CATHERINE PETRANY

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The Wisdom of the Psalms and Psalter

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This study presents a revised version of my doctoral dissertation submitted to the Department of Theology in 2014 at Fordham University in the Bronx, New York. A portion of chapter three appeared previously in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, edited by Nancy deClaissé-Walford. I am grateful to Professor Konrad Schmid, Professor Mark S. Smith and Professor Hermann Spieckermann, editors of the *Forschungen zum Alten Testament II* series, for accepting this work for publication. I especially would like to thank Professor Smith for his detailed comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript. I am also grateful to Dr. Henning Ziebritzki, Editorial Director for Theology and Jewish Studies at Mohr Siebeck, for his help throughout the publication process. Many thanks as well to Susanne Mang and Tobias Stäbler for their help in the preparation of this volume.

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I dedicate this book to my grandparents, Ronald and Grace, who experienced every part of my graduate studies with me and made writing this book possible.

Contents

Introduction

The Psalter begins with a lesson on the value of a righteous life. Psalm 1 bestows its instruction simply, with rich metaphors and a third-person discourse that veils both the identity of the speaker and the audience. Thus, the book of Psalms, the liturgical songbook of diverse religious communities both present and past, commences not with a song-poem directed toward the divine, but with a descriptive and didactic reflection about the life-giving way of righteousness. Psalm 1 is wisdom, humanly provided and anthropologically concerned, situated outside of the voluble triangle of psalmist, congregation, and deity that comprises so much of the psalms' communicative environment. This kind of wisdom, in various formulations, appears at different points throughout the Psalter. It contrasts with the dominant psalmic genres of lament and praise and it suggests a distinct provenance and function in the ancient world.[1] Consequently, sapiential language in the psalms can seem like a kind of interloper, a didactic sidebar, rather than an integral part of the human-divine verbal encounter that constitutes the unique character of the Psalter. Due to this peculiarity, the role of human wisdom within the book continues to be a rich and evolving question.

The present study attempts to contribute to this question of wisdom in the Psalter by approaching it from the vantage point of speech orientation, or more precisely, the distinctive interaction between horizontally oriented, inter-human speech and vertically oriented, human-divine speech in the psalms. One of the primary differences between the book of Psalms and the books of the wisdom corpus is the variegated communicative landscape that characterizes the former. The diverse cast of the psalmic audience extends beyond the foremost divine Addressee to a variety of respondents, including the congregation, evildoers, the self, the heavens, and many others. The direction of the psalmist's address, as well as the shape of the invitation to respond, constantly changes. The rapid interchange of first-, second-, and third-person speech conjures an interactive verbal environment, and uniquely involves those who engage the text, offering not only the "you" but also the "I"

[1] Claus Westermann identifies the primary modes of psalmic speech this way, writing that "in the Psalter there are two dominant categories, the hymn (including the Psalm of thanks) and the lament." See his *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 18.

for the reader/hearer's appropriation. Within this context, the pedagogical process cannot simply be identified with biblical wisdom but only emerges through the powerful interplay of constantly shifting speech. Thus, this study aims to constructively identify the psalms' unique instructional function, one that relates to but ultimately moves beyond the content oriented issue of wisdom as such.

To this end, chapter one situates the question of wisdom's role in the book of Psalms by outlining the dominant historical-critical and canonical perspectives that have dictated the character of the inquiry in contemporary scholarship. Modern scholars have dealt with the presence of wisdom language in the book of Psalms in two primary ways. In the formidable wake of Hermann Gunkel, form-critical scholars have attempted to define the parameters of a wisdom psalm genre and identify its *Sitz im Leben*. As this scholarly quest floundered due to a lack of consensus regarding which psalms are wisdom psalms, redaction-critical scholars have shifted emphasis to the question of wisdom's role in the shape of the Psalter as a whole. Exemplified in the work of Gerald Wilson, this approach sees wisdom as the dominant influence that transforms the Psalter from a liturgical collection into a didactic guidebook at the time of its final redaction. Canonical approaches to the final form of the Psalter likewise highlight the wisdom influenced instructional function of the book, while also stressing that the Psalter functions in multiple ways, with no one function being determinative. In conjunction with the latter, this chapter argues for a new approach to the question of psalmic wisdom that, rather than simply isolating wisdom passages, contextualizes wisdom's presence in the psalms and Psalter according to its constant interaction with other types of discourse. Recent rhetorical and theological studies on the psalms from Carleen Mandolfo, Derek Suderman, and Beat Weber are consulted to situate the present approach.

