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THE TEACHING OF AMENEMOPE AND PROVERBS  
XXII 17-XXIV 22: FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON A  
LONG-STANDING PROBLEM

by

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Adolf Erman argued in 1924 that Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 10<sup>1</sup> is dependent on an Egyptian sapiential work, the Teaching of Amenemope. Since then, it has been widely—though never universally—agreed that this part of the book of Proverbs or, in the opinion of many, the whole of xxii 17-xxiv 22, has been influenced by this Egyptian source.

The theory was, however, challenged some years ago by the late R.N. Whybray. The challenge came in three of his publications in 1994: chapter 3 of his book *The Composition of the Book of Proverbs*, an article on “The Structure and Composition of Proverbs 22:17-24:22”, and his commentary on Proverbs in the *New Century Bible* series. While Whybray does not deny that “there may be direct reminiscences of” Amenemope, “as of other similar works”, he maintains that the “alleged dependence” of this part of Proverbs “as a whole on Amenemope in any way must be regarded as questionable” (“Structure”, p. 96). Indeed, it appears from what Whybray says in his discussion of the alleged dependence that he regards it as, not merely questionable, but unlikely.

The purpose of the present article is to look again at the question of the dependence of Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22 on Amenemope in the light of Whybray’s challenge to the widely-accepted theory. Whybray was a leading scholar in the study of Israelite wisdom literature and made many valuable contributions to the subject. A challenge advanced by

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<sup>1</sup> Although Erman says “23,10” on p. 92, I have ventured in the present article to substitute for it xxiii 11 in accordance with the usage of later scholars because verse 11 clearly belongs with verse 10. Erman seems to have mentioned verse 10 because it is the last verse in which he detected the influence of Amenemope, not because he thought of it as the end of an editorial section in the book of Proverbs.

so distinguished a scholar of the wisdom literature deserves to be taken seriously and examined in detail.

Before Whybray's argument is discussed, some preliminary points may be made. First, it is generally agreed that xxii 17-xxiv 22 is the third major collection of sayings in the book of Proverbs,<sup>2</sup> though that does not necessarily imply that the collection is a literary unity. Second, attempts to prove that Amenemope is itself dependent on a Semitic original have failed (see Bryce). Further, "the date of composition [of Amenemope] is probably Ramesside (c. 1250-1100 BC),"<sup>3</sup> and it is therefore earlier than Proverbs. Third, I shall not discuss the question how the author of this part of Proverbs learned about Amenemope (if it was known to him). Did he, for example, know a Hebrew translation of the Egyptian work, or was he able to read the Egyptian text for himself? Was he dependent on an earlier Hebrew work which, in turn, was dependent on Amenemope? Nor shall I discuss theories "of a common source from which both authors excerpted material in their own ways", of which Whybray rightly says "such explanations are entirely hypothetical" ("Structure", p. 86). There may have been such intermediaries between Amenemope and Proverbs and we must make allowance for the possibility of their existence, but we have no direct evidence for them.

## I

It is unnecessary to attempt here to summarize the history of discussion of the problem (see, for example, the account given by Bryce). It is, however, necessary to give some account of the principal ways in which the dependence of the Hebrew work on Amenemope has been understood, if Whybray's argument is to be discussed against its background in the history of scholarship: we need to have a clear idea of the kind of theory that he is attacking.

Erman's article of 1924 drew attention to a number of similarities between Amenemope and verses in the book of Proverbs and, in par-

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<sup>2</sup> There is a new heading in xxiv 23: "These also are the sayings of the wise." Whybray (*Composition*, p. 145) views xxiv 23-34 as an appendix to what precedes and as probably originally an independent collection. Whether or not that is correct, verse 22 brings to an end a section of the book of Proverbs.

<sup>3</sup> Ray, p. 23. Similarly, Whybray ("Structure", p. 86) says that Amenemope was written c. "1,100 BC or a little earlier", and he refers on p. 83 n. 1 to Brunner, p. 235, for the date.

ticular, found a concentration of seven similarities in Prov. xxii 17-xxiii 11 (see n. 1 above), but detected none in xxiii 12-xxiv 22. He suggested that a Jew living in Egypt in the Saite or Persian period translated Amenemope into Hebrew or Aramaic, substituting the divine name Yahweh for references to any other deity, and making other changes to suit Jewish readers (p. 92). However, the translation suffered at the hands of collectors of proverbs, who treated it without much understanding of its meaning. The result is that what has survived is only a mutilated form of the original Semitic translation. Further, he suggested that *š'łšîm*, "thirty", should be read in Prov. xxii 20 instead of *š'lsôm* (the *Kethûbh*) or *š'ālîšîm* (the *Qere*), and that it referred to the thirty chapters into which Amenemope is divided—"thirty being the number which epitomized justice in ancient Egypt" (Ray, p. 23; cp. Bryce, pp. 20, 85, 225 n. 47). This reading came into the hands of a collector of sayings, but it made no sense in its present context. "Aber wer weiß, in welcher trümmerhaften Gestalt ihm das Buch schon vorliegen mochte, und wieviel er überhaupt noch davon verstand?" (p. 90; cp. p. 92).

That same year, 1924, a review by Ernst Sellin of Erman's article appeared in the *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, followed by an article, also by Sellin, in the same journal on the same subject. Sellin agrees that Amenemope has influenced this part of Proverbs and writes of influence on the whole "Spruchsammlung" of xxii 17-xxiv 22. He also adds four further parallels between the two works, three of which had already been suggested by Hugo Greßmann in the *Vossische Zeitung* 294 (22 June 1924), to which I have not had access.

Sellin follows Erman in reading "thirty" in Prov. xxii 20, but differs from him in claiming that it makes sense in its Hebrew context. In Sellin's opinion, it refers to the thirty Hebrew sayings that he finds in Prov. xxii 22-xxiv 22. The Hebrew writer has been influenced by Amenemope's reference in 27.6 to the thirty chapters into which the Egyptian work is divided, but the Hebrew text contains thirty sayings instead of thirty chapters. The Hebrew sayings identified by Sellin are not restricted to xxii 22-xxiii 11 in which parallels to Amenemope had been found, but extend into xxii 12-xxiv 22. According to Sellin, when the Hebrew writer got to the end of Prov. xxii 11, it was not that he could not understand what followed in the relevant part of Amenemope, or that he was using a translation that had fallen into disarray. Rather, while he drew on Amenemope for sayings that were relevant to his own purpose, he ignored parts of the Egyptian writing that were not,

and therefore drew on other sources instead. The Teaching of Amenemope was intended to train officials for Egyptian government service, and the Hebrew writer passed over passages that he thought relevant only to that purpose, rather than to the needs of Israelite readers. Sellin thus ascribes greater freedom than Erman to the Hebrew writer in his handling of the Egyptian material.

Another article on the subject by Greßmann appeared in 1924 in the *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*. We learn from it (p. 273) that his earlier article (see above) had already—before the publication of Sellin’s review and article—found thirty sayings in Prov. xxii 22-xxiv 22 corresponding to the number “thirty”, which Erman had postulated in xxii 20. In this second article, Greßmann lists the parallels between Proverbs and Amenemope, distinguishing between close similarities in wording and similarities in thought. He also sets out the relevant verses in Proverbs alongside the places in Amenemope on which he believes them to be dependent. It is evident from this synopsis that the order of the verses in Proverbs is not always the same as the order in Amenemope and that the text of the latter is sometimes longer than that of the former. Indeed, it may be inferred from the references given to Amenemope—and confirmed by looking at the text of Amenemope as a whole—that much in the Egyptian work has no counterpart in Proverbs. Further, like Erman, Greßmann notes that close similarities in wording do not appear after Prov. xxiii 11. It is possible, he says, that the author of this part of Proverbs may have used a recension of Amenemope different from the one that is extant, but he also regards it as probable that the Hebrew writer made use of other sources as well as Amenemope. Indeed, he notes a similarity in wording between Prov. xxiii 13-14 and lines 81-2 of the Aramaic Sayings of Ahiqar in the Elephantine papyri (Cowley, pp. 215, 222, 234).

It is not surprising that Greßmann, excited by Erman’s article, should emphasize the influence of Amenemope on the author of Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22, noting that some verses are close to the Egyptian work in both thought and expression. However, a careful examination of Greßmann’s article as a whole shows that the extent of the dependence, considerable though it was, should not be exaggerated. Greßmann does not suggest that the whole of Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22 was closely modelled on Amenemope, let alone a translation. The Hebrew writer presented some material in a different order, passed over much material, and drew also on another source or sources. The Egyptian

material was treated with considerable freedom, not only in its adaptation to belief in Yahweh. This freedom appears clearly in the way in which the thirty chapters of Amenemope have been replaced by thirty sayings, most of them not based on the Egyptian. Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22 was written by someone who was influenced by Amenemope but did not follow it closely, except in some verses, and much of whose material was not derived from this Egyptian work.

