language is certainly warranted. However, such reading does not preclude rendering the language in its basic and material meaning; that is, as actual journey, and as the physical road or tracks traveled by sojourners. Hence, in the following discussion, I shall sketch out the context of travel journey.

2. The Departure

Proverbs 1-9 mirrors many aspects of ancient travel. Night travel is discouraged in ancient travel as In *The Instructions of Shuruppag* 47, "You should not travel during the night: it can hide both good and evil."[58] Travel was characteristically from the break of dawn to full day, as perhaps reflected in the language of 4:18 "But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day."

After the prologue, the reference to both parents (father and mother) in 1:8-9, 4:1-3 and 6:20-23 may function as the sending off scenes of any travelling son. The travelling son is advised to heed

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[57] Perfective aspect of *derek* in 4:11.

[58] The translation is taken from Black, J. A., Cunningham, G., Fluckiger-Hawker, E, Robson, E., and Zólyomi, G., *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (<http://www-etcsl.orient.ox.ac.uk/>) (Oxford 1998).

the warnings, counsel and instructions of his father and mother as he embarks on his journey. In these references, the language of "binding the instruction to one's body parts" is present: "bind them on your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart" (3:3); "they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck" (3:22) and "bind them upon your heart always, tie them around your neck" (6:21). The purpose of the instruction is to guarantee the son's safety, security and direction (3:23, 6:22). Such language matches with the amulet protection common among ancient travelers. It is a pendant on a chain or cord tied on the neck of the person.[59] Amulets functioned like prayers. "They are intended to offer protection from disease, misfortune, or attacks from supernatural beings or to guarantee wealth, success and victory."[60]

3. The Dangers on the Way

The traveling son is warned by the father of the dangers and threats he would meet on the journey. Proverbs 1:10-19 describes a gang syndicate enticing him to join in their crimes, which involve the ruthless killing of the innocent for self-interest and material gain. The father in his age-old wisdom even quotes the words of the gang members:

> Come with us, let us like in wait for blood; let us wantonly ambush the innocent; like Sheol let us swallow them alive and whole, like those who go down to the pit. We shall find all kinds of costly things we shall fill our houses with booty. Throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse (1:11-14).

Lucas writes pointedly, "as well as the lure of the riches there is the lure of the camaraderie of the gang."[61] The scene is that of a gang robbery that is common in ancient travel as described in the second section of this article.

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[59] Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 228-229.

[60] D. E. Aune, "Amulets," *OEANE* 1:113-115.

[61] E. Lucas, *Proverbs,* THOTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 55.

In 2:2-15, a traveler is warned of evil people along the way, characterized by evil ways and perverted speech (2:12). The language of the "crooked and devious ways" of the wicked is descriptive of the rough, unpaved and uneven ancient roads. The road on which they thread is called "way of darkness" (*darḵê-ḥōšeḵ*). The traveling son is advised to thread on the paved road named, "way of the good" (*dereḵ ṭôḇîm*, 2:20a) and "the path of the just" *(ʾorḥôṯ ṣaddîqîm*, 2:20b). These road names may be understood as moral abstractions, but it is a literary device reflecting the naming of ancient roads.

Proverbs 6:1-5 describes the son trapped in a dubious business transaction. The father instructs the son on dealings with guaranteeing a stranger's loan. This kind of risky surety emerges in the context of trading which involved taxation, commercial treaties or agreements and loans with interest. In the context of a journey with transient social relationships, the father warns the son against acting as guarantor. Michel writes,

> Most of the inhabitants of Assur were involved in this trade. Better than contracts in which merchants were looking for trusted associates, family links gave the bases for professional relationships — it was harder to rob a family member than a foreigner![62]

Similarly, Proverbs 6:12-19 describes a treacherous world where villains were hell-bent on violence and deception. The descriptions are vivid using human sensory organs (eyes, tongue, hand, feet, etc.) yet speaks generally of the universal strangers, dangers and risks in ancient travels.

4. The Enticements on the Way

The son is further warned of the enticement of the tavern hospitality offered by a Strange Woman. This Strange Woman is described in various places in the collection: 2:16-19, 5:1-14, 6:24-35,

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[62] Michel, "The Old Assyrian Trade in the light of Recent Kültepe Archives," 71-82, especially page 77.

7:5-27 and also 9:13-18. This Woman is labeled as "strange" (*zārāh*)[63] and a "foreigner" (*nokriyah*).[64] She is lost and has no direction in life (5:5-6). She is married yet unfaithful to her own marriage covenant (2:17, 6:24.29, 7:19-20).