Chapter two examines the communicative environment of representative texts from the biblical wisdom corpus to provide the background for a comparison with the psalms. It is argued that biblical wisdom texts, despite a great deal of rhetorical and formal diversity, primarily present the pedagogical process as a horizontally oriented human discourse directed towards a human (student) audience. Exceptions to this arrangement are noted and analyzed, including Agur's prayer in Proverbs 30:7–9 and three prayer texts in Sirach 22:27–23:6, 36:1–22, and 51:1–12. It is argued that such exceptions, particularly in the book of Sirach, clearly separate the teaching process from the prayer, and thereby differ from the integration of the two discourses in the psalms. This chapter concludes by outlining the many different configurations of the speaker-audience relationship that permeate the psalms, in contrast with the comparatively uniform speaker-audience relationship found in the biblical wisdom books.

With this difference in mind, this study analyzes wisdom and instruction in the book of Psalms according to three distinct but related levels of interpretation. First, chapter three analyzes the role of wisdom elements in representative psalms of other genres, namely Psalm 25 (lament), Psalm 62 (confidence), Psalm 92 (thanksgiving), and Psalm 94 (mixed). What is found here is that the instructional value of these psalms is not isolated to the passages that reflect the wisdom tradition, but rather emerges through the integrated relationship between horizontal wisdom speech addressed to a human audience and the psalmist's vertical addresses to the divine. In this way, the psalmist acts both as a lecturer to be heard and a model to be imitated, as the audience is invited not only to listen as the addressed "you" but also to take up the role of the "I" who addresses God, and the "we" who speak together in the congregation. Thus, it is argued here that the instructional import of these psalms is as much shaped by the speaker's turn to prayer and worship as it is by the content of third-person statements and horizontal, second-person exhortations.

In a second level of interpretation, the fourth chapter examines three psalms that bear a wisdom signature throughout and are comprised entirely of horizontally directed speech (Pss 1, 37, 49). First, the didactic profile of each individual psalm is drawn, noting both the parallels and divergences from resonant wisdom texts. This leads to the conclusion that each psalm, despite a strong affiliation with the wisdom tradition, also echoes other biblical frameworks and includes components that one does not usually find in sapiential texts. Second, this chapter examines each psalm within the context of its immediately surrounding psalms. When thus contextualized, the lexical, thematic, and communicative relationships that build among neighboring psalms re-introduce the patterns of instruction discerned in chapter three within individual psalms that contain wisdom sections. A theocentric focus in these groups of psalms converges with a communicative development that emphasizes once again the move into vertically oriented address, and the gradual drawing of the horizontally addressed "you" into the vertical life of the "I" and "we" who address God.

Chapter five extends beyond the examination of wisdom's role in individual psalms and small groups of psalms and moves into a third level of interpretation by asking how wisdom contributes to the shape and function of the Psalter as a whole. To do this, the chapter focuses on Psalm 73, a psalm with strong wisdom affiliations that scholars also have pinpointed as a significant turning point within the Psalter. Psalm 73 stands at the midpoint of the Psalter between Psalm 1 and Psalm 145, which initiates the Psalter's conclusion of praise in Psalms 146–150. Both Psalm 1 and Psalm 145 also show an association with wisdom language. The development of wisdom's role in these psalms (with reference to wisdom Psalms 37 and 49 as well) showcases the role of psalmic wisdom in the passage from the beginning to the end of the

Psalter. It is argued that the hymnic contextualization of wisdom speech in Psalm 145, as well as the concluding "coda" of Psalms 146–150, substantiates wisdom's role in the service of the unique psalmic invitation not only to listen, but to speak in prayer and praise as the psalmist does, and thereby inculcate the lesson of how to be righteous.

Finally, this study concludes with a brief final chapter that summarizes and draws out the theological implications of the previous chapters. The different levels of psalmic analysis in chapters three, four and five reveal a flexible but identifiable pattern of pedagogy, one related to but distinct from the pedagogical strategies employed in the biblical wisdom corpus. Ultimately, the psalms teach by offering an invitation to take up the psalmist's vertically oriented "I" within a communal context, that is, by forming their hearers into addressers of God.

Chapter 1

History of Scholarship on Wisdom in the Book of Psalms

The role that biblical wisdom plays in the Psalter remains a lively and continuing subject of research in psalms scholarship. While the psalms contain many moments of wisdom-like teaching and piety, scholars cannot agree when and how these wisdom moments appeared in the psalms, or what effect seemingly sapiential elements have on individual psalms and the shape of the book as a whole. The significance of the issue is obvious by its staying power; different methodologies and scholarly emphases have variously shaped the contours of the question, but the basic problem remains the same. What role does the didactic wisdom tradition play in this seemingly liturgical collection or book of prayer-poems? A problematic but evident contrast exists between the "lessons" of the psalms and the more traditionally acknowledged expressions of supplication and worship.