A view of the relation of Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22 to Amenemope similar to that of Greßmann has been held by various scholars, of whom only a few examples need be given here. An example from only a few years after the publication of Greßmann's article may be found in Paul Humbert's book of 1929 on the broader subject of the Egyptian sources of Israelite wisdom literature. To turn to more recent writers, the discussions of this part of Proverbs by Gemser (1963), Scott (1965) and McKane (1970) are all similar in general, although they differ in details such as the precise definition of which verses are to be regarded as the thirty sayings to which Prov. xxii 20 refers. If Whybray's attempt to refute the claim that this part of Proverbs is dependent on Amenemope is to be successful, it must show why the type of theory represented by scholars such as Greßmann, Humbert, Gemser, Scott and McKane is unsatisfactory.

## II

A convenient way in which to begin an examination of Whybray's attack on the theory that Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22 is dependent on Amenemope is to discuss the text of xxii 20 and the question whether *š'lošim*, "thirty", should be read. I shall not discuss all the textual problems of this passage but shall focus attention on this word. In order to discuss verse 20, it is necessary also to consider verse 19.

- 19 *lihyôt byhwh miḇṭaḥekā*  
*hōda'tikā hayyôm 'ap-'attā*  
 20 *hālō katabū l'kā šālōšim (Qere)/šlšwm (Kethibh)*  
*b'mō'ēšōt wādā'at*

The following translation is offered in the *Revised Standard Version*:

- 19 That your trust may be in the LORD,  
 I have made them known to you today, even to you.  
 20 Have I not written for you thirty sayings  
 of admonition and knowledge . . . ?

The *RSV*'s translation of verse 20 reads *š'lošim*, where the two readings of the MT are *šyšym* and *ššum*.

The LXX translates the first four words in verse 20 as follows:

καὶ σὺ δὲ ἀπόγραψαι αὐτὰ σεαυτῷ τρισσῶς,

Do thou transcribe them triply for thyself (Toy's translation).

The Greek word τρισσῶς is the adverb corresponding to the adjective τρισσός, "threefold", and presumably means "in a threefold way" or "three times" (see Lust et al.). Where the MT has *kātabtū*, the first-person singular perfect *qal*, the LXX has the imperative singular, but the other versions agree with the MT. The Vulgate's counterpart to the disputed Hebrew word is *tripliciter*, "in a threefold manner" or "in three ways". The Peshiṭta and the Targum—and the latter is dependent on the former (see Weitzman, pp. 90, 109-10)—have 'al *t'lat* (Targum: *t'lāṭā*) *zabnūn*, "three times". These renderings see the number "three" in the word, but do not understand it to mean "thirty".

It may be suspected that the translators responsible for these versions identified the Hebrew word before them with *š'lošim*, which appears in Gen. vi 16; Num. ii 24; 1 Sam. xix 21 and 2 Kings i 13 as the masculine plural of the ordinal numeral *š'liš*, "third". In 1 Sam. xix 21, for example, *mal'ākām š'lošim* refers to the third group of messengers sent by Saul to capture David. Prov. xxii 20 was therefore understood to say "Have I not written third things?", which was interpreted to mean "in a threefold way" or "three times".

This way of interpreting Prov. xxii 20, as found in the Targum, was transmitted to later Jewish exegetes, and it is one of the interpretations found in the Midrash to Proverbs. A tradition attributed to Rabbi Ishmael says: *kl m'sh 'wtw hywm m'swlš hyh. htwrh m'swlšt twrh nby'ym wktwbym*, "Every thing<sup>4</sup> on that day [in which the Torah was given] came as a triplet (*meshullash*). Scripture is a triplet: Torah, Prophets, and Writings" (Visotzky's translation). A number of examples are given, and then "R. Levi said: Thus you learn that every thing on that day came as a triplet, hence it is said, *Indeed, I wrote down for you a threefold lore*, etc. (Prov. 22:20)" (cp. Visotzky 1992, p. 145 n. 5: "Reading triplets (*shelishim*) for excellent things (*shalishim*)"). Similarly, Rashi interprets the verse as a reference to the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. In his Book of Roots, Qimḥi offers the definition *pa'am štayim w'sālōš*, "two or three times", as an alternative to *d'bārīm niplā'im w'nikbādīm*,

<sup>4</sup> Or "phenomenon".

“remarkable and honourable things” (see below). The Midrash to Proverbs (which Visotzky 1992, p. 10, dates in the 9th century AD) is much later than the LXX and presupposes the Targum, but the Greek translator may well have thought along similar lines when seeking to understand the Hebrew text, although there is no reason to conclude that he thought of the three divisions of the canon (it is also possible that there was a tradition of interpretation underlying the LXX that was transmitted to later Jewish writers).

The interpretation of the versions offered above implies that the Hebrew text used by the translators read *šlyšym*, the letters of the *Qere*—though it would also be compatible with *šlšym* as in 1 Sam. xix 21, etc.—rather than the *Kethibh* *šlšwm*. The *Qere* *šālšīm* is usually regarded as the plural of the noun *šālš* which denotes a military officer of some kind in 2 Kings x 25 (cp. ix 25, xv 25), who is associated with a chariot in Exod. xiv 7, xv 4. This word is to be distinguished from the *šālšīm* of 1 Sam. xviii 6, which are musical instruments. Another noun, *šālš* or *šālš* in Ps. lxxx 6 and Isa. xl 12, appears to be a unit of measurement, presumably a fraction meaning “a third”, as in Mishnaic Hebrew. Whybray rejects the *Qere* in Prov. xxii 20 because a “term denoting a military rank or function” is “clearly inappropriate” (*Composition*, p. 133).

Although Whybray regards *šālšīm* as unsuitable in Prov. xxii 20, others have sought to make sense of it here. The older English versions translate it “excellent things”, and this interpretation goes back to a Jewish interpretation different from the one discussed above. It was, however, noted above that one of the interpretations of the word in Prov. xxii 20 recorded by Qimḥi is “remarkable and honourable things”. He relates this meaning to Exod. xiv 7, xv 4, where he understands *šālšīm* to refer to *q’šnīm w’nikbādīm*, “leaders and honourable men”.

Such an interpretation is found in the Midrash to Proverbs as an alternative to the one noted above. First, the words *šālšīm b’mō’ēsōt wādā’at* in the MT are understood to mean *bhm ‘swt w’št šlyšym hyk mh d’ty’ mtmwl šlšwm*, which Visotzky translates: “This refers to counsels and knowledge of ages past, as it is said, *In time past (mitemol shilshom)* (Exod. 21:29).” This interpretation in terms of the *Kethibh* is followed by an alternative: *šlyšym gbwrym hyk mh d’t ‘mr wšlyšym ‘l kluw*, “[or else it refers to the counsels and knowledge] of leaders, as you would say, *Captains over all of them*” (Exod. xiv 7). Similarly, before Ibn Ezra explains the *Kethibh* (*‘tmwl šlšwm ktbtly lhwdy’k ‘mry ‘mt*, “I wrote formerly to cause thee to know words of truth . . .”), he explains the *Qere* to mean *šlyšym dbrym*. These words are to be understood in terms of his reference to



xxii 20 in his comments on Prov. viii 6, where the words *kī-nē gūdīm 'ādabbēr* are discussed. He explains that *n'gūdīm* is *knw ngyd whm dbrym mšwbbhym*, "like *nāgūd* [ruler], and they are highly praised [or excellent] things". The meaning is said to be like that of *hālō' kātabtū l'kā šālīšīm*. He compares Exod. xiv 7 and adds: *ky yš lmlk mšnh gm šlyš*, "for a king has a second [in command] and a third [leader]". Rashi explains *n'gūdīm* in viii 6 as *dbry ngydwot whšybwot*, "things of leadership and importance".

Ibn Ezra was acquainted with Ibn Janaḥ's book on Hebrew roots, and he would have known the latter's comments on *šālīšīm*. Ibn Janaḥ understands the word in Exod. xiv 7 to denote "officers and princes" (cp. 2 Kings vii 2, ix 25), and suggests the meaning "wisdom" (*hukm*) in Prov. xxii 20. He then goes on to comment on *b'tuppām b'simhā ūb'šālīšīm* in 1 Sam. xviii 6, where he interprets the third word to mean "poetry" or "song" (*'as'ār*) because "its value is of a higher order than that of other speech as the value of princes is of a higher order than that of other men". He presumably interprets *šālīšīm* in Prov. xxii 20 in an analogous way.

A similar conclusion is reached along a different route by Saadiah, whose Arabic translation of Prov. xxii 20 includes the words translated by Derenbourg as "Ne t'ai-je pas écrit des chefs d'œuvre . . .?" Derenbourg adds an explanatory comment in a footnote: "Litt. des rois, terme qui désigne en arabe les livres supérieurs" (p. 44). The Judaeo-Arabic word is *mlwk'*.

Franz Delitzsch defends interpretations of Prov. xxii 20 in terms of Prov. viii 6:

The name of the chief men (members of the chief troop) is transferred to the chief proverbs, as, Jas. ii. 8, that law which stands as a king at the head of all the others is called the "royal law;" or, as Plato names the chief powers of the soul, μέρη ἡγεμόνες.

