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WHO WERE THE “MEN OF HEZEKIAH” (PROVERBS XXV 1)?

by MICHAEL CARASIK

Though the word “king” appears more than 30 times in the book of Proverbs, the only Israelite kings actually mentioned by name there are Solomon and Hezekiah. The headings in Prov. 1:1, 10:1 and 25:1 identify the proverbs they introduce as “Solomon’s,” fitting the description of his wisdom in 1 Kings. The emergence of the Israelite wisdom tradition with the consolidation of Solomon’s kingdom is plausible enough—a strong central government needs an educated class of administrators—and indeed such writers as A. Alt and G. von Rad have tried to treat this “Solomonic enlightenment” as a historical fact.¹ The consensus of opinion today, however, is better represented by this statement of James L. Crenshaw: “In sum, our examination of the biblical traditions about Solomon’s wisdom discovers no shred of evidence deriving from the era of that king.”² Instead, wisdom traditions are assumed to have clustered around the literary character of Solomon as the legendary wisest of all men. By contrast, the notice in Prov. 25:1

¹ More recently this view has been defended in somewhat subtler fashion by Walter A. Brueggemann, “The Social Significance of Solomon as a Patron of Wisdom,” in John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (ed.), *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Ind., 1990), pp. 117-32, on which see further below.

² *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta, 1981), p. 99. The question is discussed thoroughly by R. N. Whybray, “Wisdom Literature in the Reigns of David and Solomon,” in Tomoo Ishida (ed.), *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays* (Winona Lake, 1982), pp. 13-26.

that these particular Solomonic proverbs were “transmitted” (he’tiqu)³ by the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, seems rather specific. It is this specificity, and the notice’s apparent lack of tendentiousness,⁴ which have led scholars to accept it as historical evidence for “a school or scribal establishment under royal patronage, where literary records of the past were assembled and new literature was produced.”⁵ “There is no reason,” argues Crenshaw, “for the tradition to arise associating Hezekiah with wisdom unless a historical basis for such thinking existed.”⁶ My purpose in this article is to suggest that there is, in fact, another reason for this association, and hence Prov. 25:1 should not necessarily be taken at face value as historical.⁷

³ The root עתק seems to have had an original meaning of “proceed” or “advance”, as in Gen. 12:8, 26:22. The unusual usage of Prov. 25:1, by an extension of this meaning, is generally taken as indicating that the men of Hezekiah were passing along wisdom from an earlier time, that is, copying it. The notion of “editing” suggested by Whybray may be understood as part of the process but is not, I think, expressed in this verb (“The Sage in the Israelite Royal Court,” in *The Sage in Israel* [n. 1], p. 138).

⁴ So R. B. Y. Scott, “Solomon and the Beginnings of Wisdom,” *SVT* 3 (1960), p. 273.

⁵ R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs/Ecclesiastes* (Garden City, N.Y., 1968), p. 155.

⁶ (n. 2) pp. 25 and 94. More recently, similar sentiments are expressed by Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (New York, 1990) pp. 5 and 22, and by a wide range of scholars in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*.

⁷ Patrick Skehan attempted to make the same point. But he gave no reason for the use of Hezekiah’s name in the verse other than its numerological value. See “A Single Editor for the Whole Book of Proverbs” (revised version) in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Poetry and Wisdom* (Washington, DC, 1971), 23; the article is reprinted in James L. Crenshaw (ed.), *Studies in*

Instead, I propose to explain the reference to Hezekiah as another example of a literary phenomenon found elsewhere in the Bible, in the historical superscriptions to certain psalms.⁸ On the assumption that the expression *ledavid* indicated an authorial or at least biographical connection to King David, a number of psalms acquired superscriptions linking their composition to specific events in David's life, of which most are known to us from the books of Samuel. Ps. 3, for example, is entitled, "A psalm of David, when he fled from his son Absalom." The key to the connection between Ps. 3 and the report of Absalom's rebellion in Samuel, what Elieser Slomovic calls the "germinal linguistic link," is the expression *qamim 'alay*, "those who rise up against me," in v. 2 of the psalm. The same expression is found describing Absalom and his supporters in 2 Sam. 18:31 (*haqqamim 'aleka*) and 32 (*qamu 'aleka*). This gave the glossator the crucial clue to which historical event matched his psalm. Once the psalm was linguistically hooked onto the event, thematic similarities were found which appeared to confirm the attachment. Besides the general theme of deliverance from the foe (which would be applicable

