

## “These, too, are for the Wise!”: Proverbs 24:23 and the Structure of the Book of Proverbs<sup>1)</sup>

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There is a noticeable tendency in modern Bible translations and recent Proverbs commentaries to translate the Hebrew superscription in Proverbs 24:23 (עֲשֵׂה אֵלֶּיךָ לְחֻמֵּיִם) as “These, too, are (sayings) of the wise”.<sup>2)</sup> The reasoning behind this translation can be found in one of the oldest commentaries on the book: In 1858, Franz Hitzig argued against the Hebrew phrase being translated as “These, too, are for the wise,” since “these are not sayings for the wise, for the healthy do not need a doctor.”<sup>3)</sup> By using a phrase from the Gospel of Luke (Luk 5:31), Hitzig argued that the wise can hardly be the addressees of the

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1) I am grateful to Professor Dr. Hee Sook Bae for the invitation to publish this article in the prestigious Journal of Biblical Text Research. My article builds on previous work, in particular a piece published in 2020 in the Festschrift for Hermann Spieckermann and the introduction of my commentary on Proverbs 1-15 (n. 5 and 17).

2) See, e.g., NAB: “These also are words of the wise”; NAS: “These also are sayings of the wise”. One of the reviewers pointed me to the fact that current Korean Bible versions follow the latter (“These also are sayings of the wise”), as seen in the New Korean Revised Version (“이것도 지혜로운 자들의 말씀이다”) and the Holy Bible (2005, “이 또한 현인들의 말씀이다”). – For recent scholarly commentaries see M. V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18B (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 770: “These too are of the wise”; C. B. Ansberry, *Proverbs: The (Trans)formation of Character in accord with Wisdom and Virtue*, Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament 16 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024), 542: “These also are of the wise”.

3) F. Hitzig, *Die Sprüche Salomo's* (Zürich: Orell Füssli, 1858), 252: “Sprüche für die Weisen sind es nicht; denn die Gesunden bedürfen keines Arztes.”

instruction because the wise need no instruction. However, Johann David Michaelis suggested to the contrary in his 1769 *Introduction to the Old Testament* that “the wise” (חֲכָמִים) are not the subject but the object in Proverbs 24:23: “Wise men should remember this, too.”<sup>4)</sup>

In the following, I demonstrate that Michaelis’s translation from over 250 years ago is the correct rendering. Proverbs 24:23 is, as I show, one of the seven superscriptions of the book and has a special function for the overall composition. The brief phrase in Proverbs 24:23 serves as the main turning point of the book, initiating the transition from a wisdom for beginners to a wisdom for the wise.

This article is divided into three parts. I begin with a paragraph on Proverbs 24:23 and its place within the seven superscriptions of the book (1), followed by analysis of the connections between the superscriptions and the prologue of the book in Proverbs 1:1-7 (2). Finally, I summarize the main arguments with regard to the structure and internal logic of the book of Proverbs and the aforementioned transition from a wisdom for beginners to a wisdom for the wise (3).

## 1. Proverbs 24:23 and the Seven Superscriptions of the Book of Proverbs

Proverbs 24:23 is part of the seven superscriptions that give the book of Proverbs its structure.<sup>5)</sup> Even at first glance, it is noticeable that the wording of Proverbs 24:23 differs from the other superscriptions. In all other cases, the authorship is expressed by a grammatical construction identifying the author through the *status constructus*: “proverbs of X” (X מְשָׁלִי) or “words of X” (דְּבַרֵי X). The first type can be found in Proverbs 1:1a; 10:1a; 25:1 and the latter in 22:17; 30:1a; 31:1:<sup>6)</sup>

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4) J. D. Michaelis, *Deutsche Übersetzung des Alten Testaments, mit Anmerkungen für Ungelehrte: Sprüche und Prediger Salomo*, Band 7 (Göttingen: J.C. Dieterich, 1769), 51: “auch Weise sollen dis merken”.

5) Such a combination was already proposed by A. Luc, “The Title and Structure of Proverbs”, *ZAW* 112 (2000), 252-255, here 254. See also M. Winkler (“Sechs und eine halbe Säule der Weisheit: Spr 22:1-17 und das Gliederungssystem des Sprichwörterbuchs”, *BN* 174 [2017], 21-40) for a different perspective.

6) See B. U. Schipper, “Wisdom for Beginners and for the Advanced: The Prologue of the Book of Proverbs and the System of the Seven Superscriptions”, C. Körting and R. G. Kratz, eds., *Fromme und Frevler: Studien zu Psalmen und Weisheit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 469-478.