Delitzsch's interpretation of Prov. xxii 20 is improbable. As Toy says, "the terms 'royal' and 'governing' are epithets of the nouns 'law' and 'parts,' while here the word *officers* stands alone and undefined, and the designation of a maxim simply as a 'captain' (or, 'officer') is unexampled and unnatural" (p. 423). If *šālīšīm* is understood to mean "officers" or the like, then it is unlikely to be the original reading. Whybray is then justified in rejecting it in Prov. xxii 20. It is a pity, however, that he did not offer a fuller discussion of the reading and the interpretation of the versions, and note the fact that it is closer to *š'losīm*, the suggested alternative, than it is to the *Kethibh šīlsōm*.

Elsewhere, *šlšōm* is used after *t'mōl* or *'etmōl* to mean "the day before yesterday" or, more generally, "hitherto, previously, formerly". Although it occurs only here on its own, Whybray assumes ("Structure", pp. 88-9) that it has the same meaning as when the whole phrase appears (cp. Ibn Ezra), and he translates verse 20a as "Did I not write to you recently . . .?" He notes that verse 19 contains

a temporal expression: *hayyōm*, "today": "so that your trust may be in Yahweh I am making them (sc. my teachings) known to you, even to you, *now*." In the next verse he takes occasion to remind the same pupil of the importance of some earlier instructions which he had already given or sent, in writing . . ., on a previous occasion: "Did I not write to you some time ago with advice and wisdom (*da'at*)?"

Whybray's interpretation is not free from difficulty, even apart from his assumption that *šlšōm* on its own has the same meaning as when it is preceded by (*'*)*tmwl*, and the fact that he assumes the correctness of *hayyōm* in verse 19 without discussing the rendering ζωήν, "life", in Aquila and Symmachus, which appears to presuppose a Hebrew reading *hayyīm*. A more serious difficulty is, not that the situation is one in which a sage is writing a particular document for an individual pupil (cp. Prov. xxxi 1), but that there is a reference to an earlier private letter to this particular individual pupil (*l'kā*, with a second-person masculine singular pronominal suffix). I know of no parallel in the wisdom literature of a reference to an earlier private letter, which was not available to readers of the wisdom book. This is different from, for example, Egyptian wisdom books nominally addressed to a named king, but with no pretence of an earlier private letter.

Whybray advances three arguments against reading *š'ālšōm*. First, he claims that there is "no reason to emend a word which makes good sense in its context as 'previously' or 'some time ago,' substituting for it a word meaning 'thirty'" (p. 88). It is indeed a sound principle not to resort to emendation when the MT makes good sense, but Whybray has over-simplified the situation. I have questioned above whether the reading *šlšōm* really makes "good sense" as Whybray claims. Moreover, the MT tradition offers us two readings: *šlšōm* and *šlyšym*. The difference over the penultimate letter presumably arises from the fact that in some forms of the Hebrew script it is difficult, or even impossible, to be sure whether the scribe intended *waw* or *yodh* (as is sometimes the case in, for example, 1QIs<sup>a</sup>): the former reading takes the letter to be *waw*, and the latter takes it to be *yodh*. Although *šālšōm* is spelled *plene*

with *šlyšym* as the consonantal text underlying the *Qere*, the word can also be spelled *defective* as *šlšym*. To read *š<sup>e</sup>lōššim* is to make only a very small change to either of the two transmitted texts.

Whybray's second argument against reading *š<sup>e</sup>lōššim* is that

None of the Versions has interpreted *šlšōm* here in the sense of "thirty," although LXX, whose translator was evidently puzzled by its unique appearance by itself, guessed from the root *šlš* that it was in some way connected with the number "three" and rendered it by *trissos*, "in a three-fold manner," followed by Vulg. and Pesh. (P. 88.)

It may fairly be pointed out against Whybray that it is also true that none of the versions interpreted the Hebrew text to mean "recently". Moreover, he assumes without justification that the LXX translator read *šlšum* rather than *šlyšym* (or even *šlšym*). It is one thing to dismiss the reading *šlyšym* (as Whybray does) as unlikely to be original. It is another to assume that the translator did not read *šlyšym*. Moreover, if the interpretation of the versions that I have offered above is correct, it is more likely that they read *šlyšym* than *šlšum*.

The third objection raised by Whybray against reading *š<sup>e</sup>lōššim* is that

there is some doubt whether "Have I not written . . . thirty?" without any specification of the things enumerated, e.g. *d<sup>e</sup> bārīm* "a *mārīm*,"<sup>5</sup> "words," corresponds to normal Hebrew usage (it is not clear that G.-K. 134n covers such a case). (P. 88.)

Whybray's footnote 21 comments that GK "states that 'Certain specifications of *measure*, *weight* or *time*, are commonly omitted after numerals,' but makes no mention of writings". The reason for Whybray's reference to GK § 134 n is probably ultimately that Greßmann cites it on p. 273 n. 1 in defence of reading *š<sup>e</sup>lōššim*. Whybray is right to question whether the reference in GK applies to words. However, Greßmann's case is not dependent on this reference. Whybray has not demonstrated that a "specification of the things enumerated" would have been needed. He appears to have overlooked Bryce's reference (p. 83) to 2 Sam. xxiv 12: *šālōš 'ānōkī nōtēl 'āleykā*, "Three things I offer thee." Perhaps more surprising is Whybray's failure to observe that a similar use of a numeral occurs in Prov. xxx 7: *štayim šā'altī mē'ittāk*, "Two (things) I ask of thee". Similar uses of *šālōš* and *'arba'* are found in

<sup>5</sup> A misprint for *'mārīm*.

Prov. xxx 15, 21; and of *š'lašā* and *'arbā'ā* (*Qere* in verse 18) in verses 18, 29 (cp. *šēš* and *šeba'* in vi 16). Whybray's commentary on Proverbs does not suggest that there is anything strange in the use of numerals in these verses. Why, then, should he find *š'lōšīm* difficult in xxii 20?

To read *š'lōšīm* in Prov. xxii 20 is thus to make no more than a very small change to the text, and Whybray's objections to making so slight a change are weak or groundless. On the other hand, the *Qere* does not make sense, and Whybray's defence of the *Kethibh* is difficult. Those who read *š'lōšīm* believe that there is evidence elsewhere in this part of Proverbs for dependence on Amenemope (and their reasons will be considered below). If that hypothesis is accepted, then a solution to the problem of the text in xxii 20 is found by reading *š'lōšīm*.

In discussing the views of other scholars about the suggested reading *š'lōšīm*, Whybray is correct in saying that J. Ruffle "considers that it 'should be treated with some reserve'" (*Composition*, p. 134 n. 9), but he is mistaken in asserting that this reading is "rejected" by Richter, p. 37, and McKane, p. 372. To begin with McKane, Whybray appears to have misunderstood his rejection of Gemser's opinion that "the introduction in 22.17-21 should perhaps be taken into the reckoning in an attempt to arrive at the number thirty. This possibility should be ruled out . . ." McKane's point is that attempts to identify thirty sayings in Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22 should not include xxii 17-21 in their number, because it is an introduction, not a saying. He is not questioning the acceptance of the reading "thirty" in xxii 20. On the contrary, his translation of the verse on p. 245 has "thirty sayings", and on pp. 377-406 he seeks to identify the thirty sayings and numbers each one. Similarly, Richter recognizes dependence on Amenemope in some verses of this part of Proverbs (pp. 25-36), and he regards the reading *š'lōšīm* as "wahrscheinlich" (p. 29). However, he distinguishes between the work of the "Übersetzer" of Amenemope into Hebrew and that of the "Sammler oder Verfasser" in Proverbs. The number "thirty" is ascribed by Richter to the former (p. 37), and presumably he thinks, like Erman, that it refers to the thirty chapters of the Egyptian work. It should not, however, in his opinion, be understood as a reference to thirty sayings in Proverbs compiled by the latter.

The mention of Richter raises the question whether thirty sayings can plausibly be identified in Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22. According to Whybray, the question should be answered in the negative. I shall postpone a discussion of this problem until an account has been given

of Whybray's understanding of the structure of xxii 17-xxiv 22 in general.

I have argued in the present section of this article that in Prov. xxii 20 neither the *Kethibh*, which Whybray favours, nor the *Qere* yields satisfactory sense. The proposed reading *š'lošim* involves practically no change to the text, and its plural ending agrees with that of the *Qere* and probably has the support of the versions. Further, three arguments advanced by Whybray against reading *š'lošim* are unconvincing. It can, however, be accepted only if it makes good sense in the context.

I shall consider later the question whether the similarities between Amenemope and Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22 are sufficient to justify the conclusion that the latter is, to some extent at least, dependent on the former. If it is, then Erman may be right in seeing a connexion between "thirty" in xxii 20 and the thirty chapters in Amenemope. Erman suggested that the connexion belonged to the original translation of Amenemope into a Semitic language, and that it was lost in the process that led to the creation of the present MT (cp. Richter). If, however, Grefmann and others are right in finding thirty sayings in this part of Proverbs, then the direct reference is to the Hebrew rather than to the Egyptian. Indeed, if thirty sayings can be detected in the Hebrew, it might even be suggested (although, as far as I am aware, it has not been suggested) that the reference is only to the Hebrew, regardless of what is found in Amenemope.

