World Order and Ma^{c}at:
A Crooked Parallel

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1. *Comparison in Wisdom Studies*

No field of Egyptian-Israelite comparative study stands on more solid ground than Wisdom literature. The fact that selections from the Book of Amenemope in some form worked their way into the Book of Proverbs proves that channels of communication were open for this most international of genres.[1] Numerous parallels between Egyptian and Israelite Wisdom texts, both in the deep patterns of thought and —even more tellingly—in incidental, non-ideological details of phrasing and order,[2] have left little doubt that many of the similarities are homologies, not analogies.[3]

The numerous parallels that have been observed for more than a century[4] add up to a strong argument that Israelite Wisdom stands in the same tradition-stream as its Egyptian predecessors.[5] Yet the very persuasiveness of Egyptological comparisons in the study of Wisdom literature has led to unwarranted assumptions of

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1. See esp. Glendon Bryce, *A Legacy of Wisdom* (Lewisburg, Penn., 1979) 66–87 and passim; also D. Römheld, *Wege der Weisheit*, BZAW 184 (Tübingen, 1989).

2. See in particular the extensive lexical study of Nili Shupak, *Where Can Wisdom Be Found? OBO* (Freiburg, 1993), which compares the semantic fields of words for wisdom, folly, and learning in Egyptian and Israelite Wisdom literature. Of course, many of the correspondences may be an artifact of shared thematic concerns rather than evidence for a sociolect or a even a technical vocabulary. But the congruency of Israelite and Egyptian wisdom terminology embraces phrases and collocations as well as semantic equivalents and includes equivalents with distinctive semantic shapes that are *not* found in Wisdom texts elsewhere.

3. To use a distinction basic to evolutionary biology, *homologies* are resemblances due to common genetic derivation, such as the bird's wings and the lizard's front legs. *Analogies* are resemblances resulting from similar adaptation to similar needs, such as the wings of bats and birds. In human culture, homology may come about by either direct derivation or influence. "Parallels" can be of either kind, and the distinction should be kept in mind.

4. The earliest modern comparison of Hebrew and Egyptian Wisdom I know of is F. Chabas, "Hébraeo-Aegyptiaca," *Trans. Soc. Bib. Arch.* 1 (1872), 173–82. Chabas compared moral doctrine in biblical and Egyptian literature generally, including some of what we now call Wisdom literature. He observed significant congruities between the two nations' moral teachings and concluded that they reflect the "common ground of divine origin" in the two cultures. Since then, most comparative studies have seen the parallels as homologies rather than analogies.

5. P. Humbert's 1929 work, *Recherches sur les sources égyptiennes de la littérature sapientiale d'Israël* (Paris, 1929), is still a valuable compendium of parallels, but one that mixes analogies and homologies. See also R. J. Williams, "The Sages of Ancient Egypt in the Light of Recent Scholarship," *JAOS* 101 (1981), 1–21. An up-to-date comparative study is much needed.

H. D. Preuss's article, "Das Gottesbild der älteren Weisheit Israels," *VTS* 23 (1971), 117–45, is, in spite of some dubious conclusions, a good assemblage of religious parallels and does make the case for a

identity and blurrings of particularity. Moreover, these comparisons have given certain theories ostensibly objective external support and endowed them with an appearance of greater solidity than they deserve.

2. Ma^{c}at and the World Order

Ma^{c}at is the central concept in Egyptian ethics and arguably in Egyptian religion generally. Ma^{c}at means truth and justice. These two principles—not as two separate concepts but as a single notion—come close to covering the range of the uses of the term Ma^{c}at. However, an impressive gallery of scholars has seen *order* or *world order* as the overarching concept expressed by Ma^{c}at.[6] The notion of Ma^{c}at as order was then put to service as the fundamental explanatory principle for Israelite as well as Egyptian Wisdom.

The theory of Ma^{c}at and the world order is the single most influential use of Egyptological comparison within the area of Wisdom literature, and it dominated Wisdom scholarship for some three decades. The theory has recently been undermined from different directions by J. Halbe,[7] C.-A. Keller,[8] F.-J. Steiert,[9] R. E. Murphy,[10] and, most effectively, L. Boström,[11] but it is still a force to be reckoned with. Those who doubt the presence of the world-order concept in Israelite Wisdom often feel it necessary to repudiate the relevance of the Ma^{c}at parallel, while assuming it to have been accurately described.[12] My critique goes deeper, arguing that both poles of the parallel have been misunderstood. The focus of this article is the Ma^{c}at parallel as a means of establishing the world-order belief in Israelite Wisdom.

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deep congruity between the theologies of the older sections of Proverbs (chaps. 10–29) and foreign, particularly Egyptian, Wisdom. Preuss, however, overlooks the distinctively Israelite characteristics of the older collections. Preuss's belief that the inherited world-order axiom is what binds Israelite wisdom to its foreign background (120–28) is predicated on the parallel that the present essay rejects. The relation between Israelite Wisdom and its foreign predecessors is dialectical, not imitative; see in particular F.-J. Steiert, *Die Weisheit Israels* (Freiburg, 1990), 28–209.