Ancient Israelite Wisdom (New York, 1976). The editor might equally well have chosen the word *hkhnym* or, even better, the phrase *mlky-yhwdh*, both of which have the same numerological value. The arithmetic does not even work correctly: *hzqyh* = 130, but there are 139 verses and, according to the analysis of Eissfeldt, 128 proverbs in the section. (See Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* [Oxford and New York and Evanston, 1965], p. 475 = *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* [3rd ed., Tübingen, 1964], p. 643). Finally, Skehan's hypothesis does not explain the words *'nsy-hzqyh*, "men of Hezekiah."

⁸ The standard articles on this are Brevard S. Childs, "Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis," *JSS* 16 (1971-72); pp. 137-50, and Elieser Slomovic, "Toward an Understanding of the Formation of Historical Titles in the Book of Psalms," *ZAW* 91 (1979), pp. 350-80.

in many cases), Slomovic and Brevard Childs note the following: the mockery of v. 3 of the psalm seems to recall the mockery of David by Shimei the son of Gera in 2 Sam. 16:7-8; when God holds the psalmist's head high in v. 4, this is compensation for David's climbing the Mount of Olives with his head covered in 2 Sam 15:30; when in v. 6 the psalmist lies down, sleeps and wakes again, this alludes to David's resting at the Jordan (2 Sam. 16:14, 17:22). Thus, once the correct verbal link was found, an interpretative reading of the contents of the psalm confirmed the historical connection. There are similar links, both linguistic and topical, which connect Hezekiah's wisdom with Solomon's, and Prov. 25 with the historical situation of 2 Kgs 18-19.⁹ Such links provide not just a plausible but even a likely reason for a glossator looking for a historical *Sitz im Leben* for the collection of Prov. 25-29 to connect it with Hezekiah.

The most basic clue that links Hezekiah with Solomon-like wisdom is the verb *hiskil*, "to be prosperous, successful, intelligent." The word is a leitmotif of the book of Proverbs, appearing (in various forms) once in 1:3, the introduction to the book as a whole, and another dozen times in 10:1-22:16, the first Solomonic collection of proverbs—13 out of 61, over a fifth of all occurrences of the word in the entire Bible.¹⁰ Now wisdom in general was an attribute not considered characteristic of all Israelite kings, but of Solomon alone. The single apparent exception is the verb *hiskil*, which appears in 1 Kgs 2:3, when David says to Solomon, "Keep the charge of the LORD your God ... in order that you may succeed (*taskil*) in whatever you

⁹ Since some of the passages I adduce are found only in Kings, the connection is clearly with it and not with the parallels in Isa. 36-37 or 2 Chr. 32.

¹⁰ The noun from this root, *sekel*, shows a similar pattern: once in Prov. 3:4, four times in the first Solomonic collection, and once more in 23:9, the succeeding "instructional" material, for a total of 6 out of 16 biblical occurrences.

undertake and wherever you turn”¹¹ and only once again in Kings: in 2 Kgs 18:7, in the introduction to the reign of Hezekiah: “And the LORD was always with him; he was successful (*yaskil*) wherever he turned.”¹² For a later interpreter who understood *hiskil* as an indication of wisdom, the use of *hiskil* would point to Hezekiah as the Israelite king who carried on Solomon’s legacy of wisdom.

We can trace the connection further by continuing with the rest of 2 Kgs 18:7, which explains *yaskil* in military-political terms by describing what was evidently the most notable of Hezekiah’s successes: “He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him.” And it is, in fact, in the story of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem that we find literary confirmation of Hezekiah’s being conversant with proverbial wisdom. This is in 2 Kgs 19:3, where the speakers are Hezekiah’s emissaries to Isaiah: “Thus said Hezekiah: This day is a day of distress, of chastisement, and of disgrace. For ‘the babes have reached the birthstool, but the strength to give birth is lacking.’” I have added the word “for” and the single quotation marks to make clear that the second half of the verse is a proverb.¹³ They really represent the Hebrew word *ki*, left untranslated here by the NJPS (as by the New Revised Standard Version); this word is used several times elsewhere in the historical books to introduce proverbs (cf. Judg. 8:21; 2 Sam. 11:25). The utter lack of topicality of the second half of the verse if taken literally is sufficient to

¹¹ Biblical translations are taken from the New Jewish Publication Society version.