This question has developed in two primary ways in contemporary scholarship. First, scholars have dealt with the form-critical question of the "wisdom" genre of individual psalms. Second, studies on the final form of the Psalter have examined the influence of wisdom on the function of the Psalter as a whole. Both of these approaches have maintained a general bifurcation of the book's didactic and liturgical functions, and defined psalmic wisdom as a post-exilic addition that promotes an individualized and reflective function distinct from the psalms' original function as the spoken words and vocalized songs of Israel's ritual life.

1. Wisdom in Individual Psalms

Twentieth Century Foundations: Hermann Gunkel and Sigmund Mowinckel

The characterization of the Psalter as a disparate collection of liturgical poems stems from the emphasis on the cultic dimension of the psalms initiated by Herman Gunkel and magnified by his student Sigmund Mowinckel. Gunkel's form-critical enterprise, which dominated psalms scholarship for much of the twentieth century, concentrates on interpreting psalms as individual compositions whose forms originated in the cult. While Gunkel holds that

various *Gattungen* originally had ties with the cultic activity of the Temple, he also stresses the "decisive change" by which psalmody came into the hands of pious individuals. These pious songwriters, influenced by the prophets, utilized traditional cultic forms but surpassed them by creating "spiritual poetry" geared towards an individual, rather than public, encounter with God. For Gunkel, this "spiritual poetry" is the "particular treasure of the psalter," even as he recognizes that the ancient cultic forms remain.[1] Gunkel's acknowledgement that wisdom plays a significant, if limited, role in the historical development of psalmody initiated many years of scholarly effort to form-critically define psalmic wisdom and locate the ancient context of its composition.

Gunkel himself sees wisdom not only as a distinct genre of poetry represented by entire psalms, but also as a consistent influence in psalms of other genres. Gunkel initiates his treatment of *Weisheitsgedichte* in the psalms by briefly examining the character of wisdom "*outside the psalter*."[2] Thus, his analysis of the topic begins with the idea that wisdom, insofar as it appears within the psalms, is an importation from another thought world rather than a fundamental aspect of psalmody in its origins.[3] Gunkel identifies what he sees as the main stages of sapiential thought in the biblical wisdom books, from short sayings to more extensive poetry and then, ultimately, reflection on the question of divine retribution.[4] Subsequently, he identifies these stages in various psalms throughout the Psalter, classifying Psalms 1, 37, 49, 73, 91, 112, and 128 as wisdom poetry.[5] In addition to these psalms, Gunkel also sees wisdom as an identifiable influence in psalms of other genres, including thanksgivings, hymns, complaints, and mixed poetry.[6]

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[1] Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (trans. James D. Nogalski; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 20.

[2] Ibid., 293.

[3] Ibid., 298. Gunkel does briefly suggest, however, that the influence of "lyric poetry" can also be seen in wisdom, such as the hymns and individual complaints in the book of Job, as well as in the book of Sirach.

[4] Scholars now commonly reject the notion that wisdom developed from shorter to longer poetic forms. See James L. Crenshaw, "Wisdom Psalms?" *CurBR* 8 (2000): 9.

[5] Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms*, 295–297. It should be noted, with Roland Murphy, that Gunkel is not absolutely clear about which psalms he considers to be wisdom poetry. As Murphy points out, perhaps this is related to the subsequent difficulty scholars have had reaching a consensus. See Roland Murphy, "A Consideration of the Classification 'Wisdom Psalms'," in *Congress Volume Bonn 1962* (ed. G.W. Anderson et al; VTSup 9; Leiden: Brill, 1963), 157.

[6] Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms*, 297. According to Gunkel, the "lyric genres" that show a wisdom influence include the following: Pss 25:12f; 31:24f; 32:6f, 8–10; 33:16–18; 34:12–22; 39:6c, 7; 51:15; 62:9–11; 73:1f; 92:7; 94:8–11, 12f; 97:10; 107:43; 111:10ab; 119:1–3, 21, 118, 119a. Gunkel seems to distinguish here between lyric genres that include

Gunkel identifies wisdom in the psalms by appealing primarily to content, in much the same way that he identifies royal psalms. First, he cites terminological indicators, namely wisdom/חכמה (Pss 49:4; 37:30; 111:10), instruction/תורה (Pss 78:1; 94:12), riddle/חידה (Pss 49:5; 78:2), and proverb/משל (Pss 49:5; 78:2).[7] Second, he cites content such as references to the "fear of the Lord," the "terrible fate of the godless," the "doctrine of retribution," and the contrast between the righteous and the wicked. He also cites a number of different forms associated with wisdom, such as the direct address of father to son, admonitions, short instructional sayings such as the numerical saying, "better than" sayings, and אשרי sayings.[8] Perhaps most significantly, Gunkel declares in relation to identifying wisdom elements in psalms of other genres:

> In general, even if not in every particular case, wisdom components (mostly sayings) stand out in the particular psalms by the fact that they speak about YHWH in the third person, and thus do not exhibit the form of a prayer.[9]

Of course, this statement does not stand in actuality; many psalms speak about God in the third person within the clear boundaries of cultically derived genres that he himself outlines, such as the hymn or even the lament. However, the idea that wisdom elements are simply not *prayerful* seems an intuitive part of the identification for Gunkel.