Table 1. Superscriptions of The Book of Proverbs

1:1a	The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel	מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה בֶן-דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל
10:1a	The proverbs of Solomon	מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה
22:17	Incline your ear and hear the words of (the) wise.	הִטְ אָזְנוֹךָ וּשְׁמַע דְּבָרֵי הַחֲכָמִים
24:23	These, too, are for (the) wise.	גַּם-אֵלֶּה לַחֲכָמִים
25:1	These, too, are proverbs of Solomon that the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, collected.	גַּם-אֵלֶּה מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱתִיקוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַזְּקֵנָה מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה
30:1a	The words of Agur, son of Jakeh, the Massaite	דְּבָרֵי אַגּוּר בֶּן-יָקֵחַ הַמַּסְאִי
31:1	The words of Lemuel, king of Massa, which his mother taught him.	דְּבָרֵי לְמוּאֵל מֶלֶךְ מַסָּא אֲשֶׁר-יִסְרָתָהּ אִמּוֹ

The seven superscriptions provide important information: Proverbs 1:1 introduces Solomon as “son of David, king of Israel”. Proverbs 10:1 builds on this, referring only to “proverbs of Solomon” (מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה) without further explanation, and Proverbs 25:1 presents a combination of three authorities: the proverbs of Solomon, a special group of the wise called the “men of Hezekiah” (אַנְשֵׁי הַזְּקֵנָה), and King Hezekiah himself.<sup>7)</sup> In contrast to this, Proverbs 22:17 and 24:23 refer only to “words” (דְּבָרִים), whereas Proverbs 30:1 and 31:1 introduce two other authorities: “Agur, son of Jakeh, the Massaite” and his words, and “Lemuel, king of Massa” and the words “which his mother taught him”.

It is noteworthy that the parts of the book that are introduced by superscriptions referring to “proverbs of Solomon” (מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה), are by far the most extensive, whereas the four parts of the book introduced by a reference to “words” (דְּבָרִים) are much smaller:<sup>8)</sup>

7) The reference to Hezekiah should not be taken historically; see M. Carasik (“Who Were the ‘Men of Hezekiah’ (Proverbs XXV 1)?”, *VT* 44 [1994], 289-300), who recognizes in Pro 25:1 a case of “innerbiblical exegesis”. On the different concepts of narrative framing, see J. Vayntrub, “Before Authorship: Solomon and Proverbs 1:1”, *BiblInt* 26 (2018), 182-206, here 193.

8) See also A. Meinhold, *Die Sprüche. Teil 1: Sprüche Kapitel 1-15*, ZBK AT 16/1 (Zurich: TVZ, 1991), 23.

- I. 1:1-9:18 (256 verses)
- II. 10:1-22:16 (375 verses)
- III. 22:17-24:22 (70 verses)
- IV. 24:23-34 (12 verses)
- V. 25:1-29:27 (138 verses)
- VI. 30:1-33 (33 verses)
- VII. 31:1-31 (31 verses)

The seven superscriptions are also connected by certain keywords. Proverbs 1:1; 10:1; 25:1; 31:1 refer to a king (מֶלֶךְ), which means that the subsequent material is presented as royal wisdom. Proverbs 22:17; 30:1; 31:1 are connected by the term דְּבָרִים (“words”) and Proverbs 22:17; 24:23 by the term הַכְּמִים (the “wise men”). Interestingly, the two superscriptions in 24:23 and 25:1 share the phrase גַּם־אֵלֶּה (“these too”). This phrase makes clear that the seven superscriptions should not be seen as something accidental but as a well-composed structure. They form a system that contains an internal logic, with each superscription building on the previous one.

Reading the seven superscriptions in sequence, the first one in 1:1 gives detailed information about Solomon, who is introduced as the “son of David, king of Israel”. Proverbs 10:1 can then use the abbreviated version, mentioning only “proverbs of Solomon” (מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה). Proverbs 22:17 begins with the “words of the wise” (דְּבָרֵי הַכְּמִים) as a second category of wisdom that is likewise taken up in 24:23. The phrase גַּם־אֵלֶּה (“these too”) in 24:23 and 25:1 creates a sequence in which the words of the wise and the previous proverbs of Solomon are bound together. This is expanded in 30:1 and 31:1. Here, other authorities such as Agur and the mother of King Lemuel are mentioned. By doing this, the seven superscriptions expand upon the biblical tradition about Solomon.<sup>9)</sup> Wisdom is thus not only what comes from Solomon but also what stems from wisdom teachers, “the wise,” and from foreign authorities – because regardless of what stands behind the names “Agur” and “Lemuel”, one aspect is remarkable:

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9) This is the reason why so few “Solomonic” references can be found in the book of Proverbs, according to the exhaustive study by M. Winkler, *Das Salomonische des Sprichwörterbuchs: Intertextuelle Verbindungen zwischen 1 Kön 1-11 und dem Sprichwörterbuch*, HBS 87 (Freiburg: Herder, 2017), 349-361; W. A. Brueggeman, “The Social Significance of Solomon as Patron of Wisdom”, J. G. Gammie and L. G. Perdue, eds., *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 117-132, here 118.

According to Genesis 25:14, the term “Massa” that is linked to Agur in Proverbs 30:1 and to King Lemuel in 31:1 refers to a place in Arabia.<sup>10)</sup>

The reference to foreign authorities creates an interesting connection to the so-called Solomon narrative in 1 Kings chapters 3-11. There, it is stated that Solomon’s wisdom “surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt” (1Ki 5:10). If one understands Agur and Lemuel as “sons of the east,” the final two chapters of Proverbs go beyond a Solomonic connection. Taking this one step further, it might be also possible to find a “wisdom of Egypt” mentioned in 1 Kings 5:10 in Proverbs, because the superscription in Proverbs 22:17 refers to a classical phrase known in Egyptian wisdom literature: “Give your ears to hear the things that are said; give your heart to understanding” (Amenemope 3.9-10). Moreover, Proverbs 22:17 introduces a section of Proverbs which draws significantly on an Egyptian wisdom text – the Instruction of Amenemope.<sup>11)</sup>

In short, the seven superscriptions indicate that wisdom in the book of Proverbs is more than the **מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה**, the “proverbs of Solomon”; it also includes the words of the wise and of foreign authorities. All of this points to a sapiential discourse bringing different positions in dialogue to each other. Hence, even just at this point of the analysis, it can be seen that the system of the seven superscriptions presents important evidence concerning the overarching structure of the book.

The same is true for Proverbs 24:23. The brief formulation of 24:23 (**בְּ-אֵלֶּהָ לְהַכְּתִיבִים**) is closely connected to the other superscriptions of the book. Moreover, seeing Proverbs 24:23 as a genuine part of the seven superscriptions in which each superscription builds on the previous one solves a problem in previous research: Scholars have often wondered why the wording of 24:23 is so short and why a term such as “sayings/proverbs” (**מִשְׁלִים**) or “words” (**דְּבָרִים**) is not used. Because of this, some scholars emend the text and add more terms, resulting in readings such as “These too are the words/sayings of the wise”.<sup>12)</sup>

10) See I. Hoppe, “Massa (Place)”, C. M. Furey, et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, vol. 18 (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 36-37; A. -K. Wigand, “Lemuel”, C. Helmer, et al., eds., *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, vol. 16 (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 99-100.

11) M. V. Fox, “From Amenemope to Proverbs: Editorial Art in Proverbs 22:17-23:11”, *ZAW* 126 (2014), 76-91.

12) See, e.g., R. P. O’Dowd, *Proverbs*, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 329; L. G. Perdue, *Proverbs*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 2000),

Others, such as Alex Luc, have argued that Proverbs 24:23 cannot be seen as a full superscription.<sup>13</sup> However, the reason for the lack of a concrete term becomes quite clear when reading the seven superscriptions in sequence. Proverbs 24:23 introduces a second educational stage within the overall composition of the book. It encourages the study of wisdom, as becomes clear when looking at the grammatical structure (נְבִיאִים לְהַקְדָּמִים). The *lamed* in לְהַקְדָּמִים should not be taken as *lamed auctoris* as some scholars argue (“from the wise”);<sup>14</sup> the phrase should rather be translated as “for the wise”. Such a reading is supported by the ancient biblical translations. The Septuagint reads “these things I say to you, wise men” (ταῦτα δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν τοῖς σοφοῖς); the Syriac reads “These I say to the wise” (ܠܠܘܗܝܡ ܠܘܫܝܘܢܝܘܬܝܗܘܢ), and the expanded Targums are similar. The Vulgate takes לְהַקְדָּמִים as an indirect object.<sup>15</sup> The medieval commentators follow this understanding as well. Ramaq paraphrases “These things are for the wise,” and according to Hameri, “Solomon, after having addressed the son and all pupils, speaks now to the wise.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, the vast majority of readers until early modern scholarship rightly understood this superscription as addressing the wise – or, to put it differently: The “wise” are not the authors but the addressees; they should learn wisdom.