¹² Despite the similarity in translation, “turn” is a different Hebrew verb in each of the two verses.

¹³ John Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary* (2nd ed., London and Philadelphia, 1970), p. 685, notes that this statement “probably repeats a popular proverb.”

make clear that its use is metaphoric; its being a “couplet”, as the commentaries recognize,¹⁴ also separates it from the surrounding text, even from the somewhat elevated phrase which introduces it.¹⁵ The lack of a more explicit citation of these words leaves open the question whether this was a proverb newly coined by Hezekiah; I think it more likely it was traditional, as *ki* implies. The reference in Hos. 13:13 to the phrase *mashber banim*, “the birthstool of babes,” is as likely as not an allusion to this very proverb. In any event, Hezekiah is clearly (to the interpreter) following in the proverb tradition of Solomon. What is more, he is the only Judean king who uses a proverb (though David uses several before becoming king).¹⁶ Note, by the way, that the word *tokhehah* in the introduction to the proverb has a particularly Proverbial (with a capital P) ring. This word *tokhehah* is rare,¹⁷ but it recalls to the ear a more common word from the same root, *tokhahat*. This latter word is a favorite of the book of Proverbs, where a full two-thirds of

¹⁴ E.g. Gray (n. 13); similarly, James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (Edinburgh, 1951), p. 490.

¹⁵ I follow William McKane in seeing openness to interpretation as the identifying characteristic of a particular kind of proverb; though the similes and metaphors of Prov. 25 do attempt to fix the interpretation of their images, these images at least play a greater role there than in most of the Book of Proverbs (*Proverbs: A New Approach* [London and Philadelphia, 1970], esp. pp. 23 and 414). On the assistance form and content can give us in identifying proverbs within a non-proverbial text, see Carole R. Fontaine, *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament* (Sheffield, 1982), pp. 24-5.

¹⁶ David uses proverbs in 2 Sam. 24:13 and 11:25. In the rest of Kings, only Ahab uses a proverb (1 Kgs 20:11); but he is obviously unsuitable to be called a successor of Solomon.

¹⁷ It is found elsewhere only in Hos. 5:9; Ps. 149:7; and in Isa. 37:3, the text parallel to ours.

its 24 biblical occurrences are found. This and the use of *yaskil* combine to make Hezekiah the clear choice of a glossator to fill the role of Solomon's literary executor.

So far we have been able to trace the connection of Hezekiah with Solomon's wisdom in general and have seen him using a proverb describable as "Solomonic." But there are more direct connections with the material in Prov. 25 as well. Similes and metaphors like that of 2 Kgs 19:3 are particularly concentrated in this section of Proverbs.¹⁸ The fact that the proverb Hezekiah chose had this metaphoric character, quite unusual in the first Solomonic collection of 10:1-22:16, may have suggested that these similitudes were his particular proverbial specialty. More particularly, one notices that Prov. 25:2-7, the verses which immediately follow the heading, are a cluster of *melekh* sayings. This may have suggested or at least confirmed the need to link the new section with the name of a particular king.¹⁹ Moreover, the words *yom-tsarah* ("a

¹⁸ McKane, (n. 15), p. 577, calls "the marked increase in imagery" of this chapter its most significant feature. Udo Skladny notes that similes and (more rarely) metaphors make up about half of chs 25-27, his section C (*Die ältesten Spruchsammlungen in 29* (p. 65 and n. 44).

