

THE ANTIQUITY OF PSALTER SHAPE EFFORTS

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Summary

In recent decades, Psalms scholarship has paid increasing attention to the overall editorial arrangement of the book of Psalms, and to the placement of individual psalms as their literary context. An obvious objection to this enterprise is its novelty, especially since the Psalms have enjoyed unparalleled exegetical attention in the history of Christian and Jewish exegesis. This objection is fed by the nearly ubiquitous inaccurate presentation of Psalter-shape readings as originating in 1985 with Gerald Wilson. While Wilson has changed the landscape and is deservedly named as the recent ancestor of this project, that history is inaccurate. We will show that a desire to understand the shape of the whole Psalter, and its editorial intention, can be dated to the second century, leading through various stages to full-length commentaries following this approach being attempted in the nineteenth century. Finally, without detracting from Wilson's unique contribution, we will show that he was not alone in his own day but that others were engaged in this task concurrently and in the decades before him.

1. Introduction

1.1 Psalter Shape: a renewed, but not new, project

As is well known, the last thirty-five years have seen a renewed focus on the book of Psalms as the literary context of individual psalms, and this is usually traced to the ground-breaking work of Gerald Wilson.¹ An obvious objection to this approach is its absence from the sustained attention which the Psalms have enjoyed in the history of Christian and

¹ Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; Chico: Scholars Press, 1985).

Jewish exegesis: '[O]ne has to seriously question any new insight like this that has not been recognized over the millennia of previous interpretation.'² Without denying that Wilson has changed the landscape, this article will seek to show that the *attempt* at understanding the Psalter's deliberate arrangement is no innovation.

This article is not an attempt to detract from Wilson's genius, but the opposite. He brought a rigour to the discipline, and some unique additions in methodology. He made use of data not previously applied to the problem: ancient Near Eastern temple hymn collections and the variegated psalm collections in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Wilson's distinctive contribution is hard to overstate. Nonetheless, there is a danger of dismissing Wilson, and the methods he has made mainstream, by painting him as idiosyncratic and his ambitions as without precedent. In this article, I will argue that the narrative which leads to a dismissal of Psalter-shaped readings is historically mistaken.³ At various points in history, we find readers approaching the Psalms with a conviction that the order of the Psalms and the shape of the whole Psalter are exegetically significant. Even if their attempts to discern that significance have often (but by no means always) been humble beginnings, Wilson cannot be charged with attempting a completely new project.

1.2 The Usual Historical Claim

The history of modern interpretation of the Psalter is often presented with Wilson (and/or Brevard Childs) as a 'year zero'. Before Gunkel, interest in the Old Testament generally focused on sources based on the evolution of Israel's religion, so that canonical books as entities were ignored.⁴ The Psalter was neglected in critical study in any event.⁵ With Gunkel and

² Tremper Longman III, 'Messiah' in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Nottingham: IVP, 2008): 471.

³ For a recent example, see the claim that Wilson was in 'the initial phases of this line of inquiry', the inquiry being 'the significance of the shape, and the effects of shaping'. David Willgren Davage, 'A "Book" of Psalms in 4QMidrEschata.b?', *SJOT* 33 (2019): 223-43, esp. 223.

⁴ David M. Howard Jr, 'Recent Trends in Psalms Study' in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, ed. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999): 329-66, esp. 330; Gordon J. Wenham, 'Reading the Psalms Canonically' in *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013): 57-79, esp. 57.

⁵ Howard, 'Recent Trends in Psalms Study', 330; as Ronald Clements put it, the Psalter was 'at the back of the queue'. See his 'Psalms, Biblical Theology, and the Christian Church' in *Studies on the Text and Versions of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of Robert*

the ensuing form and cult criticism, the Psalter found itself at the centre of this quest for Israelite religion,⁶ which quenched interest in the canonical form for half a century.⁷ When Brevard Childs's work on canon criticism dramatically changed Old Testament scholarship,⁸ his student Gerald Wilson initiated our attention to the sequence, shape, and final form of the Psalter.⁹

This sketch has some merit, but it neglects the interest in the shape and sequence of the Psalter which has existed since ancient times; it especially fails to notice that some of the most mature Psalter shape efforts were conducted while form and cult criticism were at their peak, and it unfortunately presents Wilson as an outlier, a Melchizedek without peers or genealogy.¹⁰ We will show that the work of Wilson (and of others in his own day) is a return to an ancient project, not a new direction. Wilson and his followers may have been much more successful than their precursors, but the direction of travel is historically recognisable.

Gordon, ed. Geoffrey Khan and Diana Lipton (VTSup 149; Leiden: Brill, 2012): 99-112, esp. 101.