With this understanding of Proverbs 24:23, the logic underlying the seven superscriptions becomes clear. Proverbs 24:23 stands right in the middle of the superscriptions, with three preceding it and three following it. The first three superscriptions (1:1; 10:1; 22:17) introduce the notion of wisdom by invoking two different authorities: the “proverbs of Solomon” (מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה) and the “words of the wise” (דְּבָרֵי הַחֲכָמִים). The second set of three superscriptions that

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216, both of whom translate: “There also are sayings of the wise”. For a related German example, see W. Frankenberg, *Die Sprüche*, HKAT II/3:1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1898), 137: “Auch folgende Sprüche sind von Weisen”.

13) See A. L. Luc, “The Titles and Structure of Proverbs”, 253-254.

14) See H. F. Fuhs, *Das Buch der Sprichwörter: Ein Kommentar*, FzB 95 (Würzburg: Echter, 2001), 337; C. R. Yoder, *Proverbs*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 242; R. C. van Leeuwen, “The Book of Proverbs”, L. E. Keck, et al., eds., *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 5 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 19-264, here 213.

15) See M. V. Fox, *Proverbs: An Eclectic Edition with Introduction and Textual Commentary*, HBCE 1 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 328. Surprisingly, this important text critical question is not discussed in Dominique Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament: Tome 5: Job, Proverbes, Qohélet et Cantique des Cantiques*, OBO 50:5 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 718-719.

16) Quoted from M. V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 770.

follow Proverbs 24:23 also refers to the proverbs of Solomon (25:1) and the words of wise men (30:1 and 31:1), but with an important modification. The proverbs of Solomon are not presented directly but with reference to the “men of Hezekiah” who collated them.<sup>17)</sup> Moreover, the “words” are not introduced as words of “wise men” but as the words of foreign authorities such as Agur and the mother of King Lemuel. In short, the superscription in Proverbs 24:23 can be seen as the turning point within the system of the seven superscriptions, introducing three superscriptions that refer to a derivative form of wisdom. Proverbs 24:23 marks the shift from the first part of the seven superscriptions to their second part. But what can be said about the consequences of this shift for our understanding of the book? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine Proverbs’ prologue, because all scholars agree that the prologue in Proverbs 1:1-7 serves as the introduction to the whole book and can be seen as the key to understanding it.

## 2. The Prologue of the Book of Proverbs (Pro 1:1-7) and the Seven Superscriptions

Much has been said about the prologue of the book of Proverbs.<sup>18)</sup> With regard to the present discussion concerning the seven superscriptions, the prologue of the book in Proverbs 1:1-7 contains important evidence. The following analysis concentrates on three aspects: (1) the structure of the prologue and its composition, (2) the concept of wisdom it develops, and (3) its addressees.<sup>19)</sup>

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17) For the meaning of *הִפִּיל* *hifil*, see H. Schmoldt, “*הִפִּיל* ‘*hifil*’”, *TDOT* 11 (2001), 456-458. The verb is also attested in Middle Hebrew: “to translate, transcribe”; see M. V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31, 777*: “transcribed” and B. K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 300: “copied and collected”.

18) See for example A. Keefer, “A Shift in Perspective: The Intended Audience and a Coherent Reading of Proverbs 1:1-7”, *JBL* 136 (2017): 103-116, and for a more detailed discussion B. U. Schipper, *Proverbs 1-15*, S. Germany, trans., *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019), 61-71.

19) For the following, see also B. U. Schipper, “Wisdom for the Beginners and for the Advanced”, 470-473.

