

THE ROYAL LADY OF PROVERBS 31

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Prov 31:1 MT

דְּבַרֵי לְמוֹאֵל מֶלֶךְ מַשָּׂא אִשְׁרֵי־יִסְרָתוֹ אָמוֹ

The words of king Lemuel,
the prophecy that his mother taught him.(KJV)

The words of Lemuel, king of Massa,
which his mother taught him. (RSV)

LXX Prov 24:69 = MT 31:1

οἱ ἔμοι λόγοι ἐῤρηγται ὑπὸ θεοῦ
βασιλέως χρηματισμός ὃν ἐπαίδευσεν ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ

My words have been spoken by God;
the oracle of a king whom his mother instructed.

The name Lemuel (לְמוֹאֵל/לְמוֹאֵל) calls to mind the Arabic phrase *لَمَّ اللهُ* (*lamma ʿallahu*) “God rectified, restored someone to good condition, reunited (people)” (Lane 1893: 3013; Wehr 1979: 1029). Given the well attested interchange of *ל"ה* and *ע"ע* verbs (GKC 77^e) one can posit the Hebrew cognate *לְמוֹה/לְמוֹה* which would account for the *ו* in *לְמוֹאֵל*, rather than *לְמוֹם*, which would have called for the name *לְמוֹאֵל* (like the *תְּנִיאֵל* of Num 34:23) or *לְמוֹמֵאֵל* (like the *תְּנִנֵאֵל* of Jer 31:38). The *לְמוֹאֵל* of Prov 31:4 is most likely

2 THE ROYAL LADY OF PROVERBS 31

to have been the original vocalization since and original לָמוֹ would have contracted (*lamaw* > *lamô*) to לָמוֹ, not לָמוֹ.

Whereas the מַשָּׂא of Prov30:1 is best read as the cognate of Arabic نشأ (*našʾa*, form IV) “he created, produced, originated” and منشئ (*munšī*) “author, originator” (Lane 1893: 2791; Wehr 1979: 1131),¹ in Prov 31:1 the מַשָּׂא is best read as a proper noun related to the Ishmaelite מַשָּׂא mentioned in Gen 25:14 and I Chron 1:30. Consequently, the RSV and NAB translations, “Lemuel, king of Massa” are preferred to other translations which opted for מַשָּׂא “oracle.”²

Despite what is stated in 31:1, the words which follow in 31:2–9 are not the words of Lemuel, but of his mother. The phrase מִלִּדְמוֹתַי מַשָּׂא would better introduce verses 10–31, which could well be Lemuel’s words of praise for his mother, permitting the text of 31:28 to be paraphrased “Her son arose and called her blessed.” The appropriate introduction to the mother’s instructions to Lemuel in 31:2–9 should have been, דְּבָרִים לְלֵמוּאֵל אֲשֶׁר־יְסִרְתּוּ אִמּוֹ, “words to Lemuel by which his mother instructed him”³

Prov 31:2 MT (LXX Prov 24:70)

מַה־בָּרִי וּמַה־בֶּרֶבְטָנִי וּמַה־בְּרִנֹּדָרָי:

What, my son? What, son of my womb?

What, son of my vows?

τί τέκνον τηρήσεις

τί ῥήσεις θεοῦ

πρωτογενές σοι λέγω υἱέ

τί τέκνον ἐμῆς κοιλίας τί τέκνον ἐμῶν εὐχῶν

What, O child, will you observe?
 What are the dictates of God?
 My firstborn, I am speaking to you, O son,
 What is it, son of my womb? What is it, son of my vows?

McDaniel Translation

Prosper, my son! Flourish, son of my womb!
*Thrive, son of my vows!*⁴

Behind the threefold interrogative *מה . . . ומה . . . ומה* “what . . . what . . . what?” of the MT stand three imperatives from the stem *נָמַה*, the cognate of Arabic *نماء/نمى* (*namy/namā*) “to grow, increase, expand, prosper, flourish, thrive” (Lane 1893: 3038; Wehr 1979: 1174–1175). Like the verbs *נָשָׂא*, *נָסָה*, and *נָשַׁח*, which drop the initial *נ* in the imperative, the imperative *נָמַה* became simply *מָה*, a homophone and homograph of the interrogative *מָה*. The verb *נָמַה* is found in the proper name *נְמוּאֵל* (Ναμουηλ) and the gentilic *הַנְּמוּאֵלִי* (ὁ Ναμουηλ) in I Chron 4:24 and Num 12:26.⁵ Otherwise, *נָמַה* may never have been used in the standard Judean dialect of Hebrew. The use of *בֶּר* “son” by Lemuel’s mother, instead of *בֶּן*, is indisputable evidence that she was speaking in a dialect. Thus, it is not surprising to encounter a number of rare words on the lips of Lemuel and his mother which were not normally used in the Jerusalem/Judean dialect.⁶

The Septuagint (24:70 = 31:2) has an expanded text which includes (1) *τηρήσεις* “you will keep,” (2) *ρήσεις θεοῦ* “the dictates of God,” and *πρωτογενές σοι λέγω υἱε* “my firstborn, to you I am speaking, O son,” suggesting that the *מה בר* in the *Vorlage* was also read as *מִדְּבַר* which could

4 THE ROYAL LADY OF PROVERBS 31

account for the ῥήσεις and the λέγω.⁷ The τηρήσεις is either a doublet of the τί ῥήσεις (τίρήσεις > τηρήσεις) or a doublet of the נרר “vow” which was read as נטר “to keep.” The πρωτογενές σοι can be a doublet of the ברִי read as בכרי “my firstborn,” originating from a dittography of the ב which was in turn misread as a כ so that the ברִי became בכרי.

Prov 31:3 MT (LXX 24:71)

אַל-תַּתֵּן לְנָשִׁים חֵילָךְ וְדַרְכֶיךָ לְמַחֲזוֹת מְלָכִין

Give not your strength to women,
your ways to those who destroy kings.

μη δῶς γυναιξὶ σὸν πλοῦτον
καὶ τὸν σὸν νοῦν καὶ βίον εἰς ὑστεροβουλίαν

Give not thy wealth to women,
nor thy mind and living to deliberation after the fact.

McDaniel Translation

Give not your wealth to women
nor your *acquisitions* to (*women*) *who deceive* kings.

The Septuagint reads πλοῦτος “wealth” for Hebrew חֵיל in ten other texts,⁸ and remains the best understanding of this verse and in 31:29. Interpretations which associate חֵיל here with the physical strength required for sexual activity seem to have King Solomon and his harem in mind rather than King Lemuel and his mother.⁹ Once the focus on חֵיל took on sexual overtones, it became necessary to emend דַּרְכֶיךָ to יְרֵכֶיךָ “your thighs” (BHS note) for a implicit sexual parallel to go with an implicit sexual חֵיל.

Defining חַיִּלְךָ as “your *wealth*” and דְּרָכֶיךָ as “your *acquisitions*” recovers the anticipated parallelism. The Hebrew דְּרָכֶיךָ is the cognate of Arabic دَرَك (*darak*) “the attainment, or acquisition of an object of want, and the seeking the attainment or the acquisition thereof” (Lane 1867: 874). Lemuel’s mother is advising her son not to be overly generous with his possessions and acquisitions, i.e., do not squander the royal estate on *untrustworthy* women.

The idea of some women being *untrustworthy* lies hidden in the MT לְמַחֲזוֹת. The initial ל is the preposition affixed to the feminine plural participle מַחֲזוֹת, from the stem מַחַח, which is the cognate of Arabic مَحاح (*mahhâh*) that Lane (1885: 2691) defined as “one who pleases, or contents, thee with his words, but who does, or performs nothing; an habitual liar; one who lies to thee even respecting the place whence he comes.” Hava (1915: 709) defined مَحاح (*mahhâh*) simply as “liar, deceiver.” The מַחֲזוֹת is a contracted form of מַחַחֲזוֹת, like the feminine singular participle רַעָה in Prov 25:19, which is a contraction of רַעָה (GKC 67^s).¹⁰ The advice of Lemuel’s mother was essentially “Son, beware of female flatterers who do lip service only!”