Gunkel vacillates regarding the *Sitz im Leben* of wisdom psalms, and does not explicitly link wisdom poetry in the psalms with one particular setting. He rejects any notion that these psalms were originally composed for worship, but acknowledges that wisdom poetry could have been introduced to worship services at a later point. So, for example, he argues that Psalms 49 and 91 may have been performed with music and even in worship. But he denies that such poems were originally created for this, but rather "were at home elsewhere," without identifying this original "home."[10] He argues that wisdom poetry was adopted in cultic settings at a later point "because they were so loved by the laity that they could not do without them in cultic performances."[11] In the end, however, Gunkel admits the futility of assigning a setting for the late adoption of such poems, writing that one "cannot determine at *which occasion* these wisdom poems would have been performed in

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"wisdom sayings" and mixed psalms that show a more distinct, and perhaps extended, alternation of genre. In the latter category, he seems primarily to be referring to Pss 94 and 119 (Ibid., 298; 308–310). However, this distinction does not seem to be rigid, as he talks about wisdom mixtures, for example, represented in single verses in hymns (e.g. Pss 107:43; 111:10).

[7] Ibid., 299.

[8] Ibid., 299–302.

[9] Ibid., 298.

[10] Ibid., 303. Here, he notes the "overwhelmingly secular" content of Pss 49, 127:3–5, and 133.

[11] Ibid., 303.

the worship service."[12] Despite this indeterminacy, his acknowledgment that psalmic wisdom could have had a secondary use in the cult points to the fluidity of function associated with different kinds of biblical poetry.

This secondary role for psalmic wisdom does not, for Gunkel, obscure wisdom's key role in the gradual historical shift by which cultic poetry became "spiritual poetry which was free from the cult."[13] Generally, Gunkel identifies the wisdom tradition as a late, non-cultic influence on the book of Psalms.[14] It represents the "penetration of reflection" into cultic poetry, and the separation of the psalms from the particular worship events that gave stiff form to the psalmic genres. That is, such wisdom elements are indicative of the historical development in psalmody that ultimately concludes with the severance of a particular genre from its cultic setting. While later scholars question Gunkel's understanding of the boundaries of "cult," his work instilled a scholarly idea that continues to float implicitly through commentaries and studies, namely that wisdom elements stand distinct from cultic elements in the psalms.

In contrast with Gunkel, Sigmund Mowinckel held that the majority of the psalms were composed for the "congregational cult," and so were essentially public in character rather than private poetry that imitated older, cultic motifs.[15] He engages in "cultic interpretation," boldly linking the psalms to a festival setting in ancient Israel. However, Mowinckel himself acknowledges that a few psalms stubbornly refuse to cooperate with his overarching, cultic vision of the Psalter, that indeed, a problem arises when we find in the Psalter some poems which do not seem to have been composed for cultic use. The problem in psalm exegesis is not the cultic psalms, but the non-cultic ones.[16]

By emphasizing the cultic character of the psalms, Mowinckel effectively cements the "outsider" status of "non-cultic," wisdom-like psalms. With regard to the nature of wisdom poetry's composition, Mowinckel admits that a fluid line separated the Israelite wise from Temple personnel, and that the "psalmists have learnt from the learned men, and the learned men have learnt

[12] Ibid., 303.

[13] Ibid., 306.

[14] Not completely, however. Gunkel (Ibid., 305) does not deny the possible "early placement" of poems like Pss 49 and 127:3–5, but he does think that acrostics are late, as well as Torah piety, references to the walls in Ps 128, commercial (not agricultural) activity in Ps 112 and the "language" of Ps 73.

[15] Gunkel (Ibid., 21) writes that "Mowinckel's fundamental error appears to consist of undervaluing the spiritual heights of the psalmist, and Israel's spiritual life in general. He conceives of the psalmist in particular as too primitive." This illuminates rather clearly the ideological presuppositions guiding Gunkel's definition of cult.