¹⁹ One wonders whether the cluster of *melekh* sayings in Prov. 26:10-15 originally also marked the beginning of a collection. The sayings containing the Tetragrammaton, with which the chapter now begins, might have been added later; R. N. Whybray discusses the possibility that these sayings were added to an earlier version of the collection to make a theological point ("Yahweh-sayings and their Contexts in Proverbs, 10,1-22,16," in M. Gilbert (ed.), *La Sagesse de l'Ancien Testament* [Paris and Louvain, 1979], pp. 153-65). That Prov. 10-15 16:1-20:16 are two collections characterized by antithetical and synonymous parallelism respectively has long been remarked. (If 15:20 concludes the section that begins with its parallel verse 10:1, then the

day of distress”), from the phrase which introduces the proverb of 2 Kgs 19:3, are actually found in Prov. 25, in v. 19²⁰ —*shen ra’ah ve-regel mu’adet mivtah boged be-yom tsarah* (“Like a loose tooth and an unsteady leg is a treacherous support in time of trouble”). I believe that the combination of *yom tsarah* and the root *bth* in the concluding phrase of the proverb, *mivtah boged be-yom tsarah*, was the “germinal linguistic link” between Prov. 25 and 2 Kgs 18-19. The day of the Rabshakeh’s speech to the besieged citizens of Jerusalem, then, was the *yom tsarah* par excellence—literally the textbook case of a *yom tsarah*. Hezekiah, however, was *yaskil* enough to know that his day of distress was also a day of *tokhahat*, of chastisement. As we shall see, he also knew better than the hypothetical subject of Prov. 25:19 where to place his trust.

The issue of trust (*mivtah*) which is key to the understanding of Prov. 25:19 is also a key motif in the story of Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem. Various forms of the verb *bth* occur a total of nine times there. Seven of them are in the speech of the Rabshakeh,²¹ who challenges Judah’s reliance on Egypt and on the Lord. In the end of the story as told here, of course, Hezekiah’s reliance on the Lord did prove wise, and the siege was lifted. But the redactor of the books of Kings has already signaled this to us in the same introductory passage where the word *yaskil* was used. 2 Kgs 18:5 tells us of Hezekiah, “He trusted (*bth*) only in the LORD the God of

history of the following section would need to have been slightly more complicated than is indicated here).

²⁰ The phrase occurs another dozen or so times elsewhere, including Prov. 24:10; I suspect it was its combination here with the word *mivtah* which forged the link (see below).

²¹ 2 Kgs 18:19, 20, 21 (twice), 22, 24, 30; an eighth is in 29 10. V. 19 contains the nominal form *bittahon*.

Israel.”²² Now, outside this story, there is only one place in the books of Kings where the root *bṯḥ* occurs. In 1 Kgs 5:5 we read, “All the days of Solomon, Judah and Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba dwelt in safety (*labetah*), everyone under his own vine and under his own fig tree.” If this last connection with Solomon seems too tenuous, it is because here the glossator would have moved into the second stage of the process postulated by Slomovic and Childs. With Prov. 25 before him, he had searched the history books for a second royal possessor and patron of wisdom. Having found the “germinal linguistic link” between Solomon and Hezekiah, and having established that the siege of Sennacherib was (as one might say) the locus classicus of Hezekiah’s wisdom, the glossator would then wish to confirm his analysis by finding as many additional connections as possible. In this particular case, it is clear that trust is an important motif both of the actual speech of the Rabshakeh and of the understanding of the story of the siege on the redactional level of Kings. The fact that the only other occurrence of the root anywhere in the books of Kings is in the story of Solomon, however, is no more than coincidence. The use of *labetah* there describes that condition of safety which Franklin

²² Thus the centrality of the root *bṯḥ* in the story was already noticed by the redactor of Kings (this verse is not found in Isaiah). Childs notes: “Although the verb ‘to trust’ does occur in Isaiah’s theology (cf. 30:15) it is a more central term in the theology of the Dtr. historian and serves specifically as the rubric under which Hezekiah is characterized (II Kings 18.5)” (*Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* [London and Naperville, Ill., 1967], p. 85). Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor observe that the theme of trust in the Rabshakeh’s speech is genuinely Assyrian: “The theme of trust is common in Assyrian historical inscriptions when describing Assyria’s enemies: they trust in their own strength, put their trust in their gods, etc.” (*II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [N .p., 1988], p. 231).