The Septuagint’s νοῦς “mind, thought, reason” is an alternative translation of חַיִּל which was read as though it were the cognate of Arabic خال/خيل (*h̄yl/h̄âla*) “he thought, fancied, imagined” and the noun “thought, opinion, surmise, mental image” (Lane 1865: 833–836; Wehr 1979: 309–310). The βίον “life” is a variant translation of the חוֹת of לְמַחֲזוֹת which was read as לִם חוֹת and then inverted to לִם חוֹת (= βίον εἶς (= חַיִּל לְמַחֲזוֹת)).¹¹

6 THE ROYAL LADY OF PROVERBS 31

The ὑστερο of ὑστεροβουλίαν “deliberation after the fact” (Liddell and Scott 1940: 1906) comes from (1) a variant reading of חיל as חל (= ὑστερέω) “to lack,” and (2) the βουλίαν is an alternative rendering of the מַלְכִין when derived from מַלְיָה “counsel, advice” (BDB 576; Jastrow 760, 971). Coming together they amount to the idea of “second guessing.”

Prov 31:8

פֶּתַח־פִּיךָ לְאֵלִים אֶל־דִּין כָּל־בְּנֵי חַלּוֹף

Open your mouth for the dumb,

for the rights of all who are left desolate. (RSV)

ἄνοιγε σὸν στόμα λόγῳ θεοῦ καὶ κρῖνε πάντας ὑγιῶς

Open your mouth to the word of God,

and judge all fairly.

The Septuagint’s λόγῳ θεοῦ “to the word of God” translates what now stands in the MT as לְאֵלִים אֶל, as though the *Vorlage* read לְכַלִּים אֶל, with the stem כַּלִּים being the cognate of Arabic كَلَام (*kalâm*) “saying, words”, used in a similar expression, فَمَه بِالْكَلام (fataḥa famahū bi³lkalâm) “he opened his mouth to say something” (Lane 1893: 3003; Wehr 1979: 981). The ὑγιῶς “fairly” reflects a variant in which the בְּנֵי was read as בְּאֵין (= בָּ + אֵין) “without” and the חַלּוֹף was read as a cognate the Arabic

- جلف (*ḥulf*) “the breach, or non-fulfilment, of a promise . . . disagreement, difference, dissension in opinions”
- جلف (*ḥilf*) “one who perseveres in opposition or contention”

- جلفة (*ḥulfat*) “a vice, a fault, or an imperfection; badness, corruptness, vitiousness, or dishonesty”
- أجلف (*ʿahlafu*) “contrariousness, hard in disposition, as though going with a leaning to one side; and [simply] leaning to one side.”

Ben Yehudah (1920: 114) proposed to read אָל “to” as the imperative אַל “hasten,” a cognate of Arabic أَل (*ʿall*) (Hava 1915: 11). He also proposed to read חָלוֹף as the cognate of Arabic خرف (*ḥaraf/ḥarif*) “unfortunate,” which Lane (1865: 726) defined as “corrupt, unsound, disordered in intellect in consequence of old age, dotage.” But these proposals were of no help in understanding the Septuagint.

A number of other interpretations have been proposed for the בְּנֵי-חָלוֹף of 31:8. McKane summarized the following:

- children of abandonment, i.e., orphans
- those subject to the vicissitudes of fortune
- those likely to perish standing on the edge of a precipice
- sons of impotence
- sons of disease
- those with a bodily infirmity
- those who were stupid, foolish, of defective intellect
- adversaries, i.e., legal opponents
- those who are the victims of circumstance¹²

Scholars have been looking for a definition of חָלוֹף which would balance the לְאֵילִם “for a mute” in the first part of the line and the עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן “poor and needy” in 31:9. However, the בְּנֵי חָלוֹף needs to be recognized as the equivalent of בְּנֵי בְרִית “sons of the covenant,” which would be a reference

to the allies, confederates, and tribal affiliates of the kingdom of Massa who would look to their king as their adjudicator.

One Arabic cognate of חֶלֶף is حلف (*ḥalif*) meaning “the act of confederating, or making a compact or confederacy, to aid, or assist; and making an agreement . . . the object was to aid the wronged, and for making close the ties of the relationship” (Lane 1865: 627; Wehr 235).¹³ The Arabic translation of בְּרִית frequently used حلف (*ḥalif*), as in Jud 9:46 where the MT בֵּית אֵל בְּרִית appears in the London Polyglott of 1667 as بيت ايل ليتحالفوا (*bayti ʿil liyataḥālafū*) “*ut ibi conjurarent conspirarentque*,” i.e., the place where they made an alliance and were united.¹⁴ The cognates of this حلف (*ḥalif*) are (1) חֶלְף “covenant, friendship, brotherhood, league” and (2) חֶלְפֵי “a sincere friend who swears to his companion that he will not act unfaithfully with him.”¹⁵

Lemuel’s mother advised her son not to open his mouth to wine and strong drink, lest it interfere with his ability to properly adjudicate for the *rich* and for the *poor*. Lemuel’s need to adjudicate on behalf of the poor is clearly stated in 31:9, פִּתַח־פִּיךָ שֹׁפֵט־צָדִק וְדִין עָנִי וְאֶבְיֹן “open your mouth, judge rightly and adjudicate (for) the oppressed and the poor.” A reference to Lemuel’s need to adjudicate on behalf of the rich lies hidden in 31:5, דִּין כָּל־בְּנֵי־עָנִי, where the עָנִי needs to be vocalized as עָנִי¹⁶ and identified as the cognate of the Arabic غنى (*ḡaniya*) “he was free from want . . . he became rich, wealthy,” and the nouns غِنَى (*ḡinan*) and غِنَاء (*ḡana*) “wealth, affluence, riches” (Lane 1877:2301–2304; Wehr 1979: 803).¹⁷

Contrary to the pointing in the MT, this עָנִי is certainly attested in I Chron 22:14, where David declared וַהֲנִיָּה בְעֵנִי “Behold, with my *riches* I have provided for the temple of Yahweh!” Myers (1965: 152) interpreted the hundred thousand talents of gold and million talents of silver David donated to be 3,775 tons of gold and 37,750 tons of silver, which he estimated to be worth 4.25 billions dollars. Despite the *paupertatula* “poverty” in the Vulgate and the πτωχεύειν “poverty” in the Septuagint, the MT עָנִי “my poverty” needs to be read as עָנִי “my wealth.” Similarly, the בְּנֵי-עָנִי of Prov 31:5 can be repointed as בְּנֵי-עָנִי, meaning “the sons of wealth,” i.e., the rich.¹⁸ If Lemuel listened to his mother he soberly and rightly judged the poor (אֲבִיּוֹן), the needy (עָנִי), and the wealthy (עָנִי).