Table 2. Analysis of Pro 1:1-7

1 The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel,	מְשָׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה בֶן-דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל
2 to know wisdom and discipline, to understand words of insight,	לְדַעַת חִכְמָה וּמוֹסֵר לְהִבִּין אֲמָרֵי בִינָה
3 to take discipline that effects prudence: Righteousness, (and?) justice, and uprightness;	לְקַחַת מוֹסֵר הַשְּׂפִיל צְדָק וּמִשְׁפָּט וּמִישָׁרִים
4 to give to the inexperienced cleverness, (and) the young person knowledge and a plan.	לְתֵת לַפְתָּאִים עֲרֻמָּה לְנֶעַר דַּעַת וּמִזְמָה
5 Let a wise person hear and add learning, and a discerning person acquire guidance,	יִשְׁמַע חָכָם וְיוֹסֵף לְקַח וְנִבְוֶן תְּהַבְלוֹת יִקְנֶה
6 to understand a proverb and an allusion, the words of the wise and their riddles.	לְהִבִּין מְשָׁל וּמְלִיצָה דְּבָרֵי חִכְמִים וְחִידָתָם
7 The fear of YHWH is (the) beginning of knowledge – fools despise wisdom and discipline.	יִרְאַת יְהוָה רֵאשִׁית דַּעַת חִכְמָה וּמוֹסֵר אֲוִלִים בְּזוּ

Regarding the *structure* (1), there is no doubt that the seven verses form a masterfully composed unit.<sup>20)</sup> Following the superscription in v. 1, four of the next five verses start with the preposition *le* (לְ). This structure, based on the middle letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*lamed*), is clearly a product of scribal wisdom and not of an oral tradition.<sup>21)</sup> This is corroborated by the fact that “the proverbs of Solomon”, which refers to the written book of Proverbs, are the subject of teaching in verses 2-4, as the infinitives in verses 2-4 syntactically depend on “the proverbs of Solomon” (מְשָׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה) in verse 1.

Four of the five verses, namely verses 2-4 and 6, are composed as long lines with a preposition and an infinitive construct. One verse (v. 5) contains finite verbal forms. Verse 7, the motto of the book of Proverbs, stands on its own but is connected to verse 2 by the keywords חִכְמָה (“wisdom”) and מוֹסֵר (“discipline”). Taking these observations together, Proverbs 1:1-7 appears to be a well-composed text with formal characteristics that run throughout, but with a caesura in verse 5.

20) See A. Meinhold, *Die Sprüche. Teil 1: Sprüche Kapitel 1-15*, 47-51; B. K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 174-175.

21) Pro 2:12; 2:16; on the significance of the lamed line, see B. U. Schipper, *The Hermeneutics of Torah: Proverbs 2, Deuteronomy, and the Composition of Proverbs 1-9*, AIL 43 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021), 41-42 with further references.

The masterful structure of the text is connected to a remarkable concentration of wisdom terms. Proverbs 1:1-7 contains ten abstract terms that represent different (2) *concepts of wisdom*. The superscription in verse 1 is followed in verse 2a by the terms *הַכְּמָה* (“wisdom”) and *מוֹסֵר* (“discipline”) which present two educational ideas: *הַכְּמָה* is wisdom in a general sense, while *מוֹסֵר* stands for a directive education.<sup>22)</sup> The first indicates the wisdom student as the *subject* of the learning process (connected to *הַכְּמָה* but also to *בִּינָה* [“insight”]), while the latter presents the student as the *object* of such a process.

Both terms, *הַכְּמָה* and *מוֹסֵר*, are followed in verses 2b and 3a by two parallel abstract phrases. The “words of insight” (*אִמְרֵי בִינָה*) and the phrase *מוֹסֵר הַשֶּׁבֶל* explain what wisdom and discipline are about: The phrase *מוֹסֵר הַשֶּׁבֶל* should be read as an attributive genitive that specifies the “discipline” (*מוֹסֵר*) from verse 2a as “discipline that effects prudence”.

According to verse 3b, this education includes qualities such as “righteousness” (*צְדָקָה*), “justice” (*מִשְׁפָּט*), and “uprightness” (*יִישָׁרִים*). The three terms connect the two levels of sapiential thought that are to be learned: the level of human interaction and the level of human-divine relationship. “Uprightness” relates to the moral/ethical quality of the individual, while “righteousness” and “justice” are the foundations of the social order before God.<sup>23)</sup> This twofold aspect concerning both the individual and the society is also the reason for the different grammatical number of the two addressees in verse 4. There is both a singular (the “young person”; *נָעַר*) and a plural (the “inexperienced ones”; *פְּתָאִים*), which refers to the two dimensions of life: the individual and the group. Both become important within the following paragraph of Proverbs 1; in the instruction of Proverbs 1:8-19, the individual – the wisdom student – is addressed by a group of people, the sinners (*הַטָּאִים*; 1:10).<sup>24)</sup>

In addition to the qualities from verse 3, verse 4 mentions intellectual capacities that allow the wisdom student to fulfill their responsibilities. By using “cleverness” (*עֲרֻמָּה*), “knowledge” (*דַּעַת*), and “plan” (*מְזֻמָּה*), the author combines three key terms for wisdom in the book of Proverbs together.<sup>25)</sup> In contrast to

22) See also M. V. Fox, “Words for Wisdom”, *ZAH* 6 (1993), 149-169.