[16] Sigmund Mowinckel, "Psalms and Wisdom," *VTSup* 3 (1955): 205.

from the psalmists."[17] In addition to redacting the psalms, Israel's wise men "became psalmists" themselves, and composed their own brand of poetry that eventually, but not originally, came to be included in the Psalter. While these men were "traditionalists" and their poetry is earmarked by the inheritance of Temple psalmody, they ultimately created something fundamentally different and unattached to specific cultic circumstances.[18] Unlike "genuine psalmography," this "learned psalmography" was private and didactic.[19] According to Mowinckel, the beginnings of this kind of wisdom poetry as found in the psalms came to full fruition in later Jewish psalmography, such as one finds in Sirach and the Psalms of Solomon.[20]

Mowinckel identifies "learned psalmography" by vaguely pointing to style and content shared with the wisdom tradition, such that to "a greater or lesser degree the psalm becomes a didactic poem."[21] He lists Psalms 1, 19B, 34, 37, 49, 78, 105, 106, 111, 112 and 127 in this category. The main characteristic seems to be some presence of human instruction, which Mowinckel cannot find a place for in Israel's public experience of temple worship. He points to wisdom's influence on the thanksgiving psalm, which led testimony to become admonition, and worship to become religious/moral instruction. For Mowinckel, this dynamic simply becomes amplified in "learned psalmography," where the admonition/warning form prevails. The subject of the wicked and the righteous (Pss 1; 112) and the issue of retribution (Ps 49) become prominent, often embroiled in the problem of theodicy (Pss 78; 105; 106).[22] Like Gunkel, Mowinckel is willing to supply a secondary, limited cultic function for this kind of private poetry (such as the personal thanksgivings Pss 34, 37, 49, and 73). However, he suggests that some psalms (e.g. Pss 1, 127) may never have functioned ritually and were simply added at the time of the book's redaction.[23] One gets the sense that Mowinckel simply cannot accept

[17] Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (trans. D.R. Ap-Thomas; 2 vols.; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 2:106.

[18] Ibid., 2:106.

[19] Ibid., 2:106–109.

[20] Ibid., 2:116–118. In this, Mowinckel generally aligns with two oft-cited studies from 1937 by M. Ludin Jansen and P.A. Munch, who attempted to lend definition to the setting of such psalms. See H. Ludin Jansen, *Die spätjüdische Psalmendichtung: Ihr Entstehungskreis und ihr "Sitz im Leben,"* (Oslo: Norske videnskaps-akademi, 1937); P.A. Munch, "Die jüdischen 'Weisheitspsalmen' und ihr Platz im Leben," *Acta Orientalia* 15 (1937): 112–140. For a brief but helpful summary of these two studies, see Roland Murphy, "A Consideration of the Classification," 158. See also, James Crenshaw, "Wisdom Psalms?," 10.

[21] Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2:112.

[22] Ibid., 2:112.

[23] Ibid., 2:114. Of the wisdom-inflected thanksgivings listed, Mowinckel suggests that they "may have been deposited as a votive and memorial gift to Yahweh and a testimony to future generations, and on a later occasion have been included in the treasury of psalms,

the idea that these poems were included in this deeply "cultic" collection of psalms, primarily because of what he sees as their didactic and private character.

In this way, Mowinckel explicitly ties the wisdom character of these compositions to an evident didacticism that he sees as fundamentally non-cultic. However, he does distinguish the didactic character of "learned psalmography" from its purely educational counterpart in biblical wisdom due to what he sees as its prayerful dimension.

> In spite of the didactic character of the 'learned psalmography,' it has one characteristic in common with genuine psalmography: these poems are, and must be considered as, *prayers*. Like every real psalm, they address God, even though they often address men as well.[24]

Grammatically, of course, not all didactic psalms actually address God or contain any explicit prayer language at all, but Mowinckel seems unconcerned by this.[25] For him, while the didactic character of wisdom poetry does fasten it with a "non-cultic" designation, it does not preclude its essential character as a poetic vehicle for communication with the divine. In general, Mowinckel defines prayers as spontaneous, connected with a home-bound and ultimately synagogal piety that might have appealed to psalm stylistics without bearing any actual attachment to the Temple cult.[26] Thus, with the statement above, he differentiates "learned psalmography" from wisdom literature while maintaining its fixedly non-cultic character. This poetry, while indicative of an inter-human didactic encounter, still has an ambiguously-defined vertical (human-divine) dimension, but not a cultic one.[27]

Despite this caveat, Mowinckel essentially constructs a barricade between "genuine" and "learned" psalms, based precisely on the idea that the latter are didactic. So, while he has a fundamentally different understanding of the Psalter than Gunkel, the two scholars agree that wisdom is an external, non-cultic, and late influence on the psalms. Moreover, both scholars associate the composition of wisdom/non-cultic psalms and psalm passages with private devotion and an instructional function. This view of how psalm composition

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the transmission of which was the duty of the temple singers and the temple poets." So, while originally private, such poems might still have secondarily been taken up into public worship.

[24] Ibid., 2:108.

[25] Psalm 1 is the first and perhaps most obvious example of this phenomenon.

[26] Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2:108.