6. Notably R. Anthes, "Die Maat des Echnaton von Amarna," *JAOS* 14 (1952), 1–36, at 1; Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (New York, 1948; 1961), 63 (see below, n. 24); S. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion* (Ithaca, 1973; German ed.: 1960), 113; H. H. Brunner, "Der freie Wille Gottes in der ägyptischen Weisheit," *Sagesses du Proche Orient ancien* (Paris, 1963), 103–20, at 103.

7. J. Halbe, "'Altorientalisches Weltordnungsdenken'," *ZTK* 76 (1979), 381–418.

8. C.-A. Keller "Zum sogenannten Vergeltungsglauben im Proverbienbuch," *W. Zimmerli Festschrift* (Göttingen, 1977) 223–38.

9. F.-J. Steiert, *Die Weisheit Israels—ein Fremdkörper im AT?* (Freiburg, 1990).

10. For Murphy's developing thought on the topic, see James Crenshaw, "Murphy's Axiom: Every Gnomic Saying Needs a Balancing Corrective," in K. Hoglund, ed., *The Listening Heart*, JSOT Supp. 58 (Sheffield, 1987) 1–13. Murphy has recently demurred from the world-order hypothesis in *The Tree of Life* (New York, 1990), 115–18. He argues that perception of analogies are not evidence of an all-embracing order that regulates human conduct, nor are sayings that formulate recompense as deed-consequence rather than divine intervention (ibid., 116f.). See also R. E. Murphy, "Recent Research on Proverbs and Qoheleth," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 1 (1993), 119–40, esp. 123f.

11. Lennart Boström, *The God of the Sages* (Stockholm, 1990), chap. 3.

12. E.g., Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 115f.

Several scholars, starting with the seminal studies of H. Gese[13] and E. Würthwein,[14] argued that the concept of world order in Israel (at least in the older collections of Proverbs—chaps. 10–29) was equivalent to the Egyptian concept of Ma^cat. Gese is ambivalent on whether the parallel is the result of influence or the same processes of development.[15] Most Biblicists who accept the theory assume that the parallel is a homology, the prime instance of Egyptian influence on Israelite Wisdom.[16] Various scholars built upon this foundation and modified the structure. The most sweeping form of the hypothesis, advanced by H. H. Schmid, holds that the concept of an all-embracing, absolute cosmic order is central to the Wisdom literature of the major civilizations of the ancient Near East, and, moreover, that the concept underwent the same three-stage dialectical development in each place.[17] Schmid went further and proposed that the order concept is the ancient Near Eastern heritage underlying broad areas of Israelite thought, in which, he believes, the order was termed *ṣedeq/ṣᵉdāqāh*.[18] This analogy is weakened by the vagueness and generality of the similarities it rests on and in any case cannot explain the particular character of Wisdom literature. I will concentrate on the more focused form of the world-order hypothesis, which is more interesting because it makes a strong historical claim, namely that a specific idea was brought from Egypt to Israel with a particular genre of literature.

The world-order theory served to answer three questions implicit in the concerns of Wisdom studies: (1) In the absence of constant divine intervention—as seems to be the case in Proverbs—what effects reward and punishment? (2) In the absence of revelation—as is the case in Proverbs—how are the rules for behavior discovered? And (3) Is there a religious basis to wisdom thought?[19] The answers are: (1) There is an all-encompassing, impersonal order built into the world, which guarantees recompense by natural processes.[20] (2) This order implies rules of

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13. H. Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit* (Tübingen, 1958).

14. E. Würthwein, *Die Weisheit Ägyptens und das Alte Testament* (Marburg, 1960).

15. While allowing for the possibility that the equivalence is an analogy, Gese (*Lehre und Wirklichkeit*, 31) also affirms strong Egyptian influence on Israelite Wisdom, so it is unclear why the Ma^cat parallel, if it is as described, would not be included in the influence. Also, Gese subsumes "Die Welt als Ordnung" under the rubric "Die Aufnahme und Ausgestaltung der Weisheitslehre in Israel" (33ff.). In spite of Gese's demurral, he is clearly using the Ma^cat parallel as an argument, not only a heuristic model, for the presence of the world-order concept in Israelite Wisdom.

16. E.g., Würthwein, *Weisheit*, 4.

17. H. H. Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit*, BZAW 101 (Tübingen, 1966).

18. H.H. Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung* (Tübingen, 1968).

19. Bible scholars brood over the question of whether Proverbs, or Wisdom literature generally, is "utilitarian," "profane," and "foreign" in character—a "Fremdkörper" in the OT (e.g., Gese, *Lehre*, 2f.). For Gese (ibid.), Würthwein (*Weisheit*, 5f.), and Schmid (*Wesen*, 1–3), the question of early Wisdom's presumed eudaemonism or secularity (the two concepts are unnecessarily equated) is one of the central issues addressed.