23) See A. Meinhold, *Die Sprüche. Teil 1: Sprüche Kapitel 1-15*, 49.

24) See Pro 8:5, 12 (*עֲרֻמָּה*); 1:22; 2:6; 8:9; 10:14; 12:1, 23; 14:7, 18; 15:2, 7, 14; 17:27; 18:15; 19:25, 27; 20:15; 21:11; 22:12; 23:12; 24:5; 29:7 (*דַּעַת*) and 2:11; 3:21; 5:2; 8:12; 12:2; 14:17; 24:8 (*מְזֻמָּה*). See also R. P. O’Dowd, *Proverbs*, 54 with parallels to Gen 2:9, 17; 3:1; 4:1.

verses 2-4, verse 5 presents a different focus, introducing the second part of the prologue.<sup>26)</sup> While all the infinitive phrases in the first part refer to the proverbs of Solomon (מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה) and thus to the written wisdom instruction, it is now the wise person (חָכָם) who appears as the subject. The finite verbal forms should be understood in a modal sense;<sup>27)</sup> they apply to the wise person, who should develop their competencies further. They should hear and continue to learn, “to understand a proverb and an allusion, the words of the wise and their riddles,” as verse 6 puts it. All of this culminates in the motto of the book in verse 7 about the fear of the Lord, which is “the beginning of knowledge” (רֵעֵת).

Examination of the structure of the text and the different wisdom terms leaves no doubt that the book’s prologue provides a sequence of abstract terms that Gerhard von Rad had already noted in his famous book *Wisdom in Israel*. For him, the terms in Proverbs 1:1-7 reflect a broad conception of education:

“By the accumulation of many terms the text seems to aim at something larger, something more comprehensive which could not be expressed satisfactorily by means of any one of the terms used.”<sup>28)</sup>

On the one hand, the terminology of Proverbs 1:1-7 reflects what can be understood as “wisdom” in the book of Proverbs. The ten words refer to different forms of acquired knowledge, beginning with “wisdom” (חָכְמָה) and also including “discipline” (מוֹסֵר), “knowledge” (דַּעַת), and “guidance” (תְּהַבִּילוֹת). On the other hand, the sequence of the terms has a meaningful logic that points to a specific pedagogical concept.

Through the carefully designed chiasmic structure of the text (see below), two different (3) addressees are in view: the “beginner” in verses 2-4 and the

25) See W. Dietrich and S. Arnet, eds., *Konkise und aktualisierte Ausgabe von HALAT* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 429; T. Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 97.

26) This is why v. 5 is often taken as redactional; see R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 31; C. H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1899), 8.

27) Cf. F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Proverbs of Solomon*, M. G. Eaton, trans. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1874), 43-44; M. V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 53. For a different position, see H. F. Fuhs, *Das Buch der Sprichwörter*, 37: “extratemporalis”.

28) G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, J. D. Martin, trans. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 13.

“advanced” in verses 5-6. While the former, the “young person” (נַעַר) and the “inexperienced one” (פְּתִי), are to be instructed in the fundamentals of sapiential education, including the complex values of “righteousness, justice, and uprightness” (מִישָׁרִים, מִשְׁפָּט, צְדָקָה; v. 3), the education of the advanced student aims for a more complicated wisdom. As a “wise” and “insightful person” (חָכָם and נְבוֹן), they should hear teaching and “add” to it, as verse 5a puts it. In short, the advanced wisdom student will become a wise scribe with much more insight into the dimension of wisdom than the beginner. This includes understanding the words of other wisdom teachers, mentioned in verse 6 as “words of the wise” (דְּבַרֵי חֲכָמִים) and insights into hidden sayings such as “allusions” (מְלִיצָה) and “riddles” (חִידָה). Both terms, מְלִיצָה and חִידָה, refer to a deeper understanding of the wisdom book that is passed from one generation of wise scribes to the next.<sup>29)</sup>