### III

Whybray argues that the structure and contents of Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22 tell against the theory of dependence on Amenemope. According to him, this passage "is *not* a single work and does *not* comprise thirty proverbs" ("Structure", p. 87). He adopts A. Niccacci's view that "these chapters did not originally constitute a literary unit at all", that xxii 17-xxiii 11 "forms a single unit containing ten units or admonitions", and that xxiii 12 and 26 "are new introductions (though they are generally counted among the 'thirty' sections) marking the beginnings of quite separate instructions"; and Whybray finds "even more distinct introductions here than even Niccacci supposed", since there are further "new beginnings" in xxiii 19, 22-6, xxiv 3-4, 13-14, "But there are not thirty" (*Composition*, p. 134).

The detection of "distinct introductions" by Niccacci and Whybray raises for the latter "a fundamental formal principle regarding the study

of the instructional form of wisdom literature”, which “most” of those who have tried to isolate thirty proverbs “have ignored, or were unaware of”. The principle is “that it is necessary to distinguish between the introductions to the individual instructions (where such exist) and the actual instruction itself—the main body of concrete teaching” (“Structure”, p. 90). The existence of these introductions “rules out the possibility that 22:17-24:22 constitute a single unitary work, as well as making the ‘count’ of thirty impossible”. In support of this principle, he claims that

Scholars who have attempted to count the individual units in these chapters have included the *whole* of the material [n. 24: Usually apart from 22:17-21] in their calculations, reckoning *introductory* material in their “count.” In this way they have “found” the required number of thirty. (P. 90.)

Further, Whybray argues that, from the point of view not merely of form but also of contents,

it can be shown that these chapters are not modelled on *Amenemope*. It is generally admitted that the thematic parallels end at 23.11 (with perhaps one or two exceptions), long before the supposed thirtieth admonition is reached; and it is also difficult to explain why even in the first part up to 23.11 the order in which the themes occur is completely different from that found in *Amenemope*. (*Composition*, p. 134.)

In discussing this part of Whybray’s argument, it may be agreed that a distinction must be made between the introduction to an instruction and the instruction itself, and that not all who have tried to isolate thirty sayings in this part of Proverbs have recognized the principle. But some have, and the fact that Whybray uses the word “most” when speaking of those who “have ignored, or were unaware of”, the principle (see above) may imply recognition of the fact that there have been exceptions, though he does not refer to them explicitly. In section II (above) of the present article, it was noted that Whybray has failed to understand a statement by McKane, p. 372, which criticizes Gemser precisely for failing to recognize the distinction when allowing for the possibility that xxii 17-21, which is an introduction, may be included among the thirty sayings. However, the recognition goes back much earlier than McKane’s book of 1970. As early as 1929, Paul Humbert (p. 28) stated that “il est évident que Prov. 23, 12 et 23, 19 constituent des formules d’introduction”, and added that the same is true of xxiii 26. He thus recognized as introductions xxiii 12

and 26 like Niccacci, and xxiii 19 like Whybray. Further, Humbert's list of thirty sayings includes, among others, xxiii 22-5 (minus 23), xxiv 3-4 and 13-14, each of which begins with an "introduction", as in Whybray's additional "new beginnings". These introductions were thus recognized long before the articles by Niccacci and Whybray.

More than one literary form is found in the material, as is rightly pointed out by Whybray. The principal distinction is between the sentence type of literature and the instruction. The former is normally the short proverb, but the latter, which is often addressed to the reader in the second person, may be longer. It is unnecessary for the present purpose to illustrate the difference by going into details. The type of theory under discussion maintains that there are thirty units in this part of Proverbs, and the units include both the sentence and the instruction type. I have used the word "saying" for units of either kind. If the theory is correct, the author was willing to use either kind of saying in compiling his list of thirty.

It was stated in section I of the present article that Erman, who drew attention to affinities between Amenemope and Prov. xxii 17-xxiii 11, could find none in xxiii 12-xxiv 22. It was therefore suggested by Greßmann, Humbert and others that the author of the Hebrew text drew on other sources for the latter passage. For example, H. Grimme (col. 60) argued that xxiii 12-18 and xxiii 19-xxiv 22 contain two collections of sayings, while Humbert (p. 28) favoured three sources for xxiii 12-18, xxiii 19-25 and xxiii 26-xxiv 22. On the other hand, Whybray regards xxiii 12-xxiv 22<sup>6</sup> as "a miscellaneous collection of (probably) seven pieces mainly of an instructional character but having no common pattern and no connection with one another" ("Structure", p. 93). It is "a collection of originally separate pieces by different authors" (p. 95), and "is an appendix or series of appendixes to" xxii 17-xxiii 11 (p. 96). His characterization of the passage is not unlike that of Greßmann, Humbert, etc., and yet he appears to regard it as evidence against dependence of Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22 in general on Amenemope. There are two reasons for his opinion. The first is related to his understanding of xxii 22-xxiii 11. The second is that he believes it to be part of the evidence against the existence of thirty sayings in xxii 22-xxiv 22. I shall discuss the first reason next, and the second will be examined in section IV below.

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<sup>6</sup> Whybray says "23:11-24:22" on p. 93 of "Structure", but his discussion elsewhere on the same page and on p. 96 (cp. *Composition*, pp. 141-5) shows that "23:11" is a misprint for "23:12".

Whybray accepts Niccacci's analysis of Prov. xxii 22-xxiii 11 into ten admonitions. The ten are: (1) xxii 22-3; (2) 24-5; (3) 26-7; (4) 28; (5) 29; (6) xxiii 1-3;<sup>7</sup> (7) 4-5; (8) 6-8; (9) 9; (10) 10-11. Niccacci maintains that the ten admonitions are a unity, and Whybray agrees: "Niccacci has shown that 22.17-23.11 is a single instruction that has been carefully constructed" (*Composition*, p. 136). Although he thus accepts Niccacci's theory, he has, however, some reservations. He holds that Niccacci's argument that (5) and (6) are "*professional* advice to an ambitious would-be courtier or civil servant, as are many of the Egyptian instructions, rests on slender grounds" (p. 137). Further, the ten admonitions "differ considerably in form and length", and Whybray thinks it "possible that they originally existed independently" (p. 138), and there is a "lack of complete conformity to a logical pattern" ("Structure", p. 92).

When an attempt is made to find a literary pattern in a particular passage in the Old Testament, it is not always possible to be sure whether the pattern was intended by the author or is fortuitous. It is, however, unnecessary for the present purpose to discuss Niccacci's arguments for the unity of xxii 22-xxiii 11. Not only is his analysis of the passage into ten sayings convincing: it also agrees with the analysis by Grefßmann and other scholars, who find here the first ten of the thirty sayings that they identify in xxii 22-xxiv 22. Niccacci's theory is compatible with the view that the Hebrew writer was influenced by Amenemope, but still intended to compose a Hebrew work in its own right. The difference from Amenemope in the order in which the themes of the passage are presented may be explained by the Hebrew writer's view of how the material would be best presented stylistically, whether or not Niccacci has been successful in interpreting the literary structure.

Now that Prov. xxii 22-xxiii 11 and xxiii 12-xxiv 22 have been examined, it must be asked whether Whybray's argument about them is valid. It has already been seen that his comments on the failure of scholars to recognize the significance of "introductory material" overlook the fact that it has been recognized by some who believe that this part of Proverbs has been influenced by Amenemope. What, however, is to be said about his claim that xxii 22-xxiv 22 does not con-

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<sup>7</sup> Whybray seems accidentally to have omitted xxiii 1-3 on p. 91 of "Structure", where only nine "brief instructions" are listed despite his statement that there are ten, and despite his implied inclusion of xxiii 1-3 on p. 94. These verses are explicitly included in *Composition*, pp. 136-9.



stitute a literary unity, that it is not modelled on Amenemope, that it continues even after the last of the alleged parallels with Amenemope (which, in any case, appear in a different order), and that there are not thirty instructions? The question whether there are thirty will be considered below in section IV. It must first be asked whether the other parts of his argument justify the conclusions that he draws from them.

Whybray's arguments appear to be directed against a theory that xxii 17-xxiv 22 is closely modelled on Amenemope, and that the passage in Proverbs is, if not a translation, at least, in general terms, a Hebrew counterpart to the Egyptian work. In section I above, however, a different account of leading theories about the relationship to Amenemope was presented. This way of understanding the influence of Amenemope does not involve as close a relationship between the two works as Whybray's criticisms appear to imply. Yet it is the way of understanding the relationship that is found in major discussions of the problem by scholars of Hebrew. According to them, the author of Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22 knew Amenemope in some form or other and was certainly influenced by it, but he treated it with considerable freedom and also drew on other sources. He was not seeking to reproduce a precise Hebrew equivalent of Amenemope or even a close approximation to it, but sought to prepare his own work in Hebrew under the influence of Amenemope. Whybray's argument that there is variety, not complete unity, in this part of Proverbs, and that it contains material that is not found in Amenemope, has little, if any, force against such a presentation of a theory of dependence on Amenemope. Indeed, dependence on some material not in Amenemope is part of this theory about the relationship to the Egyptian work, and it can scarcely be treated as evidence against it. Whybray's argument is, to a large extent, a *non sequitur*.