Just as Arabic cognates helped to clarify the meanings of בְּנֵי חֻלּוֹף “sons of the covenant, allies” and בְּנֵי-עָנִי “sons of wealth, the rich,” another Arabic cognate, آل / ليلة / آل (‘*āl* / ‘*ilat* / ‘*il*) “family, relatives, kith-and-kin, consanguinity” (Lane 1863: 75, 127–128; Wehr 1979: 27, 44), helps to clarify the original meaning of the MT אֵלִם “dumb” in 31:8. Although, as noted above (page 6), the Septuagint apparently read כלם “word” for the אֵלִם; the אֵלִם remains the preferred reading. However, it should be read as *scriptio defectiva* for אֵלִים and vocalized as אֵלִים or אֵלִים, the plural of אֵל / אֵלָה “family, kith-and-kin,” like its cognates. Just as the Arabic آل (‘*ill*) is a synonym of حلف (*hilf*), the אֵלִים / אֵלִם is the synonym of the בְּנֵי-חֻלּוֹף in Prov 31:8.¹⁹

Although noted in Castell's 1669 lexicon (58, 115) and defined as "*populus, asseclae, affines, familia, domestici*," the cognate אֵל / אַל (= אֵלָה / אֵלָהּ) has dropped out of subsequent lexicons. Although rarely found in the literature, it probably appears in the name אֵלִיאֵל (Ελιηλ / Αλιηλ) in I Chron 11:46–47, meaning the same as the אֵלִיעֶם (Ελιαβ) in II Sam 11:3 and the עֲמִיאֵל (Αμιηλ) in I Chron 3:5. They all mean "God is my kinsman" and are much like the names רְעוּאֵל (Ραγουηλ) "God is my kinsman," אַחֲזִיהַּ "Yahweh is my brother/father." According to these interpretations of חֲלוּף, עֲנִי, and אֵלִים, Lemuel's mother instructed her son to judge the poor (אֲבִיּוֹן), the needy (עֲנִי), the rich (בְּנֵי־עֲנִי), all tribal allies and confederates (בְּנֵי חֲלוּף), and his own kith-and-kin (אֵלִים / אֲלֵימִים). Her advice covered all social classes, as well as the needs of the royal family and the affairs of state.

Prov 31:10–31

אִשְׁת־חַיִל

the woman of power

The transition from the words *of* a wise woman (31:1–9) to words *about* a wise woman (31:10–31) is highlighted by the use of an acrostic form which controls the logical flow of ideas in the poem. As noted above, vv.1–9 are not the words of Lemuel, but vv.10–31 could well be the words which followed the introductory phrase מִשָּׂא מַלְךְ מַסָּא "the words of Lemuel, king of Massa." The king of Massa may have been like the king of Moab, who (according to II Kings

3:4) was a sheep master on a grand scale, suggesting that royal households were centers of home industries, commercial adventures, and charities—all requiring good managerial skills. Even a king could wax poetic over his mother who had been throughout life an אִשְׁת־חַיִל “a woman of power,” or, as the Septuagint has it, a γυναικα ἀνδρείααν “a manly woman.”²⁰

English translators have rendered חַיִל by a number of adjectives or adjectival phrases, including: capable, truly capable, excellent, good, noble, valiant, virtuous, virtuous and capable, and worthy. Missing from most of these translations is the recognition of חַיִל was also a term for being intellectually gifted. This meaning is found in two of three Arabic cognates (as found in Lane 1865: 675–677, 688, 834–835):

- (1) حَال / حَيْل / حَوْل (*ḥyl/ḥâl/ḥawl*) “strength, power, might.”
- (2) حَوْل (*ḥuwwal*) “knowing, skillful, or intelligent, in turning affairs over, or about in the mind, considering what may be the results and so managing them,” i.e., a strategist.
- (3) خَال / خَيْل (*ḥyl/ḥâl*) “a liberal, bountiful, generous person . . . one who keeps a thing, and manages, orders, or regulates well . . . [used of] a king who manages, orders, or regulates his subjects,” i.e., an administrator.

In light of 32:17 (“she girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong”) and 31:25 (“she is clothed with strength and dignity”) the woman’s physical strength can not be minimized. Cognate (1), above, reinforces this quality of her character. But in light of cognates (2) and (3) the intellectual, managerial, and charitable qualities of the woman

cannot be ignored. The word **חַיִל** carries multiple levels of meaning which requires some sort of *paraphrase* in order to be *literally* accurate—such as, “Who can find a rich generous and dynamic smart woman gifted with administrative skills?”

Prov 31:11b

וּשְׁלֵל לֹא יִחָסֵר

“He will not lack a son.”

ἡ τοιαύτη καλῶν σκύλων οὐκ ἀπορήσει

Such a one shall stand in no need of fine spoils.

Despite McKane’s dismissal of Driver’s proposal to read the **שְׁלֵל** of 31:11 as the cognate of Arabic **سَلِيل** (*salīl*) “a child or male offspring,” and **سَلِيلَة** (*salīlat*) “daughter” (Lane 1872: 1397; Wehr 489), Driver was certainly correct. McKane (1970: 667) argued that Driver’s interpretation²¹

weakens the force of v.11b, where, in agreement with the general tendency of the poem, a reference to the wife’s skill as a domestic economist rather than her fertility is desiderated.

McKane also rejected Thomas’ proposals (1965: 277) to (1) identify the **שְׁלֵל** in 31:11 with the Arabic cognate **تَلَل** (*tallat*) “wool” and (2) add **לָהּ** “for her”—to accommodate the feminine **ἡ τοιαύτη**—so that the text reads, “Wool is not lacking to her.”²² McKane concluded, “I retain the MT, recognizing that *šālāl* is difficult.”

But there is no need to follow McKane and make it a matter of *either* fertility *or* domestic economy. In 31:28 it is clearly stated that this **אִשְׁת־חַיִל** was a mother: “Her children rise up,

and call her blessed.” But she was not just a mother, she was in fact the mother of a son, a **שָׁלִיל**. The cultural priorities in the kingdom of Massa and in the royal household of Lemuel were the same as those shared down to this day in Near Eastern and Far Eastern communities in which a woman is expected to provide a son for her husband. This fact is well illustrated by the felicitous greeting in Arabic extended to those getting married. It is the word **رفا** (*rafâ*) which means not only (1) “he effected a reconciliation, or made peace between them,” and (2) “he married, or took a wife,” but also (3) “may the marriage be with close union (**رفاء** [*rifâ’un*]), constancy and the begetting of sons not daughters” (Lane 1867: 1117–1118, 1129). Wehr (1979: 403) rendered this felicitation to newlyweds as “live in harmony and beget sons!” If Prov 31:10–31 are the words of Lemuel, then Lemuel himself would be the son his mother delivered to her husband, for which she now receives his praise.

Prov 31:12

גַּמְלָתָהּ טוֹב וְלֹא־רָע כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיהָ

She benefited him well,

not badly, all the days of her life.

ἐνεργεῖ γὰρ τῷ ἀνδρὶ ἀγαθὰ πάντα τὸν βίον

For she employs all her living for her husband’s good.

Like the Septuagint and the Vulgate, English translations treat the *perfect* verb **גַּמְלָתָהּ** as if it were an *imperfect*, making the translation either present or future tense. Of the thirty-eight verbs in 31:10–31, only six are in the *imperfect*

tense (יִחְסֶר [11], תָּבִיא [15], יִכְבֶּה [18], תִּירָא [21], תֹאכַל [27], and תִּתְהַלֵּל [30]),²³ and one is in the *imperative* (תִּנְנֵה [31]). Even the *imperfect* verbs may indicate past time for actions which continued over a period of time (GKC 107^{b,e}). The thirty-one verbs in the *perfect* or *waw-consecutive* definitely support the argument made in this study that the poet had in mind a particular woman from his past, rather than an imaginary model women for all times in the future.

The MT וְלֹא־רָע (= וְלֹא־רָע) “and not bad” became τῶ ἀνδρὶ “to the husband,” in the Septuagint, reflecting a *Vorlage* with לֹא־נָשׁ, with (1) a confusion of a ר and a נ, (2) a confusion of an ע and a ש, and (3) the loss of the conjunctive ו. Delitzsch (1920: 111 §109^a and 119 §131) has cited other examples of such confusion.

Prov 31:14

הִיְתָה כְּאֶנְיֹת סוֹחֵר מִמְרָקָק תָּבִיא לְחֶמֶה

She was like the ships of the merchant;
she brings her food from afar.

ἐγένετο ὡσεὶ ναὺς ἐμπορευομένη μακρόθεν
συνάγει δὲ αὐτὴ τὸν βίον

She is like a ship trading from a distance,
so she procures her livelihood.

The Septuagint’s reading αὐτὴ τὸν βίον “her livelihood” for the MT לְחֶמֶה “her food” reflects a *Vorlage* with לחייה or לה לחים instead of the MT לחמה. The second option with a preposition is suggested by the לְנַעֲרוֹתֶיהָ וְחַיִּים

“nourishment for your servant-girls” (NRS) in Prov 27:27. The comparison with a merchant’s fleet was interpreted by McKane (1970: 667) to mean “that she explores and exploits the further possibilities of producing wealth on the basis of the husbandry of her household.” However, when the comparison is overlooked, the statement clearly claims that she imported food for her household, suggesting that there was sufficient wealth in the royal household to buy international gourmet food.

31:15

וּתְקַם בְּעוֹר לַיְלָה
וַתִּתֵּן טָרֶף לְבֵיתָהּ וְחֶק לְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ

She arose while it was still night
and gave quality food to her household,
and daily rations to her maidens

καὶ ἀνίσταται ἐκ νυκτῶν
καὶ ἔδωκεν βρώματα τῷ οἴκῳ καὶ ἔργα ταῖς
θεραπαύλαις

And she arose by night, and gave food to her household,
and tasks to her maidens.

The paired words חֶק and טָרֶף appear also in Prov 30:8, “feed me with the food that is my portion” (NAS).²⁴ Both words are very problematic. The טָרֶף, meaning “to tear, rend, pluck” appears in Gen 37:33 where Jacob cried, טָרַף טָרַף יוֹסֵף “Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.” טָרַף is a word more suited for the food of a lion, the king of the jungle, than for Lemuel, the king of Massa.

In the MT 31:15, טרף is without a doubt the cognate of Arabic طريف (*tarif*) “a thing that is *good* [*and recent or new or fresh*] . . . [or pleasing to the eye] of fruits and other things”; and طريفة (*tarifat*) “*anything new, recent, or fresh* . . . anything choice” (Lane 1974: 1845; KBS II: 380). Arabic also attests the by-form ترفة (*turfat*) “good feeding . . . good, sweet, or pleasant food” (Lane 1863: 304). In light of the interchange of the ט and the ט in words like טעה “to err” and תעה “to err,” and Hebrew קטל but Arabic قتل (*qatal*) “to kill,” there may well have been טרף/טרף by-forms in Hebrew meaning “fresh quality food.”

The קח has more to do with something inscribed than something ingested. Only secondarily does it have to do with food allowances and rations, as in Gen 47:22, וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־מִקְחָם “and they ate their portion.” This ambiguity accounts for the Septuagint’s ἔργα “work,” the “task” in the NAS, RSV and NRS, the “plan the day’s work” in the NLT—in contrast to the “portions” in the KJV, NKJ, NAS, and NIV.

Prov 31:21

לֹא־תִירָא לְבֵיתָהּ מִשָּׁלֵג
כִּי כָל־בֵּיתָהּ לְבָשׁ שָׁנִים

She does not fear for her family when it snows
for all of them are doubly clothed. (Scott)

οὐ φροντίζει τῶν ἐν οἴκῳ ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς
ὅταν ποὺ χρονίζη πάντες
γὰρ οἱ παρ’ αὐτῆς ἐνδιδύσκονται

Her husband is not anxious about those at home
when he tarries somewhere
for all those with her are clothed.

The variants in the Septuagint reflect (1) a misreading of the אִתָּהּ as יִתָּהּ, (2) a misreading of MT שֶׁלֶג “snow” as שֶׁגֶל “consort, spouse,” and (3) a doublet for the MT בֵּיתָהּ which became (a) ἐν οἴκῳ and (b) χρονίζη, “he would delay,” which was evidently a secondary misreading of the בֵּיתָהּ as בְּמַהּ.²⁵ McKane’s refusal to reprint the MT שֶׁנִּים “scarlets” as שֶׁנִּים “double” (following the Vulgate’s *duplicibus* and the Septuagints δισσάς [31:22], and Driver’s suggestion [1947:11]) is puzzling. Multi-red colors do not give warmth against snow and the cold, but layered clothing does. The quality of the clothing is not an issue since the double layers of clothing could all be top quality. Quantity does not preclude quality.

Prov 31:23

נִדְרַע בְּשַׁעֲרֵים בְּעֵלְהָ בְּשִׁבְתּוֹ עִם־זְקֵנֵי־אֶרֶץ

Her husband was known in the gates,
when he sits among the elders of the land. (RSV)
περίβλεπτος δὲ γίνεται ἐν πύλαις ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς
ἡνίκα ἂν καθίσῃ ἐν συνεδρίῳ
μετὰ τῶν γερόντων κατοίκων τῆς γῆς

Her husband is admired round about in the gates,
when he sits in council
with the elder inhabitants of the land

The Septuagint interpreted the MT בְּשִׁבְתּוֹ “with his sitting” as ἡνίκα ἂν καθίσῃ ἐν συνεδρίῳ “whenever he sits in

a *sanhedrin*/council.” In Exo 18:14, יָשַׁב is the term for Moses’ sitting to judge the people, and in Mal 3:3 for the messenger of Yahweh who was to judge and purify the sons of Levi. Kings “held court” by “sitting at the gate,” as in I Kings 22:10, which speaks of Ahab and Jehoshaphat “sitting (יָשְׁבִים) on their thrones, arrayed in their robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria” (NAS). Thus, the royal lady’s husband does not go to the city gates to lounge about or to shop, but to sit in judgement in a senate (συνεδρίω) of the tribal elders.²⁶ Thanks to the sterling character of the אִשְׁת־חַיִל, her charities and beautiful household, the prestige of her husband when in public and when in court was greatly enhanced.

Prov 31:24

סָרִין עֲשָׂתָה וְתַמְכֹּר וְחַגּוּר נָתַתָּה לְכַנְעָנִי:

she made and sold a linen garment to the merchant.

σινδόνας ἐποίησεν

καὶ ἀπέδοτο περιζώματα δὲ τοῖς Χαναναίοις

She made fine linens,

and sold girdles to the Canaanites.

The Septuagint did not translate the MT נָתַתָּה “she gave,” and the כַּנְעָנִי was simply transliterated into the plural Χαναναίοις “Canaanites.” But, as noted in BDB (489) and Jastrow (650), כַּנְעָנִי was a proper noun which also carried the meaning of “merchant, trader.”²⁷ The Syro-Phoenician woman (Συροφαινίκισσα in Mark 7:26) who asked Jesus to heal her was identified in Matt 15:22 as γυνὴ Χαναναία. In the *Shem Tob Hebrew Gospel of Matthew* (Howard 1995: 74–75) she

is identified as אשה כנענית באה מארצות מזרח “a Canaanite woman who came from the lands of the East.” But if she was “from the East” she was not a “Canaanite” because Canaan was the name given to land west of the Jordan. So the “Syro-Phoenician” woman may really have been a “merchant lady from the East,” whose business, though, may well have taken her to Syro-Phoenicia. Like the Septuagint translators before him, Mark may have misunderstood the כנענית “merchant” in his Hebrew source and simply updated the old name “Canaan” to the contemporary “Syro-Phoenicia.”

Prov 31:30a

שֶׁקֶר הַחַן וְהַבֵּל הַיָּפִי

Charm is deceitful and beauty is fleeting. (Scott)

ψευδεῖς ἀρέσκειαι
καὶ μάταιον κάλλος γυναικός²⁸

False are desires-to-please
and vain the beauty of a woman.

McDaniel Translation

Infidelity is deceitful, and beauty is fleeting.

The stem חָנַן “to be gracious” appears in such names as חַנּוּנְיָאֵל “God is gracious” and חַנּוּנְיָהוּ “Yahweh is gracious” the latter of which became Ἰωάννης in Greek and *John* in English. Hebrew חָנַן is the cognate of Arabic حن (ḥann) “he was merciful, compassionate, he became affected with a yearning, longing, desire,” and حنان (ḥanân) “mercy, pity, compassion” (Lane 1865: 652–654; Wehr 1979: 244). Therefore, it is quite surprising to have this quality labeled as a

שָׁקֵר “a lie.” Some commentators, like McKane (1970:670), avoided the issue altogether, while others, like Scott (1965: 186), followed the Septuagint (ἀρέσκειαι “a desire to please”) and resorted to paraphrase, coming up with “charm,” “fair looks,” or “favor.” A few translations have followed the Vulgate’s *gratia* with “grace” or “gracefulness” (DBY, ASV).

In the immediate context of this verse, the MT חָיִן is better derived from חָוָן, which was cited by Castell (1669: 1166) as the cognate of Arabic خان/خون (*ḥwn / ḥân*) meaning “*decepit, nec fidua, perfidus, fraudavit.*” Lane (1865: 826–827) cited خان (*ḥâna*) as meaning “he was disloyal, false, unfaithful, or he acted unfaithfully, perfidiously” and noted the intensive epithets خَائِن (*ḥâ'in*) “unfaithful, disloyal, false” and خَائِنَةٌ (*ḥâ'inat*) “very unfaithful . . . a surreptitious look at a thing at which it is not allowable to look, or the looking with a look that induces suspicion or evil opinion.” This was the verb used in the Arabic translation of Num 5:12 and 27 in the *London Polyglott* of 1667, which deal with marital infidelity.” Thus, the Hebrew חָוָן/חָוָן “infidelity” is the word of choice for 30:31a, and it has nothing to do with חָוָן/חָוָן “grace, compassion,” aside from the fact that they became confusing homographs in Hebrew.

It is difficult to relate the Septuagint’s ἀρέσκειαι “desires to please” with either חָוָן “unfaithful” or חָוָן “graciousness.” It is much more likely that ψευδεῖς ἀρέσκειαι “false desires-to-please” is a doublet reflecting the MT שָׁקֵר “a lie” and a variant which was read as שִׁפָּר / שִׁפָּר “comeliness, beauty, seemly, to be pleasing.” In Theodotian’s translation of Dan

3:32, 4:24, and 6:1, ἀρέσκειν “to please” was used to translate the Aramaic רַפְּשִׁי.

The γυνὴ γὰρ συνετὴ εὐλογεῖται “for a wise woman is blessed” in 31:30 comes from variant readings of the MT תִּשְׁבַּח יְרֵאָהּ. The εὐλογεῖται reflects a double reading of תִּשְׁבַּח (= γυνή) as תִּשְׁבַּח (= εὐλογεῖται), thanks to a confusion of a ה and a ו (see Delitzsch 1920: 114, §116^c for examples). The συνετὴ reflects a double reading of יִרְאָהּ (= φόβον) and as יִדְעָהּ (= συνετὴ), thanks to the confusion of a ו and a ה (see Delitzsch 1920: 105–107, §104^{a-c} for examples), plus the aural confusion of the ש and ע.

Prov 31:31

וַיְהִלְלוּהָ בַשְּׁעָרִים מִעֲשֵׂיהָ

And let her works praise her in the gates.

καὶ αἰνεῖσθω ἐν πύλαις ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς

And let her husband be praised in the gates.

The עֲשֵׂה מְלָאכָה הוּא “he was industrious” in I Kings 11:28 was translated in the Septuagint as ἀνὴρ ἔργων ἐστίν, rendering the Hebrew participle עֲשֵׂה “one making” by the noun ἀνὴρ “man, husband.” A similar liberty with the text occurs here in 31:31. By dropping the suffix ה of וַיְהִלְלוּהָ and the מ nominal prefix of מִעֲשֵׂיהָ, the resulting עֲשֵׂיהָ was read as a suffixed participle, much like the עֲשֵׂה (with no suffix) in I Kings 11:28. In this way the מִעֲשֵׂיהָ “her works” became (mis)read as עֲשֵׂיהָ, which was the basis for the Greek ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς “her husband,” thereby making the husband the one who received the public praise. Thus, the Septuagint

interpreted 31:31 in light of its translation of 31:23, where the well admired husband of the royal lady sits in the *sanhedrin* (καθίστη ἐν συνέδριω).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The two literary units of Proverbs 31 are 31:1–9, which are a mother’s advice to her son, Lemuel (לְמוּאֵל [לְדָבָרִים]), and 31:10–31, which are Lemuel’s words of praise (דְּבָרֵי לְמוּאֵל) about his mother. Lemuel himself had nothing to say in 31:1–9, so “the words of Lemuel”—assuming he said something—can only be the words of 31:10–31.

The royal lady was very anxious and emphatic that her son prosper. She was also very protective of the royal assets, admonishing her son not to squander his wealth and acquisitions on female flatterers and liars who would give him only lip service. Soberness, she admonished, was a requirement of the crown. The king needed to adjudicate intelligently for both rich and poor, and for both the royal family and the tribal clans and confederates.

Although the אִשְׁת־חַיִל has been traditionally interpreted as “virtuous woman” (KJV) or “a good wife” (RSV) or “an excellent wife” (NAS), the foci in 31:11–31 are not limited to the lady’s virtuousness or to her relationship to her spouse. While a husband is mentioned in verse 11, 12, 23, 28, children, maidens, and the whole household are mentioned in verses 15, 21, 27, 28. The words praising the אִשְׁת־חַיִל could have been written by a husband, son, or daughter.

In light of the introduction, “the words of Lemuel” (31:1), there is a compelling reason to conclude that Lemuel said something. If not 31:1–9, why not 31:10–31? If so, then

Lemuel appreciated the way his mother treated his father, the way she treated him and everyone else in the household. The author was speaking out of experience— which explains why thirty-one of the thirty-eight verbs in 31:10–31 are in the *perfect* tense or are *waw consecutive imperfects* with the force of a *perfect*. Even the *imperfect* verbs can refer to the past reflecting what *could, would, should* or *used to be done*.²⁹ The author was not fantasizing about an ideal woman in the future but was giving a eulogy about a family member—not his wife, but his mother.

As the text now stands, the wisdom of Lemuel’s mother, expressed as admonitions to her son in 31:1–9, are but a prelude to his eulogy of her in 31:10–31. The two units could well be reversed, with the prelude transformed into a postlude, illustrating the mother’s wisdom which had been extolled already in the eulogy itself. The point is that Proverbs 31 is a literary unit, with Lemuel being the speaker in 31:10–31 and his mother being the speaker in 31:1–9.

Once it is recognized that the אִשְׁת־חַיִל was a royal lady, the interpreter of this poem can readily appreciate her access to power, wealth, and leisure which gave her the freedom

- to engage in entrepreneurial activities (13, 16, 18, 19, 24)
- to have an expensive and comfortable wardrobe (21, 22)
- to enjoy a physical fitness routine (17)
- to enjoy gourmet foods and international cuisine (14, 15)
- to contribute generously to charity (20)
- to have maids (probably to care for the children) (15)

But not all of the royal lady’s fine qualities and strengths were dependant upon withdrawals from the royal treasury.

Her astute managerial and business skills contributed to the income of the royal household. She had an air of dignity, a good sense of humor, transparent wisdom, practical skills, and a kind spirit (25–26). She was not lacking in religious commitment. She may have been the one who named the son Lemuel/Lemoel, meaning “God made things right.” There was a *Torah* of kindness which provided her with wisdom (26), and she stood in awe of Yahweh (30).

However, Gous (1996: 38) noticed

The erotic is usually included in Ancient Near Eastern songs about women, and may even play an important role in them³⁰ . . . Here there is no suggestion of it. . . . Moreover, there is mention of children but no mention of child-rearing. This makes one wonder: Why ignore aspects like this?