Part of the problem lies in the framing of the question. There are several "Fremdkörpern" in the Hebrew Bible. Qohelet, Job, and the Song of Songs are all "fremd," each in its own way, and the latter is secular. Wisdom is indeed utilitarian, but to claim that it is somehow secular is peculiar on the face of it, given the large number of proverbs in all collections that speak of God.

20. This process was labelled the "Tat-Ergehen-Zusammenhang" in the highly influential article of K. Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?" *ZTK* 52 (1955) 1–42 = *Um das Prinzip*

behavior, a sort of natural law which the wise man can extract from events by empirical observation and rational deduction.[21] (3) The ideological foundation of Wisdom literature *is* religious, since the world order, like Ma^cat, was created and willed by God. Some scholars, notably Gese, added an Israelite "Sondergut," a stage of thinking beyond the old world-order assumption in which Yahweh's autonomy and free grace were affirmed.

The fuzziness of the term "order" makes the theory hard to evaluate and criticize, and this may be one reason for its popularity. To correct this, we should minimally distinguish three kinds of orders: *predictable, constructed*, and *mechanistic*.

A predictable order is one in which causal connections are usually recognizable—smokers (often) get lung cancer, drunk drivers (often) crash, and so on. We can hardly imagine a didactic literature *without* the assumption of predictability.[22] Predictability need not be perfect. The limitations of human knowledge, the inscrutability of the divine will, and a certain degree of randomness in events place limits on, but do not nullify, predictability.[23]

A constructed order is not a cause but a *result* of other processes. It seems incontrovertible that Wisdom literature—as well as prophetic, legal, and historical literature—believes that human behavior can construct an orderly society.

Mechanistic orders are universal forces existing independently of the particular things and persons and events of this world that *constrain* the course of events so as to execute and secure justice. The gods may have created such an order, but it now operates independently of them, though they may facilitate and maintain its processes. Such world orders are important in Far Eastern religions, one such being the Vedic R̥ta (which, I believe, directly influenced the way scholars described Ma^cat).[24] A mechanistic order is what is needed to do the job assigned to the

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der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments, ed. K. Koch (Darmstadt, 1972), 130–80. This volume gathers several essays discussing the question of recompense. The response of Patrick D. Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets, SBLMS* 27 (Chico, Cal., 1982), offers a more subtle and precise exegesis of the passages that supposedly demonstrate Koch's schema.

21. I argue against the theory that older Wisdom epistemology is in any way empirical in *Qohelet and His Contradictions, JSOT* Supp. 18 (Sheffield, 1989), 90–100. Qohelet is the first thinker who may be called, albeit loosely, an empiricist.

22. Halbe (*ZTK* 76 [1979], 385–95), observes that "order" in the sense of act-consequence relationship is present in most cultures. Indeed, I wonder if it is even possible to *think* without presuming a "world order" in this sense, which means no more than causality.

23. R. C. van Leeuwen, "Wealth and Poverty: System and Contradictions in Proverbs," *HS* 33 (1992), 25–36, shows that Proverbs is quite aware that experience does not always confirm order (i.e., predictability). Rather than simply appealing to order, the sages invoke a faith in divine justice that goes beyond the observable and predictable.

24. In particular, Henri Frankfort's influential and often-quoted definition of Ma^cat (*Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 63) is very similar to, and perhaps directly dependent upon, the definition of the Vedic concept of R̥ta offered by Hermann Oldenberg, *Die Religion des Veda* (Stuttgart, 1923), 194–96. For example: "R̥ta 'Recht,' 'Ordnung' = "die in der Welt herrschende Ordnung, über das durch eine höhere Macht vorgezeichnete Eintreffendessen, was eintreffen muss oder soll, vorzugweise an der Begriff des R̥ta geknüpft" . . . "Die Vorgänge, deren stetes Sichgleichbleiben oder derenregelmässige Wiederkehr die Vorstellung der Ordnung erweckt, gehorchen dem R̥ta oder ihr Geschen ist R̥ta" (194).

Heuristic use of distant analogies is quite legitimate, but it should be done explicitly and with care to prevent transferring too much of the model.

world order theory in its strong form. This order must be a natural force like gravity, that automatically and indifferently links consequence to deed. This did not exist in Egypt or Israel.

3. *How Ma^cat Works*

Ma^cat, whose etymological sense is straightness, is not order as such. It is, rather, the force that creates and maintains order, namely justice/truth, a concept that we subdivide, perhaps artificially, in English. It has a close equivalent—though without the full religious connotations—in Hebrew *mēšārīm*. *Mēšārīm* is etymologically "straightness" or "rectitude" and may be both *spoken* (e.g., Isa. 33:15; Prov. 23:16) and *done* (Dan. 11:6), and is both forensic justice (Ps. 9:9; 75:3; etc.) and right behavior in private life (Isa. 26:7).