It is surprising that Whybray, who was well read in scholarly publications on the wisdom literature, fails to take into account what is actually said in theories described in section I of the present article. For example, his statement that "the thematic parallels end at 23.11 . . . long before the supposed thirtieth admonition is reached" suggests that a theory of dependence on Amenemope should not involve dependence on other material, but it has no force against the theory that, though the idea of "thirty" was dependent on Amenemope, the Hebrew author drew on other sources as well in compiling his own series of thirty. Greßmann, for example, says explicitly on p. 281: "Wahrscheinlich geht also diese ganze dritte Sammlung [i.e. Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22],

wenn nicht auf Amenemope allein, so doch auf ihn und andere Vorlagen zurück”, and a similar statement is made by Humbert on p. 28. It is true that the two articles of Whybray here under consideration do not mention Greßmann and Humbert, but their works are listed in the bibliography in his commentary on Proverbs, and it is most unlikely that he had not read them. In any case, such statements are found in works that Whybray does cite in his articles, such as McKane and Römheld (e.g. “Composition”, pp. 132, 134).

Whybray’s argument from the structure and contents of xxii 17-xxiv 22 has thus failed because he does not come to grips with major types of theories of dependence on Amenemope. Nor has he proved that the “count” of thirty proverbs in this part of the Hebrew text is “impossible”. Of course, his failure to exclude the possibility does not prove that there are, in fact, thirty such proverbs in the Hebrew text. It must next be asked whether attempts to isolate thirty proverbs are plausible.

#### IV

The theory that “thirty” should be read in Prov. xxii 20 has usually been accompanied by the claim, which was first made by Greßmann, that thirty sayings can be found in this part of the book of Proverbs. The author sought, not to reproduce the thirty chapters of Amenemope, but to present thirty Hebrew sayings. In this, he was influenced by the Egyptian work, but was not reproducing exactly what was in it. The theory that “thirty” should be read does not, however, depend on finding thirty sayings in the Hebrew. Indeed, as we have seen, Erman’s original suggestion was that there was once a Semitic translation of Amenemope that did contain thirty chapters, but that the text was subjected to considerable change in the process of transmission. Similarly, Richter distinguishes between the translator, to whom the reference to thirty is due, and the “Sammler”, who was responsible for the present text in Proverbs. Nevertheless, the theory that “thirty” should be read is more easily credible if there are thirty sayings in the present Hebrew text, rather than if it is suggested that the reference is to something that was once found in the Hebrew text but is now there no longer. It must therefore be asked how plausible it is to claim that there are thirty sayings in the Hebrew.

A number of scholars have made such a claim, but they do not all agree in the sayings that they identify. Those identified by Greßmann,

Humbert, McKane, Römheld and Meinhold, will now be examined. I shall also refer from time to time to Gemser, but there is a lack of clarity about his view, for his analysis on p. 83 does not appear to agree with the analysis indicated by spaces between sayings on pp. 84, 86 and 88. It seems best to base the discussion primarily on the suggestions of the other scholars mentioned above, though without neglecting what Gemser says.

It was seen above in section III that Niccacci's analysis of xxii 22-xxiii 11 into ten sayings corresponds to the first ten identified by Greßmann. The same view of the ten is taken by the other scholars mentioned above, including Gemser—and we have seen that McKane is right to reject Gemser's suggestion on p. 85 n. 1, as an alternative to his (Gemser's) preferred analysis, that xxii 17-21 may be the first saying. There is also agreement (including agreement by Gemser) about the identification of the last five sayings: (26) xxiv 13-14; (27) 15-16; (28) 17-18; (29) 19-20; (30) 21-2. The isolation of these five sayings seems self-evident, and Whybray's commentary also finds five units here.

That leaves sayings (11)-(25) to be identified. It was seen above that Humbert rightly regards xxiii 12, 19 and 26 as introductions, not as separate sayings. It seems unnecessary for the present purpose to discuss whether a saying should be defined as the substantial saying plus its introduction, or as the saying alone. Either definition is possible, but I shall adopt the classification that excludes the introduction. I think that neither verse 12 should be regarded as a separate saying (with Greßmann, McKane, Römheld, Meinhold and Gemser), nor verse 19 (with Greßmann, and Gemser). It is of no importance whether verse 26 is regarded as part of the unit verses 26-8 (with Greßmann, McKane, Römheld, Meinhold and Gemser), and I shall treat verses 27-8 as the unit.

A problem arises in xxiii 15-16, which is regarded as a separate saying by Greßmann, McKane, Römheld, Meinhold, Gemser and even Humbert. Whybray, however, describes verses 15-18 in his commentary (p. 336) as "a distinct short Instruction of which vv. 15-16 are the introduction and vv. 17-18 the main body containing a single admonition" (cp. *Composition*, p. 142; "Structure", p. 94). Even though McKane views verses 15-16 as "The Thirteenth Saying", he comments that "This does not instruct, but it is a preliminary motivation . . ." (p. 386). It seems, therefore, that verses 17-18 are best treated as the saying, and verses 15-16 should be excluded because they are an intro-

duction. On the other hand, Whybray's analysis of the chapter is compatible with the views of the other scholars about xxiii 13-21 as modified above by the exclusion of the introductions. It is thus possible to add to the ten sayings isolated above (11) xxiii 13-14; (12) 17-18; (13) 20-1.

Is it possible to identify sayings (14)-(25) in xxiii 22-5, 27-35, xxiv 1-12? Three sayings can be isolated with reasonable probability.

First, xxiii 22-5 is regarded as one of the sayings (apart perhaps from verse 23, which is not in the LXX and differs from the context in not mentioning family relationships) by Humbert, McKane, Römheld, Meinhold and Gemser. On the other hand, verse 22 looks like an introduction because it is an exhortation to listen to one's father and mother. That tells against Greßmann's view that verse 22 is a separate saying. Whybray maintains that verses 22-6 form a "long introduction" to verses 27-8 ("Structure", p. 94; *Composition*, pp. 134, 142), although he thinks that the text was originally shorter. His opinion seems less likely than that verses 24-5 are the saying. Verse 26, which begins "my son, give me your heart", appears to be the introduction to verses 27-8, and Whybray himself says that verse 26 is an introduction (*Composition*, p. 134).

Second, xxiii 27-8 is thus a separate saying, as is recognized by Humbert, whereas Greßmann, McKane, Römheld, Meinhold and Gemser think of verses 26-8 because they have not recognized that verse 26 is an introduction.

Third, there is general agreement that xxiv 1-2 forms a single unit.

The rest of the material is more problematic, and it is more difficult to isolate individual sayings. Before it is examined, it is convenient to bring together the conclusions reached so far in the discussion above. I have argued that sayings (1)-(14) and (26)-(30) can be identified with probability, and also that three further sayings can also be identified: xxiii 24; xxiii 27-8; xxiv 1-2. That gives a total of twenty-two sayings identified so far. The remaining material is xxiii 29-35, xxiv 3-12. How many sayings can be isolated here, and do they number eight—which would bring the total up to the postulated thirty—or is the number greater or smaller?

First, the subject of xxiii 29-35 is drunkenness, and Greßmann, McKane, Römheld, Meinhold and Gemser (p. 83) regard it as one unit. On p. 86, however, Gemser apparently regards verse 29 as a separate saying. That is improbable, for verse 30 answers the question asked in verse 29. Humbert's analysis is different: he takes verses 29-30 to be one saying, and verses 31-5 to be another. That analysis

is possible. Verse 29 asks who suffers mental and physical distress, and verse 30 replies that it is someone who has had too much to drink. Verses 31-5, however, address the reader in the second person, advise him to beware of wine, and warn him of the consequences of excess of drink. The latter verses can be regarded either as a separate saying or as advice arising from the introductory statement in verses 29-30 about the troubles brought upon themselves by intemperate drinkers. Verses 32-5 then warn the reader that, if the advice of verse 31 is not followed, consequences will ensue like those described in verse 29, including (in verse 35) wounding. While certainty is impossible, the relation in substance between verses 29 and 32-5 leads me to the opinion that verses 29-35 are probably one saying.

Second, xxiv 3-7 can also be analysed in more than one way. The whole passage is concerned with wisdom, but different parts deal with different aspects of the subject. Verses 3-4 speak of a house built and established by wisdom and of the riches in its rooms. Greßmann, Humbert, McKane, Römheld, Meinhold and Gemser regard verses 3-4 as one saying. Verses 5-6 then speak of the strength and military expertise of a wise man, and verse 7 says that wisdom is too high for a fool. Greßmann states that verses 5-7 are the unit, but the others distinguish between verses 5-6 and 7. It is thus possible to treat verses 3-7 as one, two or three sayings. The fact, however, that verses 3-4 and 7 speak of wisdom, whereas 5-6 speak of a wise man, probably favours the view that there are three distinct sayings. It is possible that they all come from a source that brought together sayings about wisdom and wise men, but that the three parts were intended to be separate sayings by the editor responsible for this part of the book of Proverbs. An analysis as three sayings is perhaps more probable.

Third, xxiv 8-9 can similarly be analysed as either one or two sayings:

- 8 He who plans to do evil  
will be called a mischief-maker.
- 9 The devising of folly is sin,  
and the scoffer is an abomination to men.