Roosevelt called “freedom from fear.” It has nothing to do with the trust in God by which, according to 2 Kgs 18-19, Jerusalem was saved from the Assyrians. For the glossator, however, this could not be coincidence. Once the connection between Hezekiah and Solomon is made and Prov. 25:19 becomes the focus, *labetah* of 1 Kgs v 5 adds another grain of probability to the connection. It is, after all, followed almost immediately by a long section (vv. 9-14) on Solomon’s wisdom. As in the case of the psalm titles, once the text needing a historical reference was linguistically hooked on to the event, other similarities were found which appeared to confirm the attachment. At this stage of the process, there is really no telling what a particular proverb from ch. 25 might or might not have suggested to the glossator. As in Childs’s and Slomovic’s analyses of Ps. 3, once linguistic correspondences hooked the two texts together, the imagination would be allowed free play with thematic correspondences which would be less convincing as primary proof of the connection. But here are some of the possibilities:

- “Remove the wicked from the king’s presence, and his throne will be established in justice” (25:5). The first half of the verse recalls Hezekiah’s iconoclasm (2 Kgs 18:4); the second echoes 1 Kgs 2:12, “And Solomon sat upon the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.”²³

²³ This would be a link between Solomon and Hezekiah outside the realm of wisdom. This link is strongly made by the Chronicler: “... since the time of King Solomon son of David of Israel nothing like it had happened in Jerusalem” (2 Chr. 30:26). In the assessment of H. G. M. Williamson, “the Chronicler has gone out of his way to present Hezekiah as a second Solomon” (*1 and 2 Chronicles* [Grand Rapids, Mich. and London, 1982], pp. 350-1). See in more detail Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 119-25. (Quite different is the attitude of the Deuteronomic historian, who leaves one with a negative picture of Solomon;

• “A man’s fears shall become a trap for him, but he who trusts (*boteah*) in the LORD shall be safeguarded” (29:25).²⁴ At the end of the collection (at least as defined by the current headings), this verse, by echoing the theme of trust, seems to make explicit the moral of the story of the siege. This suggests that chs 25-29 were already a unit before they were associated with Hezekiah.

• “Like an open city without walls is a man whose temper is uncurbed” (25:28). Like 25: 9, this might describe the danger Jerusalem would have been in had Hezekiah not been the sage he was.²⁵

• “It is ... the glory of a king to plumb a matter” (25:2). This very first verse of the collection could have been taken as a reference to Hezekiah’s searching deep under the ground for a way to

this confirms that the *bth* connection with Solomon mentioned above is coincidental only).

Interestingly, Chronicles does not associate Hezekiah in any way with wisdom. This would seem a natural realm for comparison with Solomon if Prov. 25:1 indeed had any historical basis.

Hence I conclude that the Chronicler knew neither Prov. 25:1 nor any such historical tradition.

In fact, none of the elements in 2 Kgs 18-19 which I find suggestive of the comparison is included in the parallel account in Chronicles.

²⁴ The verb *bth* also appears in 28:1, 25, 26.

²⁵ If Glendon Bryce is correct in his assertion that Prov. 25:2-27 was originally a unit, then the appositeness of 25:28 and 29:25 to the story of the siege might alternatively suggest that 25:28-29:27 may actually have been appended to 25:1-27 after the connection with Hezekiah was made (“Another Wisdom-‘Book’ in Proverbs,” *JBL* 91 [1972], pp. 145-57). But I think this less likely.

The labeling of the large collections with title lines must be seen as a second stage, following the creation of the smaller collections still discernable within them.

ensure that blockaded Jerusalem would have a source of fresh water within the fortified wall.²⁶ (Though *hqr*, “plumb” or “probe,” has its figurative sense here, it is used in the mining passage of Job 28:3 for digging underground; the existence of *hqq*, especially as used in Isa. 22:16, suggests an original biliteral root *hq* with the meaning “hew into rock,” from which the trilateral roots *hqq* and *hqr* developed).

- “Like the coldness of snow at harvesttime is a trusty messenger to those who send him; he lifts his master’s spirits [lit.: restores his master’s life]” (25:13). The messenger would be those Hezekiah sent to Isaiah in 2 Kgs 19:2. Though “trusty” here is not from the root *bth*, the contrast with the perfidiousness (from the Israelite point of view) of Sennacherib’s messenger (see below), would be well taken. Alternatively or additionally, the messenger might be taken for the angel of 2 Kgs 19:35 who effected the rescue of the city, and “restoring the life” for a reference to Hezekiah’s recovery from life-threatening illness, which follows this story.