Even if Ma^cat is in some sense world order (an issue which hinges on how we define the latter concept), it is not the sort assumed by those who apply it to Israelite Wisdom. Ma^cat does not operate independently of the Pharaonic state, society, and cult. Moreover, Ma^cat does not itself effect retribution; rather, retribution *actualizes* Ma^cat.

Ma^cat may be temporarily dislodged (historically or theoretically). In this case, Ma^cat does not disappear; rather it is "placed outside."[25] Then the king, replicating the act of creation, restores order by reinstalling Ma^cat on its seat and banishing evil.[26] In this sense, Ma^cat is order: the just and true working of society maintained or restored by the efforts of God and man. On a cosmic scale, Ma^cat does displace or "drive out" (*dr*) Isft (evil or "disorder") at creation and thereafter especially at each coronation, but it does so by divine or royal agency.[27] Nowhere, so far as I know, is Ma^cat said to execute the punishment for specific violations of Ma^cat or to reward conformity to it. If an agent of recompense is mentioned, it is god, king, or society. People and gods do Ma^cat; Ma^cat doesn't do Ma^cat.

Ma^cat is not an automaton maintaining justice by impersonal processes. If Ma^cat is so understood, common metaphors such as the god "lives on Ma^cat,"[28] or "enjoys" it, or is "embraced" by it become otiose.[29] One cannot really "speak" world order or "do" world order or "make world order great."[30] Only by considerable manipulation can the concept of world order make sense in these clichés, but then we lose the heuristic value of the concept. These things can, however, be predicated of truth and justice. The world-order hypothesis blurred the Egyptian particularities of

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25. *rdi.tw m3^ct r rwty*; Khakheperre-sonbu (BM 5656, rto 10–11).

26. Neferty (Pap. Leningrad 1116B, 69).

27. E.g., Pap. Sallier I, 8, 9f. On the formula, see A. de Buck, "La Littérature et la politique . . . ," in M. David et al., eds., *Symbolae Van Oven* (Leiden, 1946), 8–11.

28. Discussed in J. Assmann, *Ma^cat: Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im alten Aegypten* (Munich, 1990), 211f. The sun god, to whom Ma^cat is offered, lives on it, as do they for whom Ma^cat is done in the sense of an ethical duty, namely the king and Osiris. "Das Prinzip Ma^cat stiftet eine Sphäre der Aufeinander-Bezogenheit alles Handelns, in der die Tat zum Täter zurückkehrt und der einzelne folgerichtig von dem 'lebt,' was in Wort und Tat 'aus ihm hervorgeht'" (ibid., 212). In cultic terms, God "lives" or is nourished from the Ma^cat that is offered to him as symbolic food.

29. For examples, see Assmann, *Ma^cat*, passim, esp. chap. VI.

30. For the idiom, see *JEA* 32 (1946), pl. VI, 9–10, 46; discussed in Assmann, *Ma^cat*, 211f.

this most Egyptian of concepts and substituted a grand theological construct of modern design.

As Assmann shows, Ma^{c}at resides in and absolutely requires social solidarity for its realization.[31] Interestingly, Keller has argued that in Israelite Wisdom, social solidarity is a greater factor than natural processes.[32] This *is* a parallel, but it has nothing to do with the sort of world order that was posited to explain the concept of justice in Wisdom literature.   ,

The idea of Ma^{c}at did not and could not exist in Israel. Ma^{c}at, as Jan Bergman says,[33] was the foundation myth of the Pharaonic state and was inextricable from the Egyptian religion and hierarchy. The most important and frequent statements about Ma^{c}at, such as that Re lives on Ma^{c}at, or that Ma^{c}at is the daughter of Re, or rites such as the daily offering of Ma^{c}at to Re, or images such as Ma^{c}at in the prow of Re's boat, can have no meaning outside an Egyptian context. Only by stripping Ma^{c}at of its distinctive character can one even claim to find a parallel in Israel. Then, however, the parallel is not to Ma^{c}at but to a scholarly construct. If we knew for a fact that some distillation or apocopation of Ma^{c}at did find its way into Proverbs, we could not look to Ma^{c}at as the key to the worldview of Israelite Wisdom, but could at most assert that Israelite Wisdom utilized that denatured concept. That, however, would give us little insight into Israelite Wisdom.

In the matter of world order, a genuine parallel can be drawn to Egyptian thought: since there was no mechanistic world-order concept in Egyptian Wisdom, we may conclude that Israelite Wisdom needed no such thing either. Put positively, the place of Ma^{c}at in Egyptian Wisdom shows that practical advice with utilitarian incentives *can* have a religious foundation and express a religious ethos. Hence so can Israelite Wisdom, though it is rooted in a very different religion.

4. *Did Ma^{c}at Disappear?*

One objection to the use of the Ma^{c}at parallel, raised by both Steiert (pp. 25f.; 31f.) and Boström (pp. 95–96), is the assertion the older Egyptian Ma^{c}at concept was not what influenced Israelite Wisdom. According to a theory set forth by H. Brunner[34] and developed by J. Assmann,[35] the classic Ma^{c}at concept, namely of a world order that automatically connected an action to its consequences,[36] was replaced in

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31. Ibid., 58–91.