[27] According to Mowinckel (Ibid., 2:110–111), the "learned psalmist" had two objectives, namely to honor and call upon God and to teach the young to honor God. It is the latter objective that he refers to as the "true religious element," as a personal "witness" and "example" that leads the young on the right path. With this dual objective of the "learned psalmist," Mowinckel holds together both the divine and human encounters and thereby essentially distinguishes "learned psalmography" from wisdom literature, which has the sole objective of teaching the young, that is, solely human communication.

and use developed draws a historical and stylistic divide, then, between the cultic and didactic functions of the psalms. In this way, psalmic pedagogy, insofar as these scholars treat it as a possibility, is relegated to a setting separate from that of worship, and is seen as more wisdom-like in its manifestation than truly psalm-like.[28]

The foundation built by these two scholars set the stage for the rather significant question of what makes a psalm a psalm, and whether didactic poems truly belong to the collection in which they are found. Must a psalm bear some kind of connection with the Jerusalem Temple to be considered "cultic" and even "psalmic"? Is didactic poetry fundamentally "non-cultic" and even "non-psalmic"? In the wake of Mowinckel's emphasis on the cultic character of the psalms, some came to prize the Psalter's ritual setting as the primary context for understanding *all* of the psalms, including those Mowinckel excluded as "non-cultic."[29] Ivan Engnell, for example, not only rejects the notion that any psalm is "non-cultic," but also argues that all psalms originated in the pre-exilic period.[30] He confidently affirms that "we cannot doubt for a moment that we are dealing with ritual texts here."[31] This position leads him to the famous statement that, "The truth of the matter is that the Book of Psalms does not contain any 'wisdom poems,' at all."[32] For Engnell, any appeal to "wisdom psalms" involves a "didactic interpretation" that he finds

[28] The closest either scholar comes to assigning an instructional function to the ancient cult lies in their respective treatments of the thanksgivings, that both acknowledge as the first line of cultic defense to cave to wisdom forces. Gunkel (*Introduction to the Psalms*, 209) locates this didactic element in the "confession" of the psalmist, which could take "the form of wise doctrine and the festival guests become students to whom the instructor now proclaims his wisdom" (here, he cites Pss 31:24; 32:6ff; 34:12ff; 51:15). The psalmist may also engage in admonitions, another common component of wisdom poetry (here, he cites Pss 31:24a, 25; 32:8f; 34:12–15; Sir 39:6). While Mowinckel (*Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2:77) believes that such testimony "according to its true nature also seeks to be a confession to Yahweh," he ultimately avers that the influence of wisdom poetry often turned this element into "sermons in verse." Thus, while both acknowledge that thanksgiving psalms sometimes involve a didactic dimension, both also ultimately explain this phenomenon by appealing to wisdom's influence.

[29] For a helpful summary of research on this issue between the period of 1955 and 1965, see David J.A.Clines, "Psalm Research since 1955: I. The Psalms and the Cult," in *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998* (JSOTSup 293 vol. 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 639–664.

[30] Ivan Engnell, "The Book of Psalms," in *A Rigid Scrutiny: Critical Essays on the Old Testament* (ed. and trans. John T. Willis; Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), 68–122. This article originally appeared under the title "Psaltaren," in *Svenkst Bibliskt Uppslagsverk,*(eds. I. Engnell and A. Fridrichsen; vol. 2; Gävle: Skolförlaget, 1952), 787–832.

[31] Engnell, "The Book of Psalms," 76.

[32] Ibid., 99.

wrong in principle due to its non-cultic or "anti-cultic" associations.[33] For him, this position relies on faulty historical perspective that relegates so-called wisdom elements to a late date in the development of the Psalter.[34] Instead, Engnell rejects Gunkel's "expression of an evolutionistic, wishful dream" and claims that passages that seem like wisdom in the psalms were psalmic in origin, and only taken up by the wisdom tradition afterwards.[35]

Other scholars define the Israelite cult differently in their determination of wisdom's place in the psalms. For example, Svend Holm-Nielson rejects an understanding of the Israelite cult that depends entirely on a connection with pre-exilic, ritual activities of the Jerusalem Temple. While he admits that late psalmody may have become separated from its original cultic setting, he sees no reason to presume that it therefore had no cultic significance at all, but may have been reinterpreted for developing understandings of the cult in the post-exilic era. He writes,

> To me, it only makes sense to use the word psalm if it is connected with divine service, thus cult. Thus, the question should rather be asked radically like this: Is there in the canonical collection any poems which cannot be denoted as psalms?[36]

Here, Holm-Nielson pinpoints the main issue arising out of the respective positions of Gunkel and Mowinckel regarding sapiential psalmody; the question of wisdom's role in the psalms ultimately involves the question of psalmic identity itself.[37] For Holm-Nielson, the very identity of a psalm lies in its connection with "divine service." Consequently, he argues that we cannot call any canonical psalm "non-cultic," an adjective that, for him, really means "non-psalmic."