- “Like cold water to a parched throat is good news from a distant land” (25:25). The good news would have been that of Sennacherib’s assassination by two of his sons, which in 2 Kgs

²⁶ See now Dan Gill, “Subterranean Waterworks of Biblical Jerusalem: Adaptation of a Karst System,” *Science* 254 (6 December 1991), pp. 1467-71, who summarizes (p. 1467): “Thus, it was not through primary planning but by means of skillful adaptation of these pre-existing natural features that the city was ensured of a dependable water supply during both war and peace.”

19:36-7 seems to follow immediately upon his return to Nineveh, rather than 20 years later as it actually did.²⁷

This list might go on and on, depending on how fanciful we wished to get and whether indeed the search for connections was extended throughout chs 25-29, as 29:25 perhaps suggests.²⁸ But we would come back at last to Prov. 25:19, the verse most directly tied in with the story of the siege, and its phrase *mivtah boged be-yom tsarah*. We are explicitly told in 2 Kgs 19:3 that that day is the “day of distress.” and we know too that the proper “trust” is a theme of that story. Our glossator may well have taken *boged* as “traitor,” a reference to the Rabshakeh himself—Hebrew-speaking because he was a renegade Israelite. There is a tradition to this effect in B. Sanh. 60a, and some modern scholars have also suggested that the Rabshakeh may actually have been the scion of an Israelite family exiled to Assyria in 722.²⁹ His participation on the Assyrian side could clearly be looked on as a betrayal. What a contrast this traitor makes with the faithful messengers of Prov. 25:13—and of 2 Kgs 19:2! In any case, it is these latter—Eliakim the steward, Shebna the scribe, and the senior priests—and not an academy of sages,

²⁷ That the murder could have been viewed not just as a historical note but in an extremely positive way is confirmed by the tradition preserved in B. Sanh. 96b, according to which the two sons became converts to Judaism.

²⁸ E.g., Raymond van Leeuwen, in a private letter of 1 April 1992, kindly pointed out to me a possible connection between Prov. 26:9 and 2 Kgs 18:21. Note that the similitude in the latter verse is directly associated with the concept of trust. I owe thanks to Professor van Leeuwen, also, for the pressure of some energetic challenges to the main conclusion of this article.

²⁹ Cogan and Tadmor (n. 22), p. 230, and reference there.

who are the “men of Hezekiah” in Prov. 25:1.³⁰ Perhaps the ascription to them, and not to Hezekiah directly, reflects a dash of realism in the picture of the king, acknowledging that such wisdom must have been preserved by the court as a whole. Hezekiah’s counselors, in particular, play a major role in the story of the siege which prompted the ascription. No doubt this is the reason for connecting these proverbs not just with Hezekiah, but with *‘anshei hizqiyahu*, “the men of Hezekiah.”

A few last remarks are in order on two broader questions that are raised by the conjecture that Prov. 25:1 is not historical, but rather the result of inner-biblical exegesis. First, how does this phenomenon relate to that of the psalm superscriptions? Second, what is left of the notion of a court-sponsored academy for the compilation of wisdom literature during the reign of Hezekiah? By comparison with the psalm superscriptions, the nature of the identification that was made is somewhat different. In Psalms, the superscriptions take for granted that the psalms are connected with the life of David;³¹ the ingenuity is applied in discovering how. Here, if my argument is correct, there existed a collection of proverbs which was known or believed not to be directly linkable to Solomon (if for no other reason than that it was preserved separately from the collection which begins in Prov. 10:1).³² The ingenuity was applied in using textual clues to

³⁰ Ibn Ezra, ad loc., also makes the connection between our two pericopes so far as he suggests that 25:1 was added to the collection by Shebna.

³¹ Whether *le-david* means “by” or “of” him.