Both verses speak of planning evil, verse 8 by *m'haššēb t'hārēa'*, and verse 9 by *zimmat 'iwwelet*. In the latter verse, *BHS* states that the principal ancient versions read "fool" rather than "folly" in verse 9, and that one Hebrew manuscript reads *'wylm*, and it is recommended that *'ēvil* should be read for *'iwwelet*. The LXX does indeed have ἄφρων,

but its rendering of the verse is not close to the MT, and the Vulgate has the singular *stulti*; the Peshitta (*skl*) and Targum (*šty*) have the singular (though the consonants could also be pointed as the plural). Another possibility is that *'ūwelet* may be an *abstractum pro concreto* and may signify “fools”. Be that as it may, the two verses are distinct sentences or proverbs, which have been brought together by the author of this part of Proverbs (or perhaps by the author of his source), because of the similarity in subject matter. The fact that they are distinct proverbs may favour the view that they should be regarded as distinct sayings for the present purpose, but the possibility that the author brought them together and treated them as a single saying cannot be excluded.

Fourth, xxiv 10-12, in which all three verses are addressed to the reader in the second-person masculine singular, can be viewed as one, two or—much less probably—three sayings. Verse 11 instructs the reader to “Deliver those taken to death” (*haššēl l'qūhīm lammāwet*), who are faced with slaughter (*hereg*). It is unnecessary for the present purpose to discuss the problems of this obscure verse, in which it is difficult to envisage the situation that is presupposed. Whatever the situation, there seems no reason why the verse should not be regarded as a complete saying in itself. Verse 10 says that if one fails in the day of adversity (*sārā*) one's strength is narrow (*šar*), that is, presumably, limited or small. The day of adversity may be the day in which the circumstances of verse 11 are set, and verses 10 and 11 may belong together. On the other hand, verse 10 may be a complete saying in itself. Verse 12 says that a plea of ignorance does not guarantee freedom from condemnation by him “who weighs souls”, i.e. God. Against the possibility that this verse is a complete saying in itself stands the fact that it begins *kī-tō'mar hēn lō'-yāda'nū zeh*, “If thou sayest ‘Behold, we did not know this’”, for “this” appears to refer back to verse 11. It presumably refers to a possible excuse that might be offered by someone who did not wish to obey the command in verse 11. Verses 10-12 should therefore be regarded as one or two sayings, rather than three.

The discussion of the above four passages has led to the following conclusions about the number of sayings in each: (I) xxiii 29-35: probably one, possibly two; (II) xxiv 3-7: probably three, possibly one or two; (III) xxiv 8-9: probably two, perhaps one; (IV) xxiv 10-11: one or two. The lowest number of possibilities gives the total four, and the largest gives nine. The total of the probables in (I)-(III) plus the two

possibles in (IV) is seven or eight. Other possible totals are six or seven. If these alternative totals are added to the twenty-two sayings isolated above, the lowest result is twenty-six and the highest thirty-one and the total including all the probables is twenty-nine or thirty (the other totals are twenty-seven and twenty-eight).

It cannot be claimed as certain that there are exactly thirty sayings in Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22, but Whybray's confident denial that there are thirty is unjustified. The number is at least close to thirty, and it may well be thirty. If weight is attached to the arguments above claiming greater probability for the identification of some sayings, then the number is either twenty-nine or thirty. Plausibility may be claimed for the number thirty, but not certainty. It must now be asked what is the most satisfactory hypothesis in the light of the evidence as a whole.

The result of the attempt to determine how many sayings are to be found in this part of Proverbs must be considered in the light of the above discussion of the text of xxii 20. It was argued above that, although none of the ancient versions agrees with the *Qere* reading *šālīšīm*, they favour its consonants, rather than the *Kethibh* *šīlšōm*. Neither the *Kethibh* (which Whybray favours) nor the *Qere* gives a satisfactory meaning in the context. The consonants of the proposed reading *š<sup>e</sup>lōšīm* are almost identical with those of the *Qere*, and would be identical if the latter were written defectively as *šlšym*; indeed, they differ from those of the *Kethibh* only in that *yodh* is read instead of *waw*, and the two consonants are known to be indistinguishable in some contexts in some manuscripts of other books. If xxii 17-xxiv 22 contains what may well be thirty sayings, it is a reasonable hypothesis that "thirty" should be read in xxii 20 (where the other readings do not give good sense), and that it refers to thirty sayings in this part of the book of Proverbs. It is not certain, but it is a reasonable hypothesis to solve a problem.

The hypothesis is strengthened if, as Erman and others have argued, there are affinities between Prov. xxii 17-xxiii 11 and Amenemope, and that they attest the dependence of the former on the latter with its thirty chapters. Whybray questions the evidence for such dependence, and it must next be asked whether his scepticism is justified.

## V

In addition to the arguments against the dependence of Prov. xxii 17-xxiii 22 on Amenemope that have been considered above, Whybray has a further objection, namely, the opinion of some Egyptologists:

Some recent studies by Egyptologists . . . , while accepting the general proposition that the book of Proverbs and 22:17ff. in particular belong to a common Near Eastern wisdom tradition and that Proverbs was substantially influenced by the Egyptian tradition, have questioned whether there is a direct relationship between that section of Proverbs and *Amenemope*. ('Structure', p. 84; cp. *Composition*, pp. 132-3.)

The Egyptologists named by him are G.E. Bryce, John Ruffle, K.A. Kitchen and Jutta Krispenz.

To begin with the last of these scholars, Krispenz is said by Whybray to conclude

that it is not possible to prove a precise connection with this or that work, and [she] makes the point that the making of such literary comparisons is necessarily vitiated by the fact that there cannot be any real equivalence between texts from different cultures. ('Structure', p. 85.)

Whybray's words seem to be a fair representation of what Krispenz says on pp. 129-31. She comments (p. 129) on the difficulty of making comparisons in meaning on the basis of words which may appear similar in translation but which have different connotations in their own languages:

Eine exakte Verbindungslinie zu diesem oder jenem Werk der ägyptischen bzw. mesopotamischen Literatur kann nicht nachgewiesen werden. (P. 129.)

It is certainly true that great care is needed to avoid superficial comparisons when one is looking for similarities in thought. However, in discussing the relationship between Proverbs and Amenemope the issue is not whether the thinking is identical at a deep level, but whether the Hebrew writer was influenced by the Egyptian text as he understood (or even misunderstood) it.

Ruffle, whose article was known to Krispenz, discusses a number of passages in Proverbs and is generally critical of theories of dependence on Amenemope. Yet even he does not totally deny the possibility of influence. On p. 65 of his article (pp. 328-9 of the reprint), his general conclusions include the following:



I would be prepared to accept that about half of the first part of the *Words of the Wise* [i.e. of Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22] can be considered to deal with the same subjects as *Amenemope* and that this could be an indication of some sort of relationship closer than coincidence.

He explains more precisely the kind of relationship that he regards as possible:

The sort of relationship that can be demonstrated can be adequately explained by the suggestion that this passage was contributed by an Egyptian scribe working at the court of Solomon based on his memories of a text that he had heard and, may be, used in his scribal training.

Although this quotation includes the word “demonstrated”, even this minimal acceptance of the possibility of some dependence appears to go further than what he says in most of his comments on proposed examples of dependence. His general outlook is well expressed in the following words:

I cannot believe that there is sufficient correspondence to justify a claim that Proverbs was borrowed from *Amenemope* in the sense that the term is normally understood, and there is no justification in my view for any emendation of the Hebrew text to bring it in line with the Egyptian.

As far as his last clause is concerned, it may be agreed that a number of emendations have been proposed that cannot serve as evidence for dependence on *Amenemope*. If, however, it is believed on the basis of other evidence that there is dependence on *Amenemope*, and if there is a problem in the Hebrew text, it is possible to argue that comparison with the Egyptian text may be of help in the textual criticism of the Hebrew. I have discussed in section II the problem of the text and meaning of xxii 20, but I shall not discuss any further textual problems in Proverbs because I do not regard them as important for the purpose of the present article.

Whybray (*Composition*, p. 133) quotes Kitchen (p. 119 n. 70), who says (and I include several words not included by Whybray):

That Prov. xxii 17ff. was copied directly and wholesale from *Amenemope* is . . . no longer a tenable assumption; the relationship (if real) was less direct.

Kitchen then goes on to refer to Ruffle’s article. It is evident that the question at issue is, partly at least, one of the nature of the alleged

dependence. It was made clear in section I of the present article that the major type of theory to be discussed is not one of copying “directly and wholesale”, but of a looser kind of influence, albeit of an influence greater than Ruffle is willing to concede.

Whybray appears to include Bryce among those who “have questioned whether there was a direct relationship between” Prov. xxii 17ff. “and *Amenemope*” (“Structure”, pp. 84-5). He also says that Bryce “was willing to admit no more than that ‘The author of the collection of sayings in Prov. 27.17ff. has adapted an Egyptian *tradition*’ (my [i.e. Whybray’s] italics) ‘around which to develop his book’” (*Composition*, p. 133). The words quoted by Whybray come from p. 85 of Bryce’s book, where he is discussing the proposed reading “thirty” in Prov. xxii 20. Incidentally, Bryce says that “we must conclude that the author . . . has adapted . . .”, and there is nothing to suggest that Bryce was unwilling to “admit” any more about the relation of xxii 17-xxiv 22 as a whole to Amenemope. The “tradition” here appears to be what Bryce describes as “the tradition of the ‘thirty’ in Egyptian literature” in p. 225 n. 47; indeed, he refers later on p. 85 to “the tradition of the ‘thirty’ (judges) in Egypt” (cp. p. 20, and Ray, p. 23).