⁶ Howard, 'Recent Trends in Psalms Study', 330; Susan Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries Vol. 1* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008): 201-203; Wenham, 'Reading the Psalms Canonically', 57.

⁷ Howard, 'Recent Trends in Psalms Study', 331; William Holladay, *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993): 266, 294; Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, 268-71; Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979): 509-10; Jean-Marie Auwers, *La composition littéraire du Psautier: un état de la question* (CahRB 46; Paris: Gabalda, 2000): 6; Robert L. Cole, *Psalms 1-2: Gateway to the Psalter* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 37; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012): 3 n. 9; Joseph P. Brennan, 'Some Hidden Harmonies of the Fifth Book of Psalms' in *Essays in Honor of Joseph P. Brennan*, ed. Robert F. McNamara (Rochester, New York: St Bernard's Seminary, 1976): 126-58, esp. 126; Norbert Lohfink, 'Psalmengebet und Psalterredaktion', *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 34 (1992): 1-22, esp. 1.

⁸ Tremper Longman III, 'Literary Approaches to Old Testament Study' in Baker and Arnold, ed., *The Face of Old Testament Studies*, 97-115, esp. 99.

⁹ Howard, 'Recent Trends in Psalms Study', 332-33; Cole, *Gateway*, 20; Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, 267, 277-80; Wenham, 'Reading the Psalms Canonically', 58. Holladay's reconstruction of 'The Compilation of the Psalter' builds exclusively on Wilson's work: Holladay, *Psalms*, 76-80.

¹⁰ Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford offers a helpful contrary voice, pointing out that there was *some* life pre-Wilson – 'The Canonical Approach to Scripture and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter' in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, ed. Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford (SBLAIL 20; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014): 5-6 – but this article will show that there was rather more.

2. Historical Lines of Enquiry

2.1 *Undeveloped Instincts*

Here is Augustine (354–430) admitting his frustration:

Although the arrangement of the Psalms, which seems to me to contain the secret of a mighty mystery, hath not yet been revealed unto me, yet, by the fact that they in all amount to one hundred and fifty, they suggest somewhat even to us, who have not as yet pierced with the eye of our mind the depth of their entire arrangement, whereon we may without being overbold, so far as God giveth, be able to speak.¹¹

Augustine was by no means the first to sense that there *should* be a logic behind the shape of the book. Eusebius noted that the first four books have a similar ending (referring to the doxologies), but the fifth a very different one, so that Hallelujah becomes the overarching ending of the whole book.¹² Attempts to reconstruct not only the history of the collection and its ordering but to discern meaning in that overall shape can be found as far back as Origen, and later in Jerome, Eusebius, Diodore of Tarsus, and other early interpreters.¹³

We will explore progressive lines of enquiry through history, beginning with the question of the Psalter's opening Psalms: are they to be read together, and do they introduce the rest of the work? We will move on to more ambitious projects of chain linking Psalms, and of gathering them into more significantly arranged groups. Finally, we consider attempts to move beyond the exegesis of individual psalms in their context, and seek a logic in the arrangement of the whole book.

The claim that Gunkel and his followers were averse to looking for an arrangement and shaping of the Psalter is also misleading. The typical misconception of Gunkel's claim is put bitinglly by Lohfink:

When Gunkel in his *Introduction to the Psalms* turns to discuss the ordering of the psalms, he makes some remarks that nearly sound tragicomical. Unfortunately, so he tells us, the psalms are not ordered according

¹¹ Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* 150.1 (NPNF¹ 8:681).

¹² Eusebius, *Comm. Ps.* (PG 23:818d-819c).

¹³ Robert G. T. Edwards, 'The Disunity and Unity of the Psalter in the Fathers', *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 10 (2016): 51-70; *contra* Gillingham's claim that Gregory of Nyssa (more than a century later) was the *first* to treat the Psalter as a unity (Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, 30).

to their Form-Critical categories.¹⁴ That would of course have suited the inventor of Form Criticism down to the ground!¹⁵

This is misleading, giving the impression that Gunkel couldn't think of any other way to order the Psalms beyond his beloved *Gattungen*. In fact, Gunkel reported that scholarship had tried and failed to find an order for the Psalter. He listed a *variety* of ways in which the Psalms have not been arranged, not only *Gattung*: superscriptions, Franz Delitzsch's project (see below), and others. He summarised scholarship as failing to find an apparent arrangement and therefore turning to other concerns; he does not outright deny that there may be an arrangement.¹⁶ Robert Cole's similar accusation of circularity is equally unfair.¹⁷

Gunkel reported that scholarship instead focused on the sequences of smaller collections,¹⁸ but even these are exceptions to the basic rule that context is irrelevant. Each Psalm 'hat nichts hinter sich, sie ist sie selbst und muß dir alles sagen'.¹⁹ The context of a psalm is to be found in similar psalms, by *Gattung*.²⁰ However, Gunkel finds space to suggest that Psalm 1 has been placed deliberately as an introduction to the whole Psalter or perhaps to some special collection within it.²¹ He thinks Psalm 2 was added later as an introduction.²²

Gunkel does appear to confuse arrangement with sorting: the Psalms may not be sorted by author, for instance, but they might be arranged to tell a story, as Wilson has argued, but also as Hengstenberg (see below) had already intimated. As Leslie McFall has demonstrated, they may be

¹⁴ German *Gattung*, plural *Gattungen*: class or genre, used specifically in biblical studies contexts for form critical categories.