³² Thus the second collection was linked to Solomon only through Hezekiah. The enabling interpretative link of Hezekiah to wisdom, however, was made through Solomon. Thus it cannot predate the clustering of wisdom traditions around Solomon, though the collection as a whole, to

determine who was responsible for the collection. It was the historical situation described in 2 Kgs 18-19 that provided the necessary clues. This link was not made explicit, since the siege of Jerusalem was certainly not the occasion during which these proverbs were actually collected. Next, since the LXX contains both the historical Psalm superscriptions of the MT and others not found there, we can place at least the continuation of this process in the period after the psalms were gathered as a book. In this respect too Proverbs is different. Here, the MT and LXX arrange the material slightly differently—in the Greek, chs. 25-29 immediately precede the “Women of Valor” poem. Yet the Hezekiah reference is found in both versions.³³ It is unlikely that the heading was added by both versions independently; hence the Hezekiah reference must have become part of 25-29 while these chapters were still a separate collection. Thus I locate the superscription in the chronological interval after 25-29 came together but before the book of Proverbs had taken its final form.³⁴ It may be that the atmosphere in which the Chronicler could make his comparison of Solomon and Hezekiah was also responsible for this gloss. I find no influence of the text of Chronicles on the gloss, however. Rather, I prefer to see the impulse for it in a narrower focus on links between the two in the realm of wisdom alone. Might the gloss

say nothing of the individual proverbs in it, might have done so. The original motive for the collection might have been stylistic, meaning it would have no bearing on the historical question.

³³ The Greek “friends” rather than “men” of Hezekiah is too minor a difference to suggest that the traditions developed independently of each other.

³⁴ It is tempting to wonder whether it was the very process of putting together the complete book of Proverbs which prompted the ascription (to match the ascription to Solomon of the collection beginning in 10:2), but this would make it more difficult to explain the disparity in arrangement between the Greek and Hebrew versions of the book.

have been a historical tradition after all? This seems unlikely. Chronicles, for one, would certainly not have ignored the opportunity to use a tradition of Hezekiah's being "wise" or a master of proverbs in order to reinforce the comparison with Solomon. But it gives no such tradition. The "Hezekiah psalm" of Isa. 38:9-20 is simply another case of a psalmic historical superscription, here integrated directly into the story to which it refers.³⁵ There is no other biblical tradition associating Hezekiah's reign with wisdom activity.³⁶ 2 Chr. 32:2-5, concerning the securing of the water supply and the refortification of Jerusalem, testify to no more about Hezekiah than a reputation for practical sagacity.³⁷ Just this, to be sure, may have helped make Hezekiah famous for his wisdom, originally practical as Solomon's was originally juridical. But it is no indication of a general flowering of scholarship and literary activity then, even if the circumstances of a prosperous reign following a certain amount of religious and political

³⁵ Note, too, that Solomon is associated with songs as well as proverbs in 1 Kgs 5:12 (though Hezekiah's psalm is called a *miktav*, not a *shir*).

³⁶ 2 Chr. 29:30 ("King Hezekiah and the officers ordered the Levites to praise the LORD in the words of David and Asaph the seer"), as the larger context of vv. 25-30 shows, is more likely to be associated with the Chronicler's attempt to prove that the role played by the Levites in the Temple service was assigned to them by David. See, e.g., the discussion in Mark A. Throntveit, *When Kings Speak: Royal Speech and Royal Prayer in Chronicles* (Atlanta, 1987), p. 123.

³⁷ Indeed, I wonder whether this may have been one element in the early development of the "wisdom that saved the city" motif. (The forgotten sage would of course have been not Hezekiah, but the actual engineer of the project.)

upheaval make it plausible. I think here of Brueggemann's notion³⁸ that Solomon's role as creator of an Israelite enlightenment is "sociologically probable" (p. 131: emphasis original). It may have been a similar feeling of sociological probability that encouraged the glossator to make his suggestion. I conclude, therefore, that the citation of the "men of Hezekiah" in Prov. 25:1 could just as well be exegetical as it could historical. If this conclusion is sound, the court of Hezekiah can no longer be considered the first, fixed point in the transmission of wisdom literature.³⁹

³⁸ (n. 1) This may be termed a "post-critical" acceptance of the Solomonic wisdom tradition.

The current "pre-critical/critical" acceptance of Hezekiah's role in the transmission of wisdom literature may have to be salvaged by a similar reading.

³⁹ My thanks to Marc Brettler of Brandeis University for many helpful comments.