32. K.-A. Keller, "Vergeltungsglauben," 223–38.

33. Jan Bergman, "Zum 'Mythus vom Staat' im alten Ägypten," in H. Biezais, ed., *The Myth of the State* (Stockholm, 1972), esp. 80–102.

34. H. Brunner, "Der freie Wille Gottes," *Sagesses . . .*, 103–20. See also G. Fecht, *Literarische Zeugnisse zur "Persönlichen Frömmigkeit, AHAW* (Heidelberg, 1965).

35. Jan Assmann, "Persönliche Frömmigkeit," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, 4:951–63; and "Weisheit, Loyalismus and Frömmigkeit," in E. Hornung and O. Keel, eds., *Studien zu altägyptische Lebenslehren*, *OBO* 28 (1979), 12–70.

36. Even according to this conception, Ma^{c}at in the classical period was not an absolutely impersonal, Karma-like automatism. God, explicitly or implicitly, is the agent, and the punishment is sometimes called "the power of God" (Brunner, "Freie Wille," 104). In the belief system of personal piety, God not only oversees and executes recompense, but his free and incalculable will determines human fate, independently of the laws of Ma^{c}at.

the New Kingdom by a religious stance known as "personal piety." In personal piety, Ma^cat in the earlier sense recedes, to be replaced by the direct and free intervention of God to effect reward and punishment and determine man's fate. Put differently, Ma^cat comes to merge with the divine will. Success and failure now depend on God's decision. A prime example of this stance is Amenemope, as in the counsel:

> Indeed, you do not know the plans of God,
> so you should not weep for the morrow (§21).

Other examples are Amenemope §§3, 5, 8, and 15. Steiert[37] argues that we should not seek a parallel in a notion of Ma^cat that disappeared in the NK, before Israel came on the scene. This critique implies a concession I would not make.

While the complex of personal piety as a whole is indeed a feature of the NK (with some forerunners), in the matter at issue here—the nature of recompense and the freedom of the divine will—the ideas associated with personal piety are well attested in the Old and Middle Kingdom. The OK Instruction to Kagemeni states: "One does not know what will happen, what god does when he punishes" (ii, 2). Ptahhotep (late OK) emphasizes God's free will and his sometimes inscrutable direction of human affairs: "One knows not what may happen, that he might understand the morrow" (343; var.: "There is no one who knows his [god's] plans, that he might plan for the morrow"); similarly 115f.[38] A variation of this principle also appears in the MK Eloquent Peasant (B 1, 183f.). Direct divine intervention in individual human affairs is also an early belief. Ptahhotep says that God punishes schemes (§6), that God's will, not man's, prevails (§6); that God gives growth in the field (§9); that wealth is a gift of God (§30). While the tone of humility and deep piety in Amenemope and Anii is new, none of the sayings in NK Wisdom that supposedly show the eclipse of Ma^cat are unparalleled in earlier Wisdom.[39] It is true that in the NK Wisdom does not assume a simple *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*, but it never did.

M. Lichtheim's careful study of Ma^cat in Egyptian autobiographies[40] defines Ma^cat in a way that distinguishes it from a (mechanistic) world order. In the OK, she says, "[Maat] was the principle of right order by which the gods lived, and which men recognized as needful on earth and incumbent upon them" (p. 19). In other words, order is a standard, not a mechanism. It is primordial and lasting, but requires gods and humans for its fulfillment. Ma^cat is not the totality of virtue, though the range of actions called doing Ma^cat does expand with time (p. 32). "Far from being a blanket term for virtuous behavior, Ma^cat meant specifically veracity and fair dealing" (p. 37). Ma^cat is primarily a public virtue; private "goodness" is not necessarily Ma^cat. In the MK, Ma^cat comprised three aspects: king, society, and individual. In the eighteenth dynasty, piety, the strong feeling of the presence of

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37. Ibid.

38. Brunner ("Freie Wille," 104), says that this saying speaks only of the shattering of wicked schemes. But that is not true of the other places where the fragility of human planning is declared.

39. The NK Amenakhte and Pap. Chester Beatty IV do not manifest this personal piety. Amemenope's personal piety is not a universal characteristic of the age.

40. Miriam Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, OBO 120 (Göttingen, 1992), 9–103.

the gods, was added to the constellation of virtues called Ma^{c}at; this trend intensified in the Ramesside period (p. 54). Having traced the history of the concept, Lichtheim concludes: "over the span of two millennia, the basic understanding of Maat doing and its rewards had not changed" (p. 97). A statement like Amenemope's, "As for Ma^{c}at, the great gift of god—he gives it to whom he wishes" (§20), does not mean the disappearance of Ma^{c}at. The statement is simply an observation that not everybody is willing or able to judge fairly. "Wisdom and piety were partners in the endeavor to formulate and teach the right kind of living" (p. 100).