¹⁵ 'Da, wo GUNKEL in seiner *Einleitung in die Psalmen* auf deren "Anordnung" zu sprechen kommt, macht er einige Bemerkungen, die fast tragikomisch klingen. Bedauerlicherweise, so statuiert er, sind die Psalmen nicht nach ihren Gattungen geordnet. Das wäre natürlich für den Erfinder der Gattungsforschung das Schönste gewesen!' (Lohfink, 'Psalmengebet', 7). Translations are the author's own.

¹⁶ Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933): 434-36.

¹⁷ Cole, *Gateway*, 157-58.

¹⁸ Gunkel and Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, 435.

¹⁹ 'has no backdrop, but is itself and must tell you everything' (Gunkel and Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, 3-4).

²⁰ Followed exactly by Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006): 255.

²¹ Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen: übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926): 3.

²² Gunkel, *Psalmen*, 10.

sorted in a complicated way that eluded initial investigations.²³ McFall's algorithm makes no reference to *Gattungen*, but does use the genre notations of the superscriptions. These genre notations, and not Gunkel's categories, would have been available to any ancient redactor who attempted to organise the Psalter.²⁴

Gunkel's point of departure was to look for an arrangement of the Psalter. He failed to find one – but so had Augustine. It was Gunkel's jettisoning of the project, not Wilson's engagement in it, which was the historical oddity.

2.2 Opening Psalms as Introduction to the Psalter

a. Psalm 1

The idea that Psalm 1 introduces the Psalter can be traced to Hippolytus (c. 170–235).²⁵ Origen's (c. 185–254) commentary set this in stone for all who followed,²⁶ such as Jerome (342–420),²⁷ and Basil (330–379).²⁸ It survived the Carolingian Renaissance²⁹ and the Reformation.³⁰ Gerald Wilson's claim that Childs was first to see Psalm 1 as an introduction is out by about two millennia.³¹

²³ He argues for an algorithm of sorting in five stages in Leslie McFall, 'The Evidence for a Logical Arrangement of the Psalter', *WTJ* 62 (2000): 223–56.

²⁴ See Alonso Schökel's lament, after describing all the ancient ways of classifying Psalms based on their internal markers, that all ancient groupings of structure and classification are 'now buried under the crushing weight' of Gunkel's *Gattungen*. ('A todas esas clasificaciones antiguas se superpone hoy con peso aplastante la agrupación por géneros literarios, según los criterios inaugurados por Gunkel.') Luis Alonso Schökel and Cecilia Carniti, *Salmos I: (Salmos 1–72) Traducción, introducciones y comentario* (3rd edn; Nueva Biblia Española; Madrid: Cristiandad, 2008): 85.

²⁵ Quoted as follows in Schökel and Carniti, *Salmos I*, 138: 'Magnífico salmo para empezar el salterio: expresa la esperanza de la felicidad, la amenaza del juicio, la promesa de incorporación al misterio de Dios.' ('Magnificent psalm as a beginning to the Psalter: it expresses the hope of joy, the threat of judgment, the promise of incorporation into the divine mystery.')

²⁶ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 118; Schökel and Carniti, *Salmos I*, 138.

²⁷ Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome (1–59 on the Psalms)* (tr. Marie Liguori Ewald; FC 48; Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1964): 3.

²⁸ 'Basilienus nennt ihn ein "kurzes Vorwort" der Psalmen' ('Basil calls it a "short foreword" to the Psalm.') Ernst Hengstenberg, *Commentar über die Psalmen*, vol. 1 (4 vols; 2nd edn; Berlin: Ludwig Dehmitge, 1849–52): 5.

²⁹ Waltke and Houston offer examples from the ninth and twelfth centuries: Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 119.

³⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1 (tr. James Anderson; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1846–1849): 1.