Holm-Nielson advocates for an expanded view of cult that could include both Torah instruction and worship as legitimate forms of cultic activity. Moreover, he rejects the idea that instruction was simply a post-exilic activity that had no place in worship services. Instead, he argues that late instructional psalmody could have been fashioned intentionally, according to the way that instruction originally functioned as part of the pre-exilic temple cult. Because

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[33] Ibid., 98.

[34] Ibid., 100–101. Thus, passages that seem non-cultic or anti-cultic or wisdom-like, we must first see through the lens of the cult. For example, he sees Ps 1 as a "Torah-liturgy type originally connected with the king." The "two ways" imaged in the psalm, rather than being a proverbial import, represent "a definite cultic situation in which the so-called ethical requirements were cultivated." Similarly, Engnell sees no reason why the acrostic psalms must be late compositions; rather, they derive from the cult and are a "hymnic-parenetic type" that ultimately influenced wisdom poetry, rather than vice versa.

[35] Ibid., 75–76. So, Engnell does not deny that wisdom circles may have had a hand in the redaction of the Psalter, but he thinks the case has been overstated.

[36] Svend Holm-Nielson, "The Importance of Late Jewish Psalmody for the Understanding of Old Testament Psalmodic Tradition," *ST* 14 (1960): 10.

[37] See Clines, "Psalms Research," 642–643.

of this expanded view of cult, Holm-Nielson is able to preserve the "cultic" and therefore the "psalmic" nature of every canonical psalm.

So, though by way of a different route, Holm-Nielson attempts to preserve the "psalmic" character of every psalm just as Engnell does. However, though both scholars call for a broader understanding of cult, Engnell's study lacks the definitional elasticity of the latter; he rejects the idea that psalms could have been didactic in much the same way as Mowinckel, simply denying that seemingly didactic songs were originally composed for didactic purposes. Engnell's attempt, then, to preserve the psalmic character of every psalm is once again predicated on the idea that instruction was alien to the Jerusalem cult.

The respective analyses of these two scholars highlight the stakes for the question of psalmic wisdom as it emerges from the foundational research of Gunkel and Mowinckel. The constructed divide between cult and instruction, based on a particular understanding of the Psalter's historical development in relation to presumed divisions of Israelite society, would shape the way that scholars approached any psalm that resonated with biblical wisdom. Within this framework, the presence of didactic discourse in the psalms, whether construed as a pre- or post-exilic phenomenon, whether a cultic or non-cultic expression, raises the question of psalmic identity as such.

Form-Critical Debate: Wisdom Psalms

The methodological predilections of Gunkel's form-critical approach eventually led to the issue being framed as a matter of identification. Are wisdom psalms a distinct genre found within the Psalter and, if so, what is the *Sitz im Leben* of such psalms? In certain studies, the scholarly ambition to spell out the historical implications of wisdom elements in the psalms initially glossed over the difficulty of simply *recognizing* which passages in the Psalter betray a connection with the sapiential tradition. Indeed, the intricate difficulty of isolating "wisdom" in the psalms often obscures the knottier obstacle of defining "wisdom" itself in the first place.[38] Conflicting reports arose; scholars cannot agree which psalms are properly "wisdom psalms," due to differing sets of criteria and the general difficulty of separating the terminology and themes represented in the wisdom literature from terminology and themes found throughout the Hebrew Bible. Still, this did not impede many scholars from optimistically venturing into a vigorous form-critical quest to define the parameters of a wisdom psalm.

[38] James L. Crenshaw notes the diversity of biblical wisdom as such, and the difficulty of constructing a definition that is neither too broad nor too narrow. See his "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence Upon 'Historical' Literature," *JBL* 88 (1969): 130–132. See also R.N. Whybray, *The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), 2–5.

Roland Murphy, one of the early proponents of the classification of "wisdom psalm," attempts to fill the form-critical gap created by Gunkel's imprecise categorization by offering "acceptable criteria" for identification. Murphy lists seven formal characteristics, namely אשרי formulas, numerical sayings, 'better' sayings, father/son address, alphabetic structure, simple comparisons and admonitions. In addition to formal criteria, Murphy cites content that marks wisdom, namely the contrast between the wicked and the righteous, the two ways, the concept of divine retribution, behavioral advice, and fear of the Lord.[39] In accordance with these criteria, Murphy decides that seven psalms can be called wisdom psalms, namely Psalms 1, 32, 34, 37, 49, 112, and 128.[40] In addition, he lists a number of psalms that include wisdom elements, namely Psalms 25:8–10, 12–14; 31:24–25; 39:5–7; 40A: 5–6; 62:9–11; 92:7–9; 94:8–15.[41] Of the latter, Murphy sees no reason why the psalmists could not have borrowed from the wisdom tradition.