5. *Lady Wisdom as Ma^{c}at*

Once Ma^{c}at was posited as the foundational idea of Israelite Wisdom, scholars naturally went looking for clearer traces of the Ma^{c}at principle in the book of Proverbs. Christa Kayatz, in her valuable form-critical study of Proverbs 1–9,[41] proposed that the goddess Ma^{c}at served as the model ("Vorbild") for personified Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8. Kayatz adduces a variety of parallels to make her case. She cautiously grants that Ma^{c}at is not a direct model for personified Wisdom; yet a complex of parallels leads her to conclude that

> [d]er Schluss liegt nahe, dass die ägyptischen Vorstellungen von der Ma^{c}at als einem geliebten Götterkind der israelitischen Konzeption der Weisheit als einem vor Jahweh spielenden Liebling als Modell gedient haben (97).
> . . . [M]anche Vorstellungen, Einzelzüge, und Motive von der Maatgestalt offensichtlich, andere mit grosser Wahrscheinlichkeit auf die Konzeption der personifizierten und hypostasierten Weisheit eingewirkt haben, nämlich: die vor der Schöpfung Präexistente, das spielende Götterkind, die Geliebte, die Lebens- und Schutzspenderin, die im Königsregiment Wirksame (119).

All these components she finds in Egypt, and she believes them to have descended from the goddess Ma^{c}at.

The Lady Wisdom-Goddess Ma^{c}at linkage is flawed. One major problem (as Kayatz concedes) is that nowhere does *Ma^{c}at* give such a speech; in fact, she never seems to speak at all. At the same time, many other gods do speak in similar ways (see below). Also, some of the texts Kayatz cites as parallels are not really about (let alone spoken by) Ma^{c}at. One that seems to be, Coffin Text Sp. 80 (spoken by Atum), actually describes Tefnut, who is allegorically glossed as Ma^{c}at by syncretistic name-replacement ("truth is her name"). The text gives equal attention to her brother Shu.

The model speech of Ma^{c}at to which Kayatz compares Proverbs 8 exists nowhere in its entirety; it is a scholarly construct. Nevertheless, there are significant *partial* parallels to Proverbs 8 (and the other Lady Wisdom speeches), and homologies need not be perfect matches. The best of these parallels, however, have nothing to do with Ma^{c}at. Texts that Kayatz[42] regards as particularly akin to Proverbs 8 are a declaration of Ramses II and a speech of Isis on the Ptolemaic Metternich magical stele. In the latter, Isis calls:

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41. Ch. Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1–9* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1966).

42. *Studien*, 92.

Come to me, come to me.
See, my mouth possesses life.
I am a daughter known in her city,
at whose utterance reptiles are expelled,
because my father educated me to knowledge.
I am his daughter, the beloved one (born) of his body. . . .

I am Isis, the divine,
mistress of magic, who does magic,
effective in pronouncing spells.[43]

If these parallels are valid, why single out Ma^cat as Wisdom's forerunner?

The literary form known as the sacral "I-style" or "self-revelation style," to which Proverbs 8 is related (especially in 12ff.), is a commonplace of hymnology and cultic drama. This form was well known in the Hellenistic period,[44] and Greek as well as Egyptian texts show its influence.[45] We can compare a wide range of texts, including a Greek magical papyrus[46] and the Isis aretalogies (in Greek, but of Egyptian derivation).[47] The Hellenistic parallels to Proverbs 8—which are in my view the strongest—also show that Lady Wisdom's mythic or literary background may be Egyptian without necessarily being ancient.[48] The Isis aretalogies, along with Isis-worship generally—were disseminated at a time when Egypt enjoyed prestige and influence in the realm of religio-magical esoterica throughout the Mediterranean.

Neither is the self-revelation form exclusively Egyptian, nor are all the motifs Kayatz describes. In various Sumerian and Akkadian hymns, goddesses characterize and extol themselves. The Gula Hymn of Bullutsa-Rabbi, for example, quotes (within a third-person frame) the goddess's self-praise, which boasts of her father's

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43. Lines 57–58, 59; see C. E. Sander-Hansen, *Die Texte der Metternichstele*, An. Äg. 7 (Copenhagen, 1956), 35–42; cf. Kayatz, *Studien*, 89. Other similarities are Isis's use of the "I am X" formula and her declaration of the favor her father showed her at birth (l. 49).

44. Jan Bergman, *Ich bin Isis* (Uppsala, 1968), 219–33, esp. 222f. Dieter Müller, *Ägypten und die griechischen Isis-Aretalogien* (Berlin, 1961), 16, suggests that this form derives from the style of oriental or Greek-oriental royal inscriptions.

45. Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos* (Leipzig, 1913), 177–206, described the widespread Hellenistic "soteriologischer Redetypus," in which εγω ειμι (or συ ει or ουτος εστιν) is extended by participial or relative clauses. This is not precisely what we have in Proverbs 8, but it is similar enough to justify associating Wisdom's speech and the "soteriological" genre with a broader self-revelation form.