In fact, Bryce makes statements on several pages that imply a recognition of a direct relationship between verses in this part of Proverbs and Amenemope. On p. 97 he states that the introduction in Prov. xxii 17-21 “shows a close correspondence to Amenemope”, on p. 101 that in xxii 17-18 “we discover the following words and phrases [which he specifies] appearing in the same successive order in the two verses of Proverbs as they do in the introductory appeal of Amenemope” (3.9-16), and on p. 102: “The most satisfactory explanation of these coincidences is that they represent condensation of the Egyptian text assimilated in the Hebrew version.” He does not deny differences, but holds that “most of the text of Amenemope has been dropped” (p. 102).

Similarly, pp. 103-4 say that “the correspondences between” Prov. xxii 21 and Amenemope 1.5-6

are too striking to be overlooked. The Egyptian text makes reference to knowledge that enables one to answer an allegation and to return a report to superiors who have sent one on a mission. The second part of Prov. 22:21, which speaks of bringing back a report (lit. “words”) to the senders, is almost an exact parallel. Moreover, the grammatical structure and the sequence of the verbs “know,” “bring back,” and “send” correspond precisely to the Egyptian text.

It is no wonder that Bryce accepts the “probability that these similarities are not coincidental but originally represent an attempt to carefully preserve important aspects of the introduction and conclusion of the original source . . .” (p. 104). His discussion of xxii 22-xxiii 11 then analyses the similarities to Amenemope and concludes that “the basic source of the content of this passage is the Egyptian wisdom book” (p. 106). Earlier in his book (pp. 66-7) Bryce finds in Prov. xxii 24 “an example of Israelite adaptation of a common Egyptian theme found in Amen. 11:13”. It is not, however, merely a common theme that might have been borrowed from another Egyptian text: “we may conclude that this admonition was inspired by the Egyptian prototype”, which must, in this context, refer to Amenemope.

It is strange that Whybray can refer to Bryce as if he were an example of an Egyptologist who doubts the dependence of this part of Proverbs on Amenemope. Perhaps Whybray means to emphasize the adjective “direct” in the phrase “direct relationship”. Bryce draws the conclusion on p. 111 that “the section of the collection entitled ‘The Sayings of the Wise’ contained in Prov. 22:17-23:11 was derived from a source that was ultimately dependent upon Amenemope”. Although he thinks that, “considering the form in which the sayings are found in Proverbs, the presence of an intermediary source seems more probable” than direct dependence on Proverbs (cp. 106), he grants that to “affirm that this is the case is no more or less demonstrable than to assert that the Hebrew writer borrowed from Amenemope directly . . .”

Bryce’s argument on the basis of “the form” depends on his theory of the three stages of assimilation of Egyptian material:

These three stages are characterized by the degree of assimilation of these elements in the wisdom literature of Israel, whether they have been *adapted* with few changes, *assimilated* with important modifications, or *integrated* into Hebrew literary traditions so that little remains of the original contribution. (P. 58.)

Bryce’s discussion of the third stage, which does not begin until after p. 111, has little to say about the dependence of this part of Proverbs on Amenemope. There are certainly differences between the “adaptive” and “assimilative” ways of handling an Egyptian text, but Bryce has not demonstrated that they must be arranged in strict chronological order or that the same writer could not have used both the former and the latter method.

For the purpose of the present article, the important question is whether there is dependence on Amenemope (or upon a Semitic translation or an adaptation of it). If there was an intermediary adaptation of Amenemope, then the detailed comparisons by Bryce which are noted above imply that much of the original remained in the adaptation. Bryce's book cannot be said to strengthen Whybray's case, but rather to argue against it.

It was argued above that the point made by Krispenz, as stated by Whybray, is questionable, that Kitchen's footnote does not exclude the kind of theory considered in section I, and that Bryce can scarcely be said to offer Whybray's case any support. The only Egyptologist cited by Whybray who presents a detailed argument that can be regarded as supporting Whybray is Ruffle (to whom Kitchen also refers). A full discussion of Ruffle's argument would require an article to itself. It would also require a full examination of the evidence that has convinced many Egyptologists and biblical scholars of the influence of Amenemope on Proverbs. It must, however, suffice in the present article to give some indication of why Ruffle's argument is unsatisfactory, and why the case made by scholars for dependence seems convincing.

Ruffle's discussion on pp. 53-4 (= 318-19) of the relation of Prov. xxii 17-18 to Amenemope 3.9-11, 16 will serve as an example. I shall not examine his rejection of some proposed emendations of the Hebrew text, for the reason given above that the case for dependence on Amenemope must rest primarily on what is in the MT. While granting that "we have a passage at first sight parallel to the Egyptian text", Ruffle comments that three lines are "lacking" from the centre, and that there are "small variations such as the unusual singular use of *'ōzen* compared with the Egyptian dual form, and the absence of a possessive pronoun with Egyptian 'words'". He also regards as "perhaps . . . significant" that the Hebrew root *yd'*, and the Hebrew words *nā'im* and *sāpā* (which he strangely writes in the construct state [*sḥl*]) "are not entirely synonymous" with their Egyptian counterparts. Further, "one might have expected a translator to use a more precise translation such as *lēb* instead of *beṭen* to correspond with Egyptian *ib*".

Ruffle's comments assume that the theory of dependence is concerned with a "translation", whereas section I of the present article showed that theories of dependence normally postulate a freer relationship. If, however, "it is a free translation" (and this clause still uses the word "translation"), Ruffle asks "why a satisfactory Hebrew text should be emended to conform"; here, however, I am concerned with

evidence for dependence that does not necessarily involve emendation. It is surprising that Ruffle writes of “the unusual singular use of ’ōzen”, as distinct from the use of the dual, as in the Egyptian text. An examination of a Hebrew concordance would have shown that this Hebrew noun is often used in the singular and, more particularly, that it is always in the singular when it is used with the second-person masculine singular suffix after the *hiphʿil* of *nāṭâ*: see 2 Kings xix 16; Isa. xxxvii 17; Ps. xvii 6, xxxi 3, lxxi 2, lxxxvi 1, lxxxviii 3, cii 3; Prov. iv 20, v 1; Daniel ix 18; similarly, the imperative plural *hattû* has as its object ’ōzen in the singular with the second-person masculine plural suffix in Isa. lv 3 and Ps. lxxviii 1. The usage in Prov. xxii 17 is not unusual: it conforms to the normal Hebrew idiom. Further, Ruffle regards “within yourself” (*bʿbiṭnekā*, literally “within thy belly”) in xxii 18 as the counterpart of “in your heart” in line 11 of Amenemope, for which he would have expected *lēb*, “heart”, to have been used in a “translation” (and *wʿlibbʿkā* had already been used in verse 17). However, while Greßmann (p. 274) and Humbert (p. 18) identify “belly” in verse 18 with “heart” in line 11 of Amenemope, Erman had originally suggested that the Hebrew here corresponds to “in deinem Leibe” in line 13 of the Egyptian, which Bryce (p. 101), who follows Erman here, translates “in the casket of your belly” (similarly, Griffith and Lichtheim).<sup>8</sup>

Mention was made above of Bryce’s comment on “words and phrases”—seven in number—“appearing in the same successive order” in Amenemope 3.9-16 and Prov. xxii 17-18. The case here for the dependence of the Hebrew on Amenemope is strong.

The question whether “thirty” should be read in Prov. xxii 20 was discussed above. Ruffle shows a greater awareness than Whybray of the difficulty of the MT, and says that there “is obviously a problem in the Hebrew text” (p. 56) [= 320-1]. He considers “a number of possibilities”, of which one is “a hitherto unknown meaning of *šālāšîm*”: perhaps a word “referring to a collection of wise sayings” may be postulated on the basis of “Arabic *salsu*, ‘a necklace’, or *salsala* ‘to bind together’”, or one might compare “the Akkadian adverbial use *šalāšî* ‘three times’”. Against such suggestions, it is necessary to bear in mind

<sup>8</sup> Even on the view that *biṭnekā* corresponds to “heart” in Amenemope 3.11 it is possible to suggest that the Hebrew translator was doing what Griffith was to do in the 20th century AD and distinguishing in translation between the different words for “heart” used in Egyptian in lines 10 and 11. See Griffith, p. 198 n. 10.

the need for caution before suggesting a cognate (especially in Arabic with its enormous vocabulary) to explain one word in a single verse without supplementary evidence. His other suggestions are that *'etmôl* should be added before *šilsôm*, or that the disputed word should be emended to *m'sâlîm*. Both these suggestions involve moving farther from the MT than by simply reading *š'losîm*. Ruffle, however, rejects that solution to the problem because of the erroneous supposition (see above) that it would have to be assumed "that a word such as *d'bârîm* had dropped out".

In several passages where similarity between Proverbs and Amenemope has been found, Ruffle maintains that there are also differences which, he believes, reduce or remove its significance. I shall give just two examples.