In sum, what we find in the prologue of the book of Proverbs is a two-tiered concept of sapiential education that relates to two different addressees: the student who begins to study wisdom (the “beginner”), and the advanced student (the “wise”) who will receive insights into the deeper dimensions of wisdom in order to contribute firsthand to the scribal tradition, as mentioned in verse 5: the “wise person should hear and add learning.”<sup>30)</sup> These two dimensions, connected to a two-tiered pedagogical concept, can be illustrated as follows:

Table 3. Prologue of the Book of Proverbs (Pro 1:1-7)

v. 1	Superscription	A
vv. 2-4	Part A: Wisdom for beginners	B
	vv. 2-3 The basic aim of instruction v. 4 Addressee: the young wisdom student(s) (נַעַר and פְּתִי)	
vv. 5-6	Part B: Wisdom for the advanced	C'
	v. 5 Addressee: the wise person (חָכָם and נְבוֹן) v. 6 The further aims of instruction	
v. 7	Motto of the book of Proverbs	A'

29) See Hab 2:6; Sir 47:17 (מְלִיצָה) and Ps 49:5; 78:2; Eze 17:2 (חִידָה).

30) See R. J. Clifford (*Proverbs: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library [Louisville: Westminster, 1999], 36), who sees three dimensions of wisdom in the text: sapiential, ethical and theological.

This overview illustrates the overall composition of the prologue of the book of Proverbs and its internal logic. Interesting insights emerge when connecting this with the system of the seven superscriptions:

Firstly, both of the significant phrases in the seven superscriptions, “proverbs of Solomon” (מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה) and “words of the wise” (דְּבַרֵי הַחֲכָמִים), are found in the prologue. The phrase מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה from the superscriptions in 10:1a; 25:1 appears in 1:1a, and the phrase דְּבַרֵי הַחֲכָמִים from 22:17; 30:1a; 31:1 in 1:6. Secondly, the aforementioned structure of the seven superscriptions, in which each builds on the previous one with Proverbs 24:23 at its center, receives a deeper sense of meaning through the prologue of the book in Proverbs 1:1-7. The call of the prologue to advance in wisdom, from the beginner to the wise, has its counterpart in the superscriptions of Proverbs 22:17 and 24:23. The phrase in 22:17 “Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise” is the last superscription that focuses on the beginner, while the superscription in Proverbs 24:23, “These, too, are for the wise,” is the first to address the advanced student, the wise. In sum, the brief wording of Proverbs 24:23 cannot only be explained by the connections to the other superscriptions in the book but closely relates to the internal structure of the book of Proverbs.

### 3. Summary: Wisdom for Beginners and for the Advanced

The foregoing analysis began with the question of how the phrase גַּם-אֵלֶּה לְחֲכָמִים in Proverbs 24:23 should be translated. Whereas some scholars – as well as modern Bible translations – read “These too are (sayings) *of* the wise”, it has been argued above that the old translation suggested by Johann David Michaelis in 1769 remains preferable. The Hebrew phrase in 24:23 should be read as “These, too, are *for* the wise,” since it refers to the overarching structure of the book of Proverbs. Not only does Proverbs 24:23 mark the middle of the seven superscriptions of the book; it is also closely connected to the two-tiered pedagogy of wisdom with two different addressees: the beginners and the advanced learners. This pedagogical concept is introduced in the prologue in 1:1-7. While the beginner should learn the main principles of wisdom, the advanced wisdom student should be able to hear and to “continue to learn” (1:6),

i.e., they should aim at becoming a wise scribe, *literatus*, and contribute to the tradition of scribal wisdom.

When asking how such a skill can be achieved, the seven superscriptions provide the answer. They connect the different parts of the book with the idea of the aforementioned two-tiered pedagogy. By doing this, the seven superscriptions develop a concept of wisdom that goes beyond the connection to Solomon in Proverbs 1:1 and 10:1; in the second part of the superscriptions, wisdom is thus connected to King Hezekiah (25:1), to Agur (30:1) and to King Lemuel and his mother (31:1). Within the system of the seven superscriptions, Proverbs 24:23 can be seen as the main turning point. It connects the seven superscriptions and imbues them with a deeper meaning. The wording in 24:23 points to the second stage of education, developed in the second part of the book. In sum, through the connection of the seven superscriptions with the prologue in Proverbs 1:1-7, the book of Proverbs is presented as a textbook for both the *beginner* and *advanced* student, the latter of whom can also be called a “wise person”. With this two-tiered focus, the book of Proverbs nicely corresponds to ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. This connection can be illustrated by Proverbs 18:15 and Egyptian instructions:

“The heart of an insightful person [חָכָם] acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise [חָכָם] seeks knowledge.” (Pro 18:15)

Proverbs 18:15 makes clear that learning wisdom is a life-long process, because being a wise person does not exempt one from studying further. It is also important for a wise person to seek knowledge continuously. Exactly this thought is expressed in Egyptian wisdom literature, such as in the Instruction of Ptahhotep from ca. 2000 BCE (52-56):<sup>31)</sup>

“Do not be proud of your knowledge,  
consult the uneducated and the wise;  
the limits of art are not reached,  
no artist exists whose skills are perfect.”