Most noteworthy, she is a sweet-talker to entice travelers (2:16, 5:3-4, 6:24, 7:5, 21). In *Inana and Enki: c.1.3.1,* a prostitute is characteristically a charmer with words.

> You have brought with you forthright speech, you have brought with you deceitful speech, you have brought with you grandiloquent speech, you have brought with you..., you have brought with you the cultic prostitute, you have brought with you the holy tavern.[65]

While her husband is away, Strange Woman is up and about at the corner of her house during the night (7:8-9, 7:11-12), stalking and enticing the traveler to enter her house (2:18-19, 5:8, 7:6-9). This woman is described as a snare to her clients (2:19, 5:4-14, 6:27-35, 7:10-12, 7:22-23). This is reflected in *The Instructions of Shuruppak* 154: "Do not buy a prostitute; she is the sharp edge of a sickle."[66] This loose woman lives a licentious lifestyle providing casual sexual experiences (2:17, 7:1, 13-18, 7:25-26).

Prostitution in city taverns often next to a religious temple was not just a social reality but also a religious concept represented by goddess Inana. *A šir-namšub to Inana (Inana I): c.4.07.9* writes:

> When I sit in the alehouse, I am a woman, and I am an exuberant young man. When I am present at a place of quarreling, I am a woman, a figurine brought to life. When I sit by the gate of the tavern, I am a prostitute familiar with the penis; the friend of a man, the girlfriend of a woman.[67]

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[63] Prov 2:16, 5:3, 6:2.

[64] Prov 2:16, 6:24.

[65] This magnificent myth with its particularly charming story involves Inanna, the queen of heaven, and Enki, the lord of wisdom. Black, Cunningham and others, *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature,* <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>, (Oxford 1998–2006).

[66] "The Instructions of Shuruppak," trans. Bendt Alster (*COS* 1:569).

[67] Translation taken from Black, Cunningham and others, *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*.

Finally, the name of the street leading to her house are labeld as "way to death" (2:18a), "path to the spirits of the dead" (2:18b), "path to Sheol" (7:27a, 5:5), "chambers of death" (7:27b). The language used here reflects the cursed and disastrous fate in ancient tavern lodging.

The Strange Woman counterpart is the Lady Wisdom.[68] Proverbs scholars are in agreement that among these parental instructions to the son are three Wisdom Poems. They are strategically located in 1:20-33, 3:13-18 and 8:1-36. These three poems are a linguistically distinct composition from the rest of the collection. First, they do not directly address the son by starting with "my son."[69] Second, the *ʾašrê* formula is decidedly found in two of these three poems (3:13,18, 8:32,34). Lastly, in all three, wisdom is personified as Lady Wisdom. Proverbs 1:20-33 and 8:1-35 are poems where wisdom is personified in the first person singular while in Proverbs 3:13-20, wisdom is personified in the third person.

While the Strange Woman stands at the corner of her house during the night (7:9-12), the Lady Wisdom stands at the main streets and plaza (1:20), at the busiest corner (1:21a), at the city gates (1:21b, 8:2-3a), entrance doors (8:3b), and crossroads (8:2).[70] Unlike the Strange Woman who invites the travelers to enter her house (7:1-13) using sexual erotic language, Lady Wisdom simply calls out travelers to listen to her for instruction and direction of the "way of wisdom" (1:20-21, 8:1-5). The name of the road leading to her is "way of pleasantness" (*ḏarḵê-nōʿam*, 3:17a), "path of peace" *(tîḇôṯêhā šālôm*, 3:17b), "way of righteousness" (*ʾōraḥ-ṣᵉḏāqāh*, 8:20a), and "way of justice" (*nᵉṯîḇôṯ mišpāṭ*, 8:20b).

Perhaps, the Lady Wisdom may have reflected the ancient private hosts. Her role in offering hospitality is to provide the right direction to

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[68] Nili Shupak suggests these two female images are comparable to ancient Egyptian sources. She argues for a realistic reading of the imagery rather than mere metaphorical.

[69] "my son" occurs 14 times in the collection.

[70] Dorsey reads *nātîb/nětîbâ* as the general idea of an open road or roadway but not street. It does not have metaphorical nuances like journey or course of travel, but a physical roadway.

the passing traveler. Thus, by following Lady Wisdom's instruction and message, the traveler will reach his destination and avoid unnecessary detours, missing the way and going astray, unlike the disreputable Strange Woman.