³¹ A claim he makes in Gerald H. Wilson, 'King, Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter' in *The Book of Psalms*:

As we have seen, we find at least this initial instinct in Gunkel, and it resurfaced in the later works of Mowinckel and Westermann. In Mowinckel's early *Psalmstudien*,³² I find no reference to Psalm 1 having an introductory function, but he later (albeit parenthetically) refers to Psalm 1 as 'the introductory poem to the whole Psalter'.³³

However, Westermann's *Praise and Lament* anthology³⁴ chides Gunkel's method and conclusions: 'Gunkel above all had no interest in how the collection was handed down to us.' What does Westermann think is, instead, the proper aim of form-critical research? To 'locate the individual Psalm in its proper context within the group of which it is a part'.³⁵ He reconstructs a history that has Psalm 1 introducing an earlier Psalter that spanned 1–119.³⁶

Strikingly, when Gerald Sheppard (a doctoral student of Childs just before Wilson) included a section on Psalms 1 and 2 in his seminal doctoral thesis, it was Westermann's work that he built on to argue that they form '[t]he preface to the Psalter' and were 'redactionally ordered into a combined prologue to the Psalter'.³⁷

b. Psalms 1 and 2

The connection between Psalms 1 and 2 is equally ancient. Origen had access to two manuscripts, one of which united them as a single poem, while a textual tradition of Acts 13:33 calls Psalm 2 'the first Psalm'.³⁸ Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) quotes Psalms 1 and 2 in their entirety, without division and without reference, simply headed by 'These things were uttered thus ...'³⁹ Waltke and Houston trace the connection back to

Composition and Reception, ed. Peter W. Flint et al. (VTSup 99; Leiden: Brill, 2005): 391–406, esp. 394.

³² Sigmund Mowinckel, *Psalmstudien* (Kristiana: Dybwad, 1921–1924; repr., Amsterdam: Schippers, 1966).

³³ Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (tr. D. R. Ap-Thomas; Oxford: Blackwell, 1962); repr. *The Biblical Resource Series* (vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004): 208–10.

³⁴ A collection and translation of two books and various articles, spanning 1961–1977. Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (tr. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981): 3.

³⁵ Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 251–52.

³⁶ Westermann, *Praise and Lament*, 253.

³⁷ Gerald T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament* (BZAW 151; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980): 136–44.

³⁸ Holladay, *Psalms*, 169; Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 145.

³⁹ Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 40 (ANF 1:176).

Clement (150–215).⁴⁰ Tertullian (150–225) quotes 2:7 as ‘the first psalm’,⁴¹ but he may simply have been reading a manuscript where Psalm 1 was unnumbered or which combined 1 with 2; John Willis offers similar patristic sources which can be explained in that way.⁴²

Moreover, when ancient authors take Psalm 1 as introductory, and see the unity of Psalms 1 and 2, they do not necessarily include Psalm 2 in the introduction.⁴³ The earliest claim that Psalms 1 and 2 together form a prologue is in Hippolytus.⁴⁴

Jewish exegesis also considered this question.⁴⁵ R. Johanan is quoted as uniting Psalms 1 and 2 in the Babylonian Talmud.⁴⁶ Rashi, who is *very* sparing in all his comments, connects 2:12c with 1:6, but makes no suggestion of combining the two psalms into one.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ I confess that I can find no evidence for this in the two places in Clement that they cite: Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 3.XII (*ANF* 1:292–95); Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 2:XV (*ANF* 1:361–63). While Holladay, unlike Waltke and Houston, is not specifically tracing the history of the unity of Psalms 1 and 2, he does mention the above quoted passage from Justin (Holladay, *Psalms*, 163) but neither passage from Clement, though he does cite other uses of the Psalms in Clement. Both agree that Origen had access to two versions of Hebrew manuscripts, one separating the two psalms, the other not, and that he judged them to be a unity: Holladay, *Psalms*, 169; Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 145.

⁴¹ Tertullian, *Marc.* 4.XXII (*ANF* 3:384).

⁴² John T. Willis, ‘Psalm 1: An Entity’, *ZAW* 91 (1979): 381–401, esp. 389–91.

⁴³ Pace Houston, who follows his assertion ‘Most agree that Psalms 1–2 are the Psalter’s introduction’ by a reference to pp. 145–46, but all he shows there is the *unity* of the Psalms in history, not the taking of them as an introduction (Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 102); this distinction is also lacking in Whiting’s assessment of the early evidence of the unity of the two psalms in support of their introductory function. Mark J. Whiting, ‘Psalms 1 and 2 as a Hermeneutical Lens for Reading the Psalter’, *EvQ* 85 (2013): 246–62, esp. 249.

⁴⁴ So Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, 40; Beat Weber, *Theologie und Spiritualität des Psalters und seiner Psalmen*, vol. 3 of *Werkbuch Psalmen* (2nd edn; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, forthcoming), ch. 7 §VII.1.B.

⁴⁵ However, evidence from Qumran is sparse and open to question: see Willis, ‘Psalm 1’, 381–84.

⁴⁶ *b. Ber.* 9b–10a. The Schottenstein Edition attributes the Gemara quotