CHAPTER SIX

SOME FORM-CRITICAL AND TRADITIO-HISTORICAL ASPECTS

Von Rad has rightly emphasized the significance of form in expressing Israelite wisdom.\(^1\) This chapter offers a preliminary exploration of the various forms by which proverbial sayings were expressed in Proverbs and in Arabic proverbs.\(^2\)

6.1 COMPARISONS\(^3\)

Comparisons are employed by the use of the יִפְסִיל proverbs, the simile, and the metaphor.

6.1.1 יִפְסִיל Proverbs

The study of the יִפְסִיל proverbs goes back to the form-critical study of Ben Sirach by Baumgartner.\(^4\) With the publication of Amememope, several scholars found parallels for this form in Proverbs (15.16, 17; 17.1; 16.8; cf. Amememope 9.7, 8; 16.11-14).\(^5\) In addition to the discussion of this form in the commentaries on Proverbs it has received special treatment in the works of W. Zimmerli\(^6\), H.-J. Hermisson\(^7\),

---

2 Unless otherwise indicated all the Arabic sayings quoted in this section have already been referred to and their sources are detailed in previous chapters. Although many proverbs could be cited as examples, due to space limitation we have selected only a few.
3 The content of the comparisons is dealt with in the previous chapters. Our concern here is with their form.
G. E. Bryce, G. S. Ogden, and G. Vanoni. However, none of these refer to the use of this form in Arabic material, especially proverbs. Even Vanoni, who cites proverbs of similar forms from different cultures and languages both ancient and modern, makes no reference to Arabic. The following discussion deals with the forms of proverbs in Proverbs and in Arabic proverbs and their significance for understanding the origin and the function of both groups.

Forms of Proverbs

There are three basic forms of proverbs in Arabic. The first two are also found in Proverbs while the last form seems to be peculiar to Arabic proverbs.

The first form is: 'A is better than B'. In this form A represents the positive element which is to be sought and B represents the negative element which is to be avoided. This form occurs several times in Proverbs (19.22b; 21.9, 19; 27.10c; 25.24; cf. 3.14; 8.19). While Prov. 21.9 and 25.24 are identical, Prov. 21.19 deals also with the same subject-matter. The contexts of Prov. 19.22b and 27.10c strongly suggest that these two sayings existed as independent proverbs.

The Arabic grammatical form which is equivalent to حُبَّ الْعَمَل حُبَّ الْخَيْرِ مِنَ الْعُقَّرَان. The form 'A is better than B' is frequent in Arabic: "The dust of work is better than the saffron of idleness.

---

12 This form is frequent in Sirach (e.g., 11.3; 19.24; 20.2, 18, 25, 31; 25.16; 30.14-17; 40.18-27; 41.15; 42.14).
13 Another form which rarely occurs is: 'A + B is better than A + C'. This form is seen in the proverb: "Regret after silence is better than regret after speech (الْمُخْلِصُ عَلَى الْلُّغَةِ حَبُّ الْخَيْرِ مِنَ الْكُلُوكِ عَلَى الْقُوُلَ)."
14 It is possible that the two lines of Prov. 16.32 belong to this form.
15 On the textual difficulties of Prov. 19.22 and the different attempts to find a correlation between its two lines see Toy, Proverbs, pp. 378-9; McKane, Proverbs, pp. 532-3; Plöger, Sprüche, pp. 219, 226. Prov. 27.10c is considered as an independent saying by Toy, Proverbs, p. 486; McKane, Proverbs, p. 614; Whybray, Commentary, p. 382. Whybray argues that there is no unity of thought in the three lines of Prov. 27.10 and suggests that v. 10c "may be a popular proverb."