5. The Motivation and Pursuit of Travel

Surely, men dominated ancient intellectual life, but there were some free women who were decent, skilled and knowledgeable[71] like the Lady Wisdom described above. Historians observed that goddesses (Nisaba, Nabû) were known to be providers of knowledge, thus, women might emulate these goddesses. After all, although rare, princesses in the Assyrian and Babylonian courts were expected to reach a certain level of scribal proficiency. Ancient women were known for their knowledge on medicine, health and midwifery.[72] In addition, ancient middle-class or courtly women were not only pre-occupied with bearing and raising children and organizing their households, but were also involved in the family business and production of goods for use or sale outside of the home.[73] For instance, Babylonian elite women were actively involved in real-estate transactions.[74] Christian Yoder in her book persuasively demonstrated "Women's Work" in Persian period Palestine. She argues that Lady Wisdom is a woman of substance reflecting the economic and public status of women at that time[75].

Therefore, as a good hostess, Lady Wisdom impresses on the young traveler to pursue wisdom *over* other usual and typical purposes of travel. It goes without saying, ancient travelers commonly pursued

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[71] Only one fragment of an Old Babylonian vocabulary text lists female scribes as scholars. There were female diviners, physicians, performers and artists, but they are rare in K. R. Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Westport, CT: Greenword Press, 1998), 151.

[72] Paul-Alain Beaulieu, "Late Babylonian Intellectual Life," in *The Babylonian World,* ed. Gwendolyn Leick (New York/London: Routledge, 2007), 473-86, esp. 480.

[73] L. D. Steele, "Women and Gender in Babylonia," in *The Babylonian World*, 299-318, esp. 303.

[74] P. Charvat, "Social Configurations in Early Dynastic Babylonia (c. 2500-2334 BC)," in *The Babylonian World*, 251-64, esp. 256.

[75] Yoder, "Woman of Substance," 113.

wealth, riches and treasures (gold, silver and jewelries) through trade and commerce[76]. But interestingly, Lady Wisdom juxtaposes wealth and wisdom in her discourse as seen below:

2:3-5 Wisdom over silver and treaures
- 2:3 If you indeed cry out for insight, and raise your voice for understanding;
- 2:4 if you seek it (wisdom) like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures
- 2:5 then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

3:14-15 Wisdom over silver, gold and jewels
- 3:14 for her (wisdom) income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold
- 3:15 She (wisdom) is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

8:10-11 Wisdom over silver and jewels
- 8:10 Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold;
- 8:11 for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

Lest it be misunderstood, the pursuit of wisdom as advised by Lady Wisdom does not necessarily sacrifice the original motivations of ancient travel since wisdom and other travel motivations are not mutually exclusive. According to Lady Wisdom, having discovered and practiced wisdom, honor, wealth, and healing will also be found. In other words, wealth, honor and riches are necessary by-products or rewards of pursuing wisdom. Consider the following verses:

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[76] There were two ancient forms of trading: personal and institutional, which traders receive financing from rich people and institutions. R. Kolinksi, "Between City Institutions and Markets: Mesopotamian Traders of the 2nd Millenium BC," in *City Administration in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 53 Recontre Assyriologique Internationale,* eds. Leonid Kogan and others (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 81-95; A. B. Knapp, "Bronze Age Mediterranean Island Cultures and the Ancient Near East, Part 1, " *BA* 55:2 (1992): 52-72.

In wisdom, there are longevity of life, riches and honor.

3:16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.

3:18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy.

In wisdom, there are honor and glory.

4:8 Prize her highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her.

4:9 She will place your head a fair garland and she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.

In wisdom, there are riches, honor, and wealth.

8:17 I love those who love me (wisdom), and those who seek me diligently find me.

8:18 Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and prosperity.

Evidences of travelling for the purpose of entertainment (i.e., Olympic Games, Temple of Zeus) and sightseeing emerged only during the Graeco-Roman period. One gains great honor and prestige as a result of travel expeditions and discoveries.[77] While there is no evidence for such motivations in the Persian period, Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 3:18-19 and 8:22-31 maintains that the great wonders of the heavens, the earth and the deep in which a traveler observes as he sojourns by foot or by carriage, is the Wisdom of Yahweh.

3:19-20 Wonder of Creation is the Wisdom of Yahweh

3:19 By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations,
by understanding he set the heavens in place;

3:20 by his knowledge the watery depths were divided,
and the clouds let drop the dew.

Moreover, one of the purposes in ancient travel is to find medicinal cure for ailments and sicknesses. "On a larger scale, the related phenomena of the pursuits of religious and medical cures took more

[77] Adams, " Travel Narrows the Mind," 161-84.

people from their homes."[78] Alternatively, Lady Wisdom presents herself as tree of life (3:18) to offer healing and restoration to the traveler as seen below.