46. These texts (without the comparison) are translated and discussed by G. A. Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten* (Tübingen, 1923), 108–11.

47. See n. 44, above. Both Bergman and Müller (*Ägypten*, passim) illuminate the Egyptian background of the aretalogies. Müller finds native antecedents for about half the features. The native elements would, however, have been accessible to an international audience only through the medium of Greek.

48. The earliest extant aretalogies belong to the first century B.C.E., but their elements are firmly rooted in earlier traditions.

Isis religion left an imprint on the Alexandrian Book of Wisdom. See, *inter alia*, Burton Mack, *Logos und Sophia*, SUNT 10 (Göttingen, 1973), 66–72, 90–95; John S. Kloppenborg, "Isis and Sophia in the Book of Wisdom," *HTR* 75 (1982), 57–84. Kloppenborg emphasizes that Sophia was assimilated to the Hellenistic, not the native, Isis, and the parallels are found in materials and notions easily available to Greek speakers.

affection and her attractiveness as spouse."[49] Thematic parallels to Lady Wisdom could be gathered if we scan the range of Mesopotamian religious texts as Kayatz did the Egyptian. Compare "This goddess, right counsel is hers"[50] with "Mine are counsel and good sense, I am understanding, power is mine" (Prov. 8:14); or "In their assembly her utterance is noble, surpassing"[51] with Prov. 8:6.

Similar criticism can be levelled against Othmar Keel's attempt to locate the background of Wisdom's playing before Yahweh (Prov. 8:30f.) in the motif of Ma^{c}at's playing before Re.[52] He adduces many examples of *playing* in Egyptian iconography, but none of this in any way identifies Lady Wisdom with Ma^{c}at, especially since Ma^{c}at herself is never shown playing before a god. One example Keel musters is a scene from Dendera (ca. 100 CE!) in which we see a boy playing a sistrum before Hathor, with Ma^{c}at sitting behind him. This may indicate a "Verbindung" between Ma^{c}at and "playing,"[53] but it does not show *Ma^{c}at* playing. Keel, like Kayatz, has *created* a parallel from bits and pieces from here and there.

None of the suggested parallels, even when genuine, establish the Ma^{c}at homology, but an untendentious comparison does yield a conclusion: Lady Wisdom does not speak or behave much like Ma^{c}at; she is therefore probably *not* modelled on her.

The Egyptian connection does, however, seem to be strongest, with distinct parallels (some brought by Kayatz) to be found in clichés and tropes, such as the declaration of mutual love,[54] the pre-existence of a personified abstraction, the motif of a beloved child playing before her divine father, as well as the focus on the time of creation—*qedem mip^{c}ālā(y)w* in Prov. 8:22. In Egyptian cosmology, the "first time"—the moment of creation—is paradigmatic for all time.

A hypothesis worthy of further examination is that texts about *Isis* had special influence on the shaping of Lady Wisdom. Texts of Isis-worship provide a more likely vehicle for transmission of concepts, themes, and formulae than do, e.g., the Coffin Texts that Kayatz emphasizes. Isis was mistress of the House of Life (the library and scriptorium joined to large temples). She was renowned in ancient Egypt and throughout the Greco-Roman world for her wisdom and might. Isis is the consummately *wise* goddess:

> (Ich bin) Isis, die göttlich ist durch die Formeln meines Mundes und durch die Weisheit meines Herzens, die mein Vater, der Gott, mir gegeben hat.[55]

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49. Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses* (Bethesda, Md., 1993), 491–99; cf. 901. Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 207–20, mustered several Babylonian and Egyptian parallels to show the Oriental background of the "soteriologischer Redetypus" in which εγω ειμι is extended by participle or relative clauses.

50. Ibid., 66.

51. Ibid.

52. Othmar Keel, *Die Weisheit 'spielt' vor Gott* (Freiburg, 1974).

53. Ibid., 59 and Abb. 33.

54. "I love him who loves me" (Prov. 8:17; cf. vv. 20f., 34) and, e.g., "Isis loves him who loves her" (Kayatz, 98–102). As far as I can tell, Ma^{c}at herself does not say anything similar. Note, also, that the formula is used in 2 Sam. 19:7a, a passage which shows no Egyptian or sapiential influences.

55. pBM III, pl. 64; quoted from LÄ II, 192.

Isis speaks in her aretalogies much as Lady Wisdom does in hers. Compare the following lines of the great aretalogy from Cyme[56] with Proverbs 8:

(3a)	I, Isis, am the ruler of all lands,
(3b)	and I was educated by Hermes. . . .
(4)	I set down laws for men and legislated that which no one can alter.
(5)	I am the eldest daughter of Kronos. . . .
(16)	I have made justice powerful. . . .
(28)	I have made justice more powerful than gold and silver.

In 12–15 she grandly recounts her work as creator. Parallels in the Metternich Stele are quoted above.