Though Murphy seems willing to accept the basic position that wisdom psalms derive from the sages and a general *milieu sapientiel*, he does not thereby rule out the possibility that such psalms had a place in Israel's liturgical tradition.[42] So, while he adheres to the notion that such psalms were composed in wisdom circles, he sees no reason to suppose that these poems did not subsequently find a home in the cult. Building on threads in Gunkel's work, Murphy finds the best evidence for possible cultic use in the testimony/*Bekenntnis* of thanksgiving psalms, which gradually took on a "didactic character."[43] Of the psalms he cites as containing wisdom elements, the thanksgiving presents an opportunity for "teaching" a lesson drawn from experience. As such, it provides a liturgically based opportunity for instruction, and an access point for both partial and complete works of wisdom poetry to gain admission into the Psalter. While acknowledging this possibility, however, Murphy ultimately remains skeptical about the determination of *Sitz im Leben* for wisdom psalms as such, admitting that "the precise life-setting of these psalms eludes us."[44] Thus, Murphy, despite his more explicit criteria for categorization, does not stray too far from the insights of Gunkel and seems to accept wisdom as derived from wisdom schools, and a late import that gained entry into the psalms through the thanksgiving testimony. His liberality on the question of possible cultic use echoes Gunkel's own admission that certain wisdom poems could have secondarily been used in the cult.

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[39] Murphy, "A Consideration of the Classification, 'Wisdom Psalms'," 159–160.

[40] Here, he differs from both Gunkel (Pss. 1, 27, 49, 73, 91, 112, 128) and Mowinckel (Pss. 1, 19B, 34, 37, 49, 78, 105, 106, 111, 112, 127).

[41] Murphy, "A Consideration of the Classification, 'Wisdom Psalms'," 165. Murphy acknowledges that this list is representative rather than comprehensive.

[42] Ibid., 160–161.

[43] Ibid., 161.

[44] Ibid., 161.

J. Kenneth Kuntz offers perhaps the most optimistic voice in the form-critical debate about wisdom psalms, building on Murphy's article but also attempting to expand on it by gathering a more detailed collection of evidence to support the idea of a separate wisdom psalms category. In an early essay, Kuntz identifies seven rhetorical devices found in psalmic wisdom: the "better" saying, numerical saying, admonition, parental address, אשׁרי formula, rhetorical question, and simile.[45] He also vigorously engages terminological evidence, using R.B.Y. Scott's list of terms particularly associated with wisdom literature to discover which psalms have a high frequency of "wisdom" terms.[46] Lastly, Kuntz identifies the thematic elements of psalmic wisdom, namely fear of the Lord/Torah veneration, the contrast between the righteous and wicked, the concept of retribution, and behavioral advice.[47]

This conglomeration of evidence leads Kuntz to affirm the seven psalms Murphy identifies as wisdom psalms, and to add Psalms 127 and 133.[48] Subsequently, Kuntz divides these wisdom psalms into three subgroups, namely sentence psalms (Pss 127, 128, 133), acrostic psalms (Pss 34, 37, 112), and integrative psalms (Pss 1, 32, 49), the last of which seems to be simply those wisdom psalms that do not fit into the first two categories.[49] Kuntz, like Murphy, demurs with regard to the question of setting, and suggests that the identified wisdom psalms may have functioned either cultically or outside of the cult. For Kuntz, these lessons may have occurred in any number of places, whether "home, street, city gate, court, synagogue, and multi-faceted cult."[50] In this way, the generating principle of Kuntz's project remains at least partially veiled, though in this early essay, he seems concerned to present psalmic wisdom as a definitive, didactic impulse within the psalms even if it is impossible to isolate where and how it was used.

The difficulty in establishing the *Sitz im Leben* of wisdom psalms turns once again on the notion that didactic speech had no place in the Jerusalem cult, and either belonged to another context entirely (e.g. a school) or was only introduced in a ritual context in the post-exilic era, when the Jewish

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[45] J. Kenneth Kuntz, "The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel – Their Rhetorical, Thematic and Formal Dimensions," in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (ed. J.J. Jackson and M. Kessler; PTMS 1; Pittsburg: Pickwick, Wipf and Stock, 1974), 191–199.

[46] Ibid., 200–211. See R.B.Y. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom in the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 121–122.

[47] Kuntz, "The Canonical Wisdom Psalms of Ancient Israel," 211–215.

[48] Ibid., 186–222.

[49] Ibid., 217–220. Of course, Kuntz identifies these subgroups only subsequent to his conclusion about which psalms are wisdom psalms. This leads to interesting methodological difficulties that other scholars point out, such as the fact that he only sees some acrostic psalms as wisdom psalms.

[50] Ibid., 222.