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31) Translation B. U. Schipper, based on the papyrus edition by Z. Žába, *Les maximes de Ptahhotep* (Prague: éditions de l'académie Tchécoslovaque des sciences, 1956), 20.

Similarly, the Demotic Instruction of Khasheshonqy (also known as Ankhsheshonky)<sup>32)</sup> from the Persian period (5th c. BCE) states (8.x+3):<sup>33)</sup>

“Do not say: ‘I am learned’; make an effort so that you may gain knowledge.”

Hence, every wisdom student starts as an “inexperienced person” (יִתְּוֹן) and needs, even as a “wise person” (חֲכָמִים), continuous education. Exactly this thought is expressed in the prologue of the book of Proverbs (Pro 1:1-7) and by the seven superscriptions with Proverbs 24:23 at the center.

<Keywords>

Book of Proverbs, Superscriptions, Overarching Structure, Wisdom for the Beginners and for the Advanced.

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32) Another name is “Onkhsheshonqi”. For the correction of the name of this wisdom instruction, see J. F. Quack, “Über die mit *nh* gebildeten Namenstypen und die Vokalisation einiger Verbalformen”, *GöMisz* 123 (1991), 91-100.

33) Adapted from F. Hoffmann and J. F. Quack, *Anthologie der demotischen Literatur*, Einführungen und Quellentexte zur Ägyptologie 4, 2nd ed. (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2018), 317. See also M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature. Volume III: The Late Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 165.

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<Abstract>

**“These, too, are for the Wise!”:  
Proverbs 24:23 and the Structure of the Book of Proverbs**

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Whereas modern Bible translations and recent Proverbs commentaries translate the Hebrew superscription in Proverbs 24:23 (בְּמִצְוֹת לְחֹכְמִים) as “These, too, are (sayings) of the wise”, the present article argues that the Hebrew wording should be understood differently. Proverbs 24:23 is one of the seven superscriptions of the book of Proverbs which give the book its structure by referring to the prologue of the book in Proverbs 1:1-7. The prologue presents the book of Proverbs as wisdom for the beginner and for the advanced student who wants to become a wise person. While the beginner should learn the main principles of wisdom, the advanced wisdom student should aim at becoming a wise scribe, and contribute to the tradition of scribal wisdom.

When asking how such a skill can be achieved, the seven superscriptions provide the answer. They connect the different parts of the book with the idea of a two-tiered pedagogy. Within the overarching structure Proverbs 24:23 marks the middle with three superscriptions preceding it and three following it. The first three superscriptions (1:1; 10:1; 22:17) introduce the notion of wisdom by invoking two different authorities: the “proverbs of Solomon” (מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה) and the “words of the wise” (דְּבָרֵי חֹכְמִים). The second set of three superscriptions that follow Proverbs 24:23 also refers to the proverbs of Solomon (25:1) and the words of wise men (30:1 and 31:1), but with an important modification. The proverbs of Solomon are not presented directly but with reference to the “men of Hezekiah” who collated them. Moreover, the “words” are not introduced as words of “wise men” but as the words of foreign authorities such as Agur and the mother of King Lemuel. In short, the superscription in Proverbs 24:23 can be seen as the turning point within the system of the seven superscriptions, introducing a second educational stage within the overall composition of the book. It encourages the study of wisdom, as becomes clear when looking at the grammatical structure (בְּמִצְוֹת לְחֹכְמִים). The *lamed* in לְחֹכְמִים should not be taken as *lamed auctoris* as

some scholars argue (“from the wise”); the phrase should rather be translated as “for the wise”. Such a reading is supported by the ancient biblical translations such as the Septuagint, the Syriac, the Vulgate as well as by the medieval commentators: The “wise” are not the authors but the addressees; they should learn wisdom.

In sum, the brief wording in Proverbs 24:23 receives its deeper sense by the general structure of the book of Proverbs and can, therefore be translated, as: “These, too, are *for* the wise”.