Unlike Isis, Lady Wisdom is not lawgiver or creator. She is present but passive in both activities: *by her* kings rule and potentates makes laws (Prov. 8:15f.). She was *with* God when *he* created the world (27–31). She did not create or empower justice, but she *speaks* truth, and she *is* righteous, and she *possesses* justice (vv. 6–8, 18, 20). She performs her work not by magic but by affecting men's hearts.

The main problem with locating Lady Wisdom's background in Isis traditions is the time gap. The aretalogies, the only texts presenting a cluster of correspondences and not just isolated parallels, are first attested in the first century B.C.E. Hellenized Isis worship, to be sure, is earlier. The incorporation of Isis in Greek worship in Egypt begins in the fourth century, but the spread of Hellenistic Isis veneration belongs to the mid-third century and beyond. Isis becomes the dominant divinity in the late third century and second century B.C.E.[57] This time-frame seems too late for even the latest redaction of Proverbs. Finding antecedents for individual features in native Egyptian religion cannot bridge the gap, because the aretalogies are first attested in the Roman period, and because direct influence from native Egyptian religious sources is extremely unlikely, especially in the Hellenistic period. Greek is far more likely to have been the mode of transmission. The hypothesis may still be valid but requires assuming the existence of unattested forerunners of the Greek aretalogies.

If this background could be confirmed, it would not necessarily mean that Lady Wisdom is an Isis figure, but only that Hellenistic Isis-texts were the major (and perhaps indirect) source of notions about how a wise goddess would speak and reveal herself to mankind. Indeed, Lady Wisdom may well be an Isis *displacement.* Proverbs 8 would be appropriating formulas from Isis-speeches in order to offer a better, and deliberately distinct, substitute. Other mythological traditions too may have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the shaping of Lady Wisdom's portrait.

If we wish to establish the existence of a world-order concept in Israelite Wisdom, we must do so independently of Ma^cat. But it is hard to imagine that without the crutch of the supposed Ma^cat parallel scholars would have discerned a world-order idea in a proverb such as "Treasures unjustly gained are of no use, but righteousness saves from death" (10:2), merely because it speaks of deed and

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56. Bergman, *Ich bin Isis*, 301. For a full textual study, see Richard Harder, *Karpokrates von Chalkis und die memphitische Isispropaganda, APAW*, phil.-hist. Kl. (1943), 14.

57. The literature is vast. Still useful is the survey of the spread of Egyptian cults by T. S. Brady, *The Reception of the Egyptian Cults by the Greeks*, Univ. of Missouri Studies 10, 1 (1935), chap. 2.

effect.[58] These are just assertions of predictability. Nor would evidence for world order be detected in an aphorism such as "Where there is no wood, the fire dies down, and where there is no slanderer (*nirgān*), quarrels subside" (26:20), just because it draws an analogy between events in the social and natural domains.[59] Such analogies are always rhetorical tropes; nowhere does a sage discover truths about the moral realm by observing the workings of nature.

Comparative study should make maximal use of the original context of the donor side of a parallel in interpreting *it*, but then avoid transferring too much of that context to the presumed receptor culture.[60] The Israelites (or their Canaanite predecessors) could draw on Egyptian Wisdom—not necessarily aware of its origins—without importing the entirety of the genre or even its most basic axioms. The Israelite sages could not have undertaken a survey of Egyptian texts of all genres and extracted a highly abstract, philosophical idea such as the world order and made that the basis of their own philosophy. The sages of Israel were not Egyptologists.

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58. Gese, *Lehre*, 34, who lists Prov. 10:2, 4, 15, 30; 11:21; 12:11, 14; 13:25 as examples that show that "auf Schritt und Tritt begegnet uns die Lehre von der Entsprechung von Tat und Folge, eben der Entsprechung, die der Ägypter durch die Geltung der Maat garantiert sah" (ibid.).

59. See Gese, *Lehre*, 33–38. Würthwein, *Weisheit Ägyptens*, 8–9, makes the same argument.

60. This differs from the "holistic" principle that Talmon advocates: "[T]he 'holistic' approach always should be given preference over the 'atomistic.' The abstraction of a concept, an aspect of society, cult or literature from its wider framework, and its contemplation in isolation, more often than not will result in distortion; its intrinsic meaning ultimately is decided by the context, and therefore may vary from one setting to another"; Shemaryahu Talmon, "The 'Comparative Method' in Biblical Interpretation—Principles and Problems," *VTS* 29 (1978), 320–56, at 56). This is true so far as it goes, but if Talmon means that only entireties can be compared, the rule is mistaken. Genres, ideas, motifs, and the like *can* transfer in isolation. While naturally gaining new significances in the process, they are nevertheless true homologic parallels.

A good analogy to this process is Edward FitzGerald's translation-rewriting of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. In this form the *Rubaiyat* had considerable influence in Victorian England and did succeed in conveying some of Omar's ideas, yet it transmitted little of the astronomical or Sufic context that was so important to the author. The analogy can be pushed further, since the original *Rubaiyat* incorporated earlier verses, while FitzGerald added lines and phrases from other Persian poems.