The answer could well be that Lemuel’s eulogy was occasioned by the death of his mother, and any reference to the erotic at such a time would not be expected. In a eulogy given by a son the matter of child-rearing was addressed indirectly, but effectively, by references to (1) the *household* in 31:15, 21, 27, (2) “her *sons*” in 31:28, and (3) the “many *daughters*” in 31:29. Nothing in the 31:10–31 precludes the poem’s having been composed in memory of the אִשְׁת־חַיִל.³¹

As Arabic cognates provided clues for unraveling the ambiguities of Prov 30:1–5, which was written in a non Judean dialect of Hebrew,³² Arabic cognates have also provided clarity in the interpretation of Prov 31:1–31, also written in a non-Judean dialect which used בֵּר and שָׁלִיל for “son” rather than בֶּן. The *old* words from the Massa dialect which need to be added to the *new* lexicons of Biblical Hebrew include:

אל	family, kith-and-kin (30:8)
דרך	acquisitions (30:3)
חון	infidelity, faithlessness (30:30)
חיל	thought, imagination (30:10)
חיל	liberal, generous, intelligent (30:10)
חיל	manager, managerial skill (30:10)
חיל	intelligent (30:10)
חלף	ally, confederate, covenant bond (30:8)
טרף	good, fresh food (30:15)
כלם	word (30:8)
למה	rectify, restore, unite (30:1)
מחח	flatterer, liar (30:3)
נמזה	prosper, thrive (30:2)
עני	riches, wealth (30:5)
שלל	son (30:11)

Fifty-three other Hebrew words in Proverbs 31 have already been identified in current Hebrew lexicons as having Arabic cognates. In my opinion there are actually sixty-eight words with Arabic cognates that appear in chapter 31.³³

By contrast, Wolters (1985: 577–587) argued for identifying just one word, the צוֹפִיָּה of 31:27, as a wordplay on the Greek word σοφία, and on this basis concluded (1) “that everything in the Valiant Woman’s sphere of action embodies wisdom. . . . She personifies wisdom in both word and deed”; (2) “that the song was probably composed sometime after Alexander’s conquest, presumably in the third century B.C.”; and (3) that “the author and the intended audience must have belonged to a sophisticated and highly literate milieu” for the

wordplay to have been understood. However, the Septuagint translators were not sophisticated enough to understand the alleged wordplay! They rendered **הַלִּיכוֹת הַצּוֹפִיָּה** as *στεγναὶ διατριβαί* “the ways-of-life were kept under cover/secret”³⁴ as though **צופיה** were a passive of **צפה**, stem II, “to cover, to overlay.” Moreover, Kennicott (1780: 477) cited the variant *perfect* form **צפיה** in manuscripts 30, 139, 207, 224 and 264.

In my opinion, the editors who incorporated this poem into the corpus of Israelite wisdom literature, as well as those who read it early on, were sophisticated enough to understand the non-Judean dialect of Hebrew used by Lemuel and his mother—be they historical or fictional characters. But in time knowledge of many words in the Massa dialect were forgotten. Many differences in the Septuagint can be clarified only by the recovery of Hebrew lexemes through an appeal to Arabic cognates. Many modern scholars have tried unsuccessfully to interpret these difficult texts using only the vocabulary of Judean Hebrew which has survived in rabbinic recollection and literature.

Instead of being read as a hymn about wisdom incarnate, Prov 31:10–31 is best read as a eulogy by a son about his mother. If it was composed after the death of Lemuel’s mother, the hyperbole can be appreciated as an expression of Lemuel’s grief. Lemuel’s exceptional mother may provide a paradigm for hyperactive royal ladies who are immune to sleep deprivation and are energized by entrepreneurial success which permits them to contribute to the royal treasury, as well as to withdraw from it. But mothers of kings were not role models for the public to emulate, but simply to appreciate. Lemuel’s royal mother, as Lemuel saw it, was in a class all to herself. Perhaps with his aunts and sisters in mind and in ear-

shot, Lemuel eulogized, “Many daughters have done brilliantly, but you, [Mother], surpassed them all (31:29).

NOTES

1. The Septuagint’s *καὶ δεξάμενος αὐτοῦς* reflects a reading of **נְשָׁן** as in Deu 33:3, **וְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִדְּבַר־תִּי** (= *καὶ ἐδέξατο ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων αὐτοῦ* “and he received from his words”) and Gen 50:17, **וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא לְפָשַׁע** (= *καὶ νῦν δέξαι τὴν ἀδικίαν* “now please pardon the transgression”). In Arabic the *u* of the cognate of **נְשָׁן** remains unassimilated. See McDaniel, “Surely There Is a God: Proverbs 30:1–5,” 128, in *Clarifying Baffling Biblical Passages*, available on the internet at <http://www.ebts.edu/tmcdaniel/cbbp-chapter15.pdf>.
2. The Septuagint’s *οἱ ἐμοὶ λόγοι εἴρηνται* reflects a *Vorlage* which was read as **וְדִבְרֵי נְמִלּוֹ אֱל** “my words were spoken (by) God,” with the inversion of the **ל** and **נ** of **לְמוֹאֵל** and the inverted word order of **מִלְּךָ** and the **שָׂא**.
3. Note Scott’s (1965: 183) emendation and translation, “Words [of advice] to a king acting foolishly.” This required reading **לְנוֹאֵל** (from **יֹאֵל** “to be foolish”) for the MT **לְמוֹאֵל**.
4. The use of three synonyms rather than a threefold repetition of “prosper” is an accommodation here to English style.
5. In Gen 46:10 and Exo 6:15 the name appears as **יְמוֹאֵל** (Ιεμμηλ/Ιεμουηλ), providing another example of the confusion of **י** and **נ**, as well as **י** and **נ**. For other examples of such confusion see Delitzsch 1920: 103–105, §103^{a-c} and 111–112, §110^b.

6. Compare Ben Yehudah's suggestion (1920: 114) that "the context demands some such significance as 'Listen!' 'Take heed!' Such a meaning of *ma* exists in Arabic." This suggestion was followed by McKane (1970: 408). But the numerous definitions of 𐤍 (*ma*) cited in Lane (1893: 3016), Hava (1915: 705), and Wehr (1979: 1042) do not include such a definition.

7. For the confusion of 𐤒/𐤓 and 𐤔, see Delitzsch 1920: 114 §116.

8. See the Greek texts of Job 20:15; 20:18; 21:7; 31:25; Psa 48:10 (MT 49:11); 61:11 (MT 62:11); 72:12 (MT 73:12); 75:6 (MT 76:6); Prov 13:22; and 31:29. Note also BDB 299, definition 3, for other references.

9. Solomon's harem of 3,000 women was more social than sexual. It was a form of welfare for the wealthy. Many of the prospective grooms for upper class Israelite maidens had lost their lives in King David's imperial adventures. Since there were not enough royal officers to go around, available maidens were compensated with a royal "wedding" of sorts. Most maidens in Solomon's harem were probably childless neglected virgins as long as they lived.

10. See McKane (1970: 409) for other interpretations which relate 𐤋𐤍𐤕𐤓 to the root 𐤍𐤕𐤓 "to wipe out, destroy, exterminate" and the 𐤍𐤋𐤕𐤓 to 𐤍𐤋𐤕 "counsel, advice" (BDB 576; Jastrow 760, 971).

11. Note the 𐤍𐤕𐤓 which was translated as βίου in Prov 4:10. For other examples of the confusion of a 𐤓 and 𐤒 and a 𐤔 and 𐤓, see Delitzsch 103–105, §103^{a-c}, 107–108, §105^{a-b}.