The first example is in Prov. xxii 21, which gives the reason for the writing mentioned in verse 20. It is translated as follows in the *Revised Standard Version*:

to show you what is right and true,  
that you may give a true answer to those who sent you  
(*l'hodî'ākā qōšî' imrê 'emet*  
*l'hāšīb 'āmārîm<sup>9</sup> 'emet l'sôl'heykā*).

Amenemope 1.5-6:

To know how to rebut an accusation to the one who makes it.  
To return a charge to the one who made it. (Ruffle)  
Knowledge how to answer a statement to its pronouncer,  
and a report to one that has sent him. (Griffith)  
Knowing how to answer one who speaks,  
To reply to one who sends a message. (Lichtheim)

According to Ruffle (p. 56 [= 321]),

the two texts do not even deal with the same subject. Amenemope the bureaucrat claims that his teaching will enable a man to refute an accusation while the Proverbs writer is concerned that the reader should be convinced of the importance of truth, particularly in carrying back information. It is closer, in fact, to the sense of Ptahhotep's words. [The teaching of Ptahhotep 145-8.]

<sup>9</sup> Ruffle thinks that *'āmārîm* should be read as *'imrê*, in the construct state, plus an enclitic *mem*. I have, however, ventured to question the theory that such a *mem* is to be found in the Hebrew Bible. See M.V. Fox et al. (ed.), *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (Winona Lake, 1996), pp. 321-38.

The second example is Prov. xxiii 1-3, which speaks of eating with a ruler (*môšēl*), and Amenemope 23.13-18, which is a warning against eating with a “noble” (Griffith, Ruffle) or “official” (Lichtheim). According to Ruffle, these two passages and a third from the Teaching of Ptahhotep “are concerned about different aspects” of “behaviour at a noble’s table”:

Ptahhotep advised his reader how to behave generally to create a good impression, Amenemope wants him to avoid appearing greedy. It is left to the writer of Proverbs to suggest moral grounds for abstaining, as well as moderation. (P. 59 [= 323].)

While there are certainly differences between Proverbs and Amenemope in the two examples considered above (though it is not clear to me what the “moral grounds” are that Ruffle claims to find in Prov. xxiii 1-3), the fact remains that there are also similarities. If the Hebrew text is not to be viewed as a translation, and if the Hebrew writer treated the Egyptian text with freedom—as Humbert and others have maintained—it is not surprising that there are such differences. The Hebrew writer may, or may not, have grasped the precise meaning intended by Amenemope, but may nevertheless have been influenced by what is said in the Egyptian text. Erman and others have drawn attention to a number of similarities concentrated in a relatively short section in Proverbs, and the similarities have a cumulative force as evidence.

A similar comment may be made about another aspect of Ruffle’s argument. He points out that some passages in which similarities between Proverbs and Amenemope have been found deal with topics that appear elsewhere in Egyptian or Hebrew texts. For example, Prov. xxiii 1-3 and Amenemope 23.13-18, which were considered above, are compared with a passage in the Teaching of Ptahhotep. Another example is the prohibition of moving a boundary-marker in Prov. xxii 28 and xxiii 10, which recalls Deut. xix 14 and xxvii 17, and which has been compared with Amenemope 7.12,15 and 8.9. Ruffle comments on “numerous references” to the importance of boundaries in “Egyptian and Mesopotamian literature” as well as in the Old Testament (p. 62 [= 326]). Similarly, Prov. xxii 29 says of a man who is *māhūr bimla’ktō* that he will stand before kings, and this has been compared with Amenemope 27.16-17, which says of “a scribe who is experienced in his office” that he “will find himself worthy to be a courtier”. Ruffle comments that “there is clearly similarity of thought but it is hardly original or confined to these two books”, and he speaks of the fact

that such an idea is very common in “Egyptian advice for young scribes”. The presence of certain ideas both in this part of Proverbs and Amenemope and in other texts does not, however, alter the fact that they are present in the former two works. Their presence favours a relationship between this limited part of Proverbs and Amenemope.

In his “Conclusions” on pp. 62-6 (= 326-9), Ruffle sums up his judgements on the passages that he has discussed on the previous pages (and also on Prov. xxiii 17-20, 21, 22, 24, 29, which he has not discussed). He notes “the difference of order in which the two sets of passages appears”, and the fact that xxii 26-7 “had no Egyptian original”, that “those points which seem to receive particular attention from Amenemope do not appear in Proverbs”, and that some “of the suggested parallels only ‘work’ if the passage from Proverbs is compared with a piece from *Amenemope* in which there is a large gap” (such as Prov. xxii 24-5 and Amenemope 11.13-14, 17-18, and xxiii 6-8, which were considered above). While he notes that a “case could be argued for dependence on the grounds of the cumulative effect of a number of similar passages”, he does not find “wholly conclusive evidence of direct borrowing”.

It was seen above in the discussion of Prov. xxii 17-18 that Ruffle is concerned with the question of a “translation” of Amenemope or at least with something approaching a translation. If, however, the question is whether the Hebrew writer was not intending to produce a translation or a work that was to be a kind of Hebrew counterpart of Amenemope, but was composing a Hebrew work under the influence—sometimes the close influence, sometimes not—of Amenemope, then the evidence needs to be studied from a different point of view. The opinion, which is shared by many Hebraists as well as by Egyptologists,<sup>10</sup> is that the similarities in subject matter, and even wording, between this limited part of Proverbs and Amenemope are best explained on the hypothesis of dependence of the former on the latter.

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<sup>10</sup> The theory that this part of Proverbs is dependent on Amenemope has recently been maintained by such Egyptologists as Nili Shupak (e.g. p. 13), who includes Ruffle’s article in her bibliography but appears not to have been convinced by it, and Miriam Lichtheim (p. 115), who includes references to the relevant verses in Proverbs in the margin of her translation of Amenemope.



## VI

The conclusions of the examination of Whybray's questioning of the theory that Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22 is dependent on Amenemope will now be summarized.

1. The theory to be discussed is, not that this part of Proverbs is a translation of Amenemope, which it clearly is not, or the result of an attempt to produce a counterpart modelled closely on the Egyptian work. The kind of theory advanced by scholars like Greßmann and Humbert is of a work influenced by Amenemope, and in some verses close to the wording of the Egyptian text, but of a work that treats Amenemope freely, often departs from it and makes no attempt to include much that is in it, and also includes much material from other sources.

2. While Whybray is right to deny that the reading *šālšm* makes good sense in Prov. xxii 20, his defence of *šlšm* is implausible. The suggestion that *š'łšm* should be read involves very little change to the text, and it deserves to be taken seriously if it can be maintained that it makes sense in the context.

3. Whybray argues that Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22 "did not originally constitute a literary unit", and he accepts Niccacci's view that xxii 17-xxiii 11 is a single collection of ten admonitions, and that xxiii 12-xxiv 22 is derived from several collections. However, such a view is compatible with the view of scholars like Greßmann and Humbert that the Hebrew writer was influenced by Amenemope but also drew on other material.

4. Both Erman and Richter accept the reading *š'łšm* in xxii 20, but hold that it originally referred to the thirty chapters in Amenemope, and that the original reference was lost at a later stage. In contrast, Greßmann and others believe that there are thirty sayings in this part of Proverbs, and that xxii 20 refers to them. An examination of the Hebrew text leads to the conclusion that, though it is impossible to be certain that there are thirty, the number is at least close to thirty, and that the most likely number is either twenty-nine or thirty. If it is accepted on other grounds that this part of Proverbs is dependent on Amenemope, and that neither the *Kethibh* nor the *Qere* makes sense in xxii 20, then the hypothesis that *š'łšm* should be read and that it refers to thirty sayings in this part of Proverbs is plausible, and it may be argued that it is the best solution of the problem.

5. Whybray appeals to the doubts of some Egyptologists whether this part of Proverbs is dependent on Amenemope, but the only detailed

discussion to which he refers is the article by Ruffle. It was argued above that the similarities between Prov. xxii 17-xxiii 11 and Amenemope are such that, despite the differences that exist, dependence on the Egyptian work is probable. The arguments advanced by Whybray (and Ruffle) against dependence are unconvincing.

In this article I have disagreed with Norman Whybray, who died in 1998, but I do not wish to end without paying a tribute to the memory of a friend for thirty-six years and a scholar whose contribution to the study of the Old Testament, and especially the wisdom literature, I value. He is missed both as a person and as a scholar of Israelite wisdom literature.<sup>11</sup>

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*Abstract*

This article seeks to counter the scepticism of R.N. Whybray about the dependence of Prov. xxii 17-xxiv 22 on the Teaching of Amenemope. It is generally held that the influence of Amenemope may be seen in a number of Hebrew verses, but not that this part of Proverbs follows the Egyptian work closely throughout; rather, the author treated Amenemope with great freedom and also drew on other sources. There is a plausible case for reading *š'lašim* in Prov. xxii 20, where neither *šilšim* nor *šālšim* makes good sense, and for the hypothesis that there are thirty sayings in Prov. xxii 22-xxiii 11. Ruffle's questioning of the relationship between the two texts has not succeeded in refuting the case built on the similarities in a number of verses.