

terms of the most recent work published by Buss on the same topic.⁴ On the whole, I think the reading of this book, would certainly benefit Hungarian theological scholarship in appraising more positively or

negatively and probably more objectively form-criticism, past and present.

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Stuart Weeks: Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1–9

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As the title indicates this book is concerned with the first major section of the book of Proverbs that is Prov 1–9. Its main aim is to explore Prov 1–9 in terms of its genre and sophisticated employment of imagery. By this S. Weeks rebuts those views according to which Prov 1–9 is a mere anthology or accretion of various editorial layers. Weeks surmises that Prov 1–9 may be viewed as a unified composition. The setting characteristic of the ancient and prestigious instruction *Gattung* is employed by a sequence of “stylistically ambitious” poems, which also expand the conventions of this *Gattung* in order to produce an “inter-play” of figurative characters and speeches. The characters in question encapsulate personified Wisdom and her perilous counterparts, the seductive Strange Woman and Woman Folly. Through these characters and through an allusive employment of words and motifs, the ancient readers were admonished to internalize the Jewish Law in order to be able to decline the dangerous and threatening alternatives and obtain wisdom. This presentation of the character of the work is performed in light of a preceding elucidation of Egyptian instructions. Nevertheless, it is positioned in a Jewish religious context, so that Weeks claims that its later prepossession betrays not reinterpretation

but an accurate comprehension of the original message. This, as it has been rightly pointed out, retains important implications for the understanding of the ways in which wisdom and Law were perceived in post-exilic Israel.

The treatment offered by Weeks is divided into six chapters and an additional annotated translation of the MT of Prov 1–9.

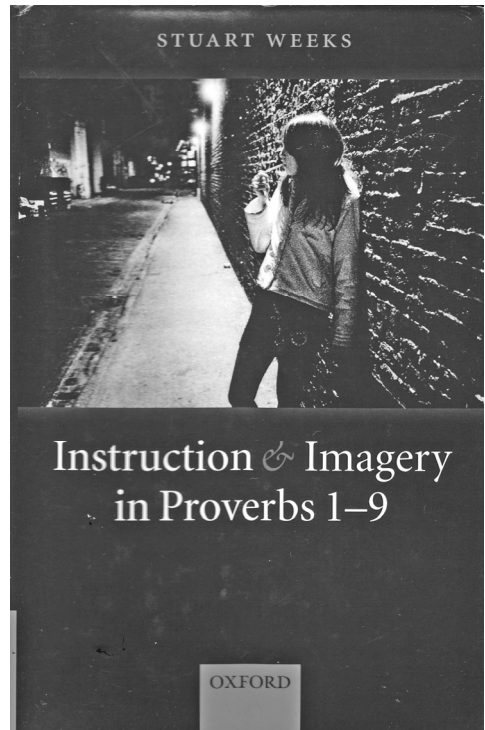
The first chapter tackles the question of the instruction *Gattung* in the ancient Near East. Hebrew literature did not come into existence and then develop in a “cultural or literary vacuum.” Therefore, scholars concur about the fact that certain genres, such as the wisdom literature of which Proverbs is a constituent part, drew on forms and conventions borrowed from neighbouring cultures. There is an ongoing discussion amongst scholars as to the degree of this borrowing. In relation to this, Weeks deems that much of Proverbs does reflect the compositional traditions that are to be found in the literatures of the ancient Near East. One of the most prominent of these is the instruction *Gattung*, which was especially widespread in Egypt. The bulk of commentators have associated Prov 1–9 with that genre. Weeks concludes this chapter by asserting that despite the universal character of the instruction genre

⁴ Martin J. Buss, *The Concept of Form in the Twentieth Century* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008).

its original aim may be best understood in its original context, especially that instructions do not derive their meaning and influences from some body or source independent of the culture and society in which they received written shape.

In chapter two Weeks attempts to prove the fact that Prov 1–9 as a whole may be viewed as a prime example of the instruction genre. In his view, there are several aspects that highlight this, such as the father-son address etc. The plethora of allusions to the paternal guidance and its portrayal of the father as a real speaker, extend far beyond the kind of mere references that one encounters in other passages (e.g. Qoh 12,12, provides a passing address to “my son”).

In chapter three Weeks builds on the conclusions of the previous chapters, especially on the fact that the genre of Prov 1–9 may be characterized as “stylistically ambitious.” Therefore, Weeks goes on to provide a treatment of the elaborate and extensive employment of figurative language. Such employment may buttress the claims about the high-literary and poetic character of Prov 1–9, which is usually typical of instructions. Weeks surmises that Prov 1–9 seems to go much further than most in this particular matter. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that it is difficult to distinguish between figurative and literal in Prov 1–9 and this difficulty occurs not only at the level of metaphors used but also when one intends to examine the extent to which the work employs other devices. Weeks proceeds to analyse the ways in which figures and motifs are connected and presented across the work. His conclusions in this chapter are that Prov 1–9 develops an “elaborate” and “distinctive” set of motifs and that the importance of some constituents only becomes lucid through an acknowledgment of their place in this work.



In chapter four Weeks attempts to furnish a fresh understanding of the instruction present in Prov 1–9. He underscores that the proclivity of scholarship to focus too much on the didacticism of Prov 1–9 resulted in an obvious neglect of its poetic character. In the case of such an instructional work as Prov 1–9, which emphasises so clearly the significance of instruction, one must indeed pay attention to the way in which this is defined. Instead, what one encounters is a work, which is designed for stating the need for the uneducated to internalize the instruction without providing the definition itself. Weeks deems that Prov 3,1–10 and 3,21–35 are the sections of the work, which appear to proffer more specific guidance in this matter. These two sections make extensive use of the path imagery, and there are no valuable reasons to view them as secondary. They are neither subsidiary to the aforementioned imagery and seem to

describe teaching for or against certain behaviour.

In chapter five, Weeks concentrates on the figurative context in which wisdom and instruction are displayed. He asserts that the significant efforts of Prov 1–9 to develop such elements of its presentation as the Strange Woman, the path imagery and the instructional setting, seem to be relevant to the work's central concerns. These elements provide alternative approaches to the comprehension of these concerns and they are far from being subsidiary to the expression of ideas of the author of Prov 1–9 about wisdom and instruction. They may have also pre-possessed and constrained that expression. Weeks analyses the ways in which such key elements would have been understood by the original readership, commencing with the distinctive portrayal of the foreign woman, followed by the establishment as to what these various elements would have proposed in combination.

In the final chapter of his book, Weeks offers a treatment of the significance of Prov 1–9, focusing on such issues as the date and place of composition, the context of Prov 1–9, the place of history in Prov 1–9, Prov 1–9 and the place of wisdom literature, Prov 1–9 and the foreign instructions and finally the purpose and setting of Prov 1–9.

In conclusion Weeks states that Prov 1–9 argues for the learning and internalizing of instruction, which Weeks simply calls "Law," however that was comprehended in the post-exilic period. It also evokes a whole plethora of biblical texts and motifs but not with such focus that one could view it to be an orchestrated interpretation, or Midrash, on any one of

them. It seems that Prov 1–9 attempts to dilate on a major post-exilic concern with intermarriage but not in a way in which it would appear to be concerned with the debate directly. In terms of the possible audience or original readers of Prov 1–9, Weeks postulates that they were expected to recognize both the genre and the biblical allusions and also the appreciation of the belletristic, poetic style of the work. The writer of Prov 1–9 provides a fairly simple message, clothed in a highly sophisticated presentation for a well-read audience. Nevertheless, positioning the work historically ought to be necessarily suppository.

Weeks's treatment of Prov 1–9 is indeed valuable, especially in his analysis of the genre of Prov 1–9, which provides further grounds for a more holistic genre definition of Prov 1–9. His work is also plausible in terms of treating Prov 1–9 as a unified composition not only in terms of its genre but also in terms of its figurative language. However, in terms of the figurative language, he tackles only the house imagery, which makes his treatment incomplete, since much other imagery may be detected in Prov 1–9, such as house or treasure imagery etc. Furthermore, his treatment of the ancient Near Eastern background ought to be read and examined carefully, since some of the results may be questionable, just as was the case with his earlier work entitled *Early Israelite Wisdom*, as pointed out by K. A. Kitchen.

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