12. Note also Driver's (1951: 194) summary of interpretations. The meanings of the Arabic cognates 𐤍𐤋𐤕 (*ḥalafa*) and 𐤍𐤋𐤕 (*ḥalafa*) required over 1,500 lines of text in Lane's lexicon (1865: 627–628 and 792–799, providing the interpreter with many varied options.

13. A second cognate of חֲלוֹף is خَلْف (ḥalafa)—not to be confused with حَلَف (ḥalafa)—meaning “he came after, followed, succeeded,” with the noun خَالِف (ḥālif) “successor, follower, caliph” (Lane 1865: 792–799). This cognate was cited in BDB (322) and provided the basis for translating the בְּנֵי חֲלוֹף as “those who are passing away, transitory.” See McDaniel, “I Have Not come to Bring the End (Matt 10:34–36),” 305–306, in *Clarifying Baffling Biblical Passages*, available on the internet at <http://www.ebts.edu/tmcdaniel/cbbp-chapter30.pdf>.

14. The feminine خَلْفَة (ḥilfat) is also attested. According to Simon (1793: 564, citing Schultens), حَلَف (ḥalafa) is the cognate of the חֲלִיפּוֹת in Psa 55:19–20,

אֵין חֲלִיפּוֹת לָמוֹ וְלֹא יִרְאוּ אֱלֹהִים
שָׁלַח יָדָיו בְּשִׁלְמוֹ חֲלִל בְּרִיתוֹ:

There were no *oaths of allegiance* from them,*
and they did not fear God.

He stretched forth his hands in retribution;
they (plural with LXX) had profaned his covenant.

*See GKC 103^f for reading לָמוֹ as a plural, and *UT* 425, #1337, for reading ל “from.”

15. Although KBS (321) cited חֶלֶף stem II, the cognate of Arabic *حلف* (*ḥalaf*) “sharp, high coarse grass, a writing reed,” the *حلف* (*ḥalafa*) meaning “to swear an oath, to establish a brotherhood, to unite in a covenant” and the noun *حلف* (*ḥilf*) “confederacy, league, covenant” are not mentioned in KBS, even though these cognates were cited in earlier lexicons, like those of Castell (1669: 1255–1260) and Simon (1793: 564). The name Alphaeus in Matt 10:3 (Ἰάκωβος ὁ τοῦ Ἀλφαίου) appears in Hebrew as חֶלְפִי, in

Syriac as **ܫܠܦܘܢ** (*ḥalpay*), and in the Arabic as **حلفى** (*ḥalfī*). It can be derived from this stem (Jastrow 457).

16. This **עָנִי** “rich” is not to be confused with **עָנִי** “poor” or **עָנִי** “poor.” Given the frequent interchange of י and ל in Hebrew roots, the graphic similarity of י and ל in certain scripts, and the coalescence in Hebrew of the *ḡayin* (ג) with the *‘ayin* (ע), it is not surprising that **עָנִי** and **עָנִי** were so easily confused that **עָנִי** dropped out of usage and became lost to lexicographers. Once the shift was made from the clarity of oral literature to the ambiguities of a written literature which used a consonant-only orthography, the plague of homographs resulted in the demise of many words from the active vocabulary.

17. The Arabic cognate of **עָנִי** “to sing” is **غنى** (*ḡanaya*). It has been recognized in the lexicons of Biblical Hebrew, along with **עָנָו** (*anawa*) “to be humble, submissive,” the cognate of **עָנִי** “poor, meek.” The name of the Levitical singer **עָנִי** (LXX Ωνι), mentioned in I Chron 15:18, 20 and the *Qere* of Neh 12:9, was probably a *Pu‘al* perfect (*‘unnay* > *‘unnē*) meaning either “he was afflicted” or “he was enriched.” An *afflicted* Levite was unlikely to have been appointed to the royal court or cult; whereas one who “was freed from want” would have well qualified for such a position. Thus, **עָנִי** “to be rich” may have been well used at one time.

18. Most translations have avoided making David into a billion dollar “pauper” by paraphrasing **עָנִי** as

- “in my trouble” (KJV, RWB, WEB),
- “I have taken much trouble” (NKJ),
- “I have taken great pains” (NIV, NIB),
- “with great pains” (RSV, NRS, NAU, NAS),
- “in my/mine affliction” (ASV, BBE, DBY),
- “I have worked hard” (NLT).

32 THE ROYAL LADY OF PROVERBS 31

The בְּעֵנְיַי was translated literally in the NJB as “poor as I am” and in the DRA as “in my poverty.” Curtiss (1910: 259) argued unconvincingly, “possibly in Gn 31³² and certainly in Dt 26⁷, עֲנִי means oppressive toil. . . . The parallel בְּכָל כֹּחִי [“with all my power”] in 29² favours *by my hard (or painful) labor.*” In BDB (777) בְּעֵנְיַי was paraphrased as “in spite of my frustration.”

19. Lane’s definition of *ʿill* (إل) reads in part, “Anything which has a quality requiring it to be regarded as sacred, or inviolable . . . relationship; or nearness with respect to kindred . . . A compact, or covenant; or one by which a person becomes responsible for the safety, or safekeeping of a person or thing, . . . a confederacy, or league; syn. حلف (*hilf*), a covenant between two parties by which either is bound to protect the other.”

20. Liddell and Scott (1940: 128) defined ἀνδρεία as “manliness, manly spirit” and the opposite of δειλία “timidity, cowardice.”

21. Although Szlos (2000: 102) noted the suggestions of Waltke (1999) and Clifford (1999), Driver’s proposal went unnoticed. Szlos concluded that “Military imagery is this poem comprises שלל ‘booty’ in v. 11, חֵיל ‘power’ in v. 10 and 29, עֵז ‘might’ in v. 25, and מַחְנִימִים ‘loins,’ עֵז ‘might,’ זְרוּעוֹת ‘arms’ and אֲמִץ ‘to strengthen’ in v.17.” For Szlos the military language, coupled with metaphors of body parts and commercial vocabulary, depicted a “woman of valor.”

22. There is nothing in MT for the ἡ τοιαύτη “such a (woman)” nor the καλῶν, which turns the “spoils” into “good spoils.”

23. Five of the six imperfect verbs could express modality when speaking of past events, such as, “he *would* not lack” (11), “she used to bring” (15), “it *would* not go out” (18), “she *would* not be afraid” (21); “she *would* not eat” (27); and “she *should* be praised” (30) (see GKC §107^{r-w}). The brief but important article by Joüon

(1922: 349–352) has, unfortunately, been ignored. Joüon called attention to the fact that the Pehitta and the Targum generally translated in the past tense. He noted further

D'autres traits indiquent que ce personnage n'est plus vivant, L'éloge que font les fils et le mari (vv. 28-29) ne peut guère s'adresser à une femme encore vivante. Les mots du v. 25 *elle a souri au dernier jour* semblent bien devoir s'entendre de la mort; de même, au v. 12, les mots *tous les jours de sa vie* supposent qu'elle a terminé ses jours.

24. Compare also Gen 47:22; Ezek 16:27; and Job 23:12.

25. On the confusion of ת and ה, see Delitzsch 1920: 108–109 §105^b.

26. Compare Gous (1996: 35) who stated, “. . . paying no attention to charm and beauty, and probably also not to child-rearing or erotic aspects, and *leaving her husband nothing to do but to sit in the city gate praising her and being praised because of her*” (italics mine).

27. In the Baltimore dialect of English used in my childhood, the name Arab (pronounced EH-raab) was used for the hucksters selling fruit and vegetables from their horse-drawn carts. The name “Canaanite” obviously had such a double meaning in Biblical times. A shift in accentuation in old Hebrew may have distinguished the כְּנַעֲנִי “Canaanite” from the כְּנַעֲנִי* “merchant.”

28. The γυνὴ γὰρ συνετὴ εὐλογεῖται “for a wise woman is blessed” comes from variant readings of the MT אִשָּׁה יְרֵאָתָא. The εὐλογεῖται reflects a double reading of אִשָּׁה as γυνὴ and as εὐλογεῖται (= אִשָּׁה), thanks to a confusion of a ה and a ו (see Delitzsch 1920: 114, §116^c for other examples). The συνετὴ reflects a double reading of יְרֵאָתָא (= φόβου) and as יִרְעָתָא (=

34 THE ROYAL LADY OF PROVERBS 31

συνετή), thanks to the confusion of a ך and a ך (see Delitzsch 1920: 105–107, §104^{a-c} for examples), plus the aural confusion of the ך and ך.

29. Compare Joüon 1922: 349–352. See note 23.

30. Gous cited Wolters 1988: 451; Gottlieb 1991: 284, 287; Brenner 1993: 129; and Bellis 1994: 196–197.

31. See the quotation of Joüon in note 23.

32. See McDaniel, “Surely There Is a God: Proverbs 30:1–5,” in *Clarifying Baffling Biblical Passages*, available on the internet at <http://www.ebts.edu/tmcdaniel/cbbp-chapter15>.

33. In a separate study of Jeremiah 31, twenty-eight of thirty-three Hebrew lexemes in that chapter having Arabic cognates have already been cited in standard Hebrew lexicons. See McDaniel, *Clarifying Baffling Biblical Passages*, 159, 178–180, available on the internet at <http://www.ebts.edu/tmcdaniel/cbbp-chapter19.pdf>.

34. See Liddell and Scott 1636, s.v. στεγνός and στέγω B, III.

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ADDENDA

Frequent appeals to Arabic cognates have been made to clarify the ambiguities in Prov 30:1–5 (see note 32) and in this study of Prov 31:1–31. A few more examples are noted here to emphasize the benefits of looking at Arabic cognates in order to understand some of the Septuagintal variants and problematic words in the MT. These examples deals with Prov 30:31, which speaks of “*three things that are stately in their stride, four that move with stately bearing.*” The “mighty lion which never retreats” was the first strident figure, mentioned in 30: 30, after which appear

... זָרִיר מְתַנֵּים אוֹתֵישׁ
וּמְלִךְ אֶלְקֹם עִמּוֹ

... the strutting cock, the he-goat,
and a king striding before his people. (RSV)

The Septuagint has a expanded text reading

καὶ ἀλέκτωρ ἐμπεριπατῶν θηλείαις εὐψυχος
καὶ τράγος ἡγούμενος αἰπολίου
καὶ βασιλεὺς δημηγορῶν ἐν ἔθνει

and a rooster strutting about boldly among the hens,
and the goat leading the herd;
and a king demagoguing before a people.

The MT זָרִיר מְתַנֵּים has been translated as “greyhound” (KJV, ASV, NKJ), “war horse” (BBE), *gallus succinctus* “cock girded” (Vulgate, DRA); “vigorous cock” (NJB); and “strutting cock/rooster” (RSV, NRS, NIV, NIB, etc.). The MT זָרִיר can be related to זָרָא “strength, valor, belt, garments” and זָרָא “to be quick” or “to harness.” When used with מְתַנֵּים “loins,” the combination suggested something fast in

the hindquarters (like a greyhound) and/or something fast and girded (like a war-horse or a gladiator) (Jastrow 412; BDB 267, 608).

But זָרְזִיר also means a “starling” or a bird used for food (Jastrow 412; Lane 1867: 1223). Thus the “rooster” and the “hens” appeared in the translations. The MT מְתַנִּים was taken to mean “strutting,” which would be the cognate of Arabic ثَنَى (*tanaya*), form V, meaning “he affected an inclining of his body . . . from side to side and walked with an elegant and proud and self conceited gait” (Lane 1863: 357). Ordinarily, the Arabic *t* became a *š* in Hebrew and a *t* in Aramaic, but as noted above, Proverbs 30 and 31 are in a dialect and mixed forms can be anticipated. Thus, the Septuagint *Vorlage* had זָרְזִיר מְתַנִּים “strutting roosters” for the MT זָרְזִיר מְתַנִּים “girded loins.” The ἀλέκτωρ “cock” and the εὐψυχος “bold” are a doublet for the זָרְזִיר. The θηλείαις “females, hens” and the ἡγούμενος ἀιπολίου “leading the herd” have no correspondents in the MT.

The real crux of 30:31 has been the אֱלֹקִים in the phrase וּמִלֶּךְ אֱלֹקִים עֲמוֹ. Scott (1965: 182) confessed that his translation, “the king whom no man dare resist,” was only a guess and conjectured, following Toy (1899), “Possibly the fourth of those *which stride proudly* (vs. 29) is another animal whose name is unknown or unrecognizable in the text as it stands.” McKane (1970) has provided a convenient summary of a number of emendations and translations, including

- כְּאֵל קָם בְּעַמּוֹ “who like a god stands among his people” (Ringgren 1947);

- אֵיל קֶדֶם עַמּוֹ “a leader preceding his people” (Bewer 1948: 61);
- עַמּוֹ לְאֶ-קוֹם/אֶל-קוֹם “against whom there is no rising up, *i.e.*, a king who is irresistible” (Driver 1951: 94, citing Hitzig);
- קָם אֶל-עַמּוֹ “standing over, *i.e.*, at the head of his people” (Driver, 1951: 94, citing Toy, Jäger, and Ewald; and followed by McKane 1979: 664);
- “the mountain goat (אֶקוֹ) standing up in front of his people” (Roth 1965: 20).

The consonantal MT can be retained if the אֶל־קוֹם is divided to read אֶל קוֹם and the אֶל is recognized as the cognate of the Arabic آ (°*āla*) “he (a prince or commander, or a king) ruled, or governed, his subjects; presided over their affairs, as commander or governor; and did so well.” The noun إيالة (°*iyālat*) means “government, rule,” and in form II آ (°*āla*) signifies “the discovering, detecting, revealing, developing, or disclosing, or the explaining, expounding, or interpreting, that to which a thing is, or may be reduced, or that which it comes, or may come to be” (Lane 1863: 126). This was certainly the meaning the Septuagint translator had in mind when they translated אֶל as δῆμηγορῶν “demagoguing, orating” with all the body language that goes with it.

The קוֹם of אֶל־קוֹם is the cognate of Arabic قوم (*qawm*) “a people, or body of persons composing a community . . . a company or body . . . of men, [properly] without women: or of men and women together; for the قوم (*qawm*) of every man is his party, and his kinfolk, or tribe, sometimes including

women as followers . . .” (Lane 1893: 2996). The consonantal MT, as re-divided, **וּמֶלֶךְ אֵל קוֹם עַמּוֹ**, means “and a king governing/demagoguing a tribe of his people.” A very similar phrase appears in Arabic, namely, **هو مويال لقومه** (*hû mû³yâl liqawmihi*) “he is ruler, governor of his people” (Lane 1863: 128). The **مويال** (*mû³yâl*) is but a variant prefixed form of **آل** (*āla*) which equals **אֵל**, and the **قوم** (*qawm*) equals **קוֹם**. In Hebrew the *aw* diphthong of *qawm* would have contract to *ô* so that **קוֹם** should be read as **קוֹם**. The **עַמּוֹ** “his people” could well be a gloss on the rare (in Judean Hebrew) noun **קוֹם** “people,” and if so would reinforce this proposed derivation.

Thus, the problems in these biblical texts turn out to be more problems with the lexicons of Biblical Hebrew than with the versions or the MT. Lexicons have yet to include many lexemes which were *known* by the Septuagint translators—and survive in Arabic cognates—but were *unknown* in rabbinic literature. With all the precautions noted by Kaltner (1996) in mind, the recovery of a number of Hebrew lexemes in this study by a careful appeal to the variants in the Septuagint and Arabic lexicons may contribute to even better lexicons of Biblical Hebrew.