3:8 Wisdom will bring healing for your flesh and refreshment for your bones.
4:22 for wisdom are life to those who find them and healing to all their flesh.

6. The Destination of the Journey

Finally, Proverbs 9 is strategically placed to be the last chapter of this collection. While this chapter may be read simply as a repetition of the Lady Wisdom and Strange Woman in the earlier chapters, the structure and distinct placement at the end of the collection deserve a stronger function as the two potential final destinations of the son. This may very well serve as ancient Mesopotamian "dead-end alleys, served one or more houses within a residential quarter, and were in private ownership."[79] This chapter portrays two women located at the beginning (9:1-6) and last section (9:13-18). They compete with each other to attract the traveler.[80] These women represent private homes offering hospitality to the traveler.

The first woman is Lady Wisdom who lives in a grand and extravagant palace of seven pillars.[81] The palace is in the elevated city (9:3 *from the highest point of the town*), which is common in ancient cities. Lady Wisdom has servant girls and a sumptuous banquet of choice, meat and wine prepared for the traveler. Shupak suggests this is

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[78] R. D. Biggs, "Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health in Ancient Mesopotamia, "in *Civilizations of Ancient Near East*, 1911-24.

[79] Baker, "Urban Form in the First Millenium BC," 67.

[80] B. Bow, "Sisterhood? Women's Relationships with Women in the Hebrew Bible," in *Life and Culture in the Ancient Near East,* eds. Richard Averbeck and others (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL, 2003), 205-15.

[81] Seven is a numeric symbol of completeness and wholeness. "Considering the restrictions of space in ancient Israel's cities, even supporting pillars points to an exceptionally large, grand and stately structure where numerous guests are expected. 'Saben' in this literary fiction symbolizes perfection (cf. 6:16, 24:16, 26:16, 25); her perfect house has plenty of room to entertain everyone (cf. John 14:2) ." Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 433.

as an invitation to intellectual meal: "he is invited to attend a school."[82] The way to Lady Wisdom is called "way of insight" (*derek bînāh*, 9:6). This kind of luxurious hospitality at one's final destination is not absent in the material culture of ancient travel (i.e., Abraham's three visitors (Gen 18:1-15), Joseph's hospitality to his brothers (Gen 43:32-34), Elisha and Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:8-37). Casson writes about the luxurious hospitality offered to Telemachus by Menelaus and Helen of Sparta:

> The accommodations enjoyed by the heroes were no less luxurious than their modes of travel. For they put up at each other's houses, where they were handsomely wined and dined and sent off loaded down with gifts.[83]

Meanwhile, the other woman is the Woman Folly who lived in a bare house with no servants. She is so impoverished to provide only "stolen water and bread" to the traveler. "Eating in secret" is in contrast to the banquet offered by the Lady Wisdom. The language reflects the illicit nature of the foolish woman's invitation. It reflects ancient tavern woman whose primary interest is to only offer stolen sexual pleasures. This matches the ancient public houses often connected to religious temples (i.e., Ishtar) "... supplying food and beds for strangers was more or less incidental, since their chief business was supplying drinks and women."[84] The language "the dead are there" and "her guests are in the depths of Sheol" (9:18) describe not just the risks but also the fatal fate of a traveler.

IV. Summary

Admittedly, some of the correlations attempted above may be strong while others are weak. Nonetheless, it is the corroboration of the pieces of evidence which makes this proposal worthy of consideration.

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[82] N. Shupak, "Learning Methods in Ancient Israel, " *VT* 53 (2003): 416-26.

[83] Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, 47.

[84] Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, 37.

The above reading does not nullify the abstract, metaphorical and moral milieu of the collection. But the material and physical strata of Proverbs 1-9 of travel journey provide the solid foundation for the abstract and moral construction of the collection.

ABSTRACT

Proverbs scholars have suggested various contextual milieu to understand Proverbs 1-9. The proposals include conceptual, socio-historical, traditio-historical and linguistic contexts. This article seeks to locate Proverbs 1-9 in ancient Near East context of ancient travel journey. It highlights the material realities an ancient traveler encounters in his journey.

撮　要

研究箴言之眾學者提出多種語境用以詮釋箴言一至九章，這些提議包括：隱喻—概念、社會—歷史、傳—歷史和語言學等不同框架。本文嘗試將箴言一至九章置於古近東旅者於旅程中的情境，突顯古代旅行者在物質世界旅行時，真實的感官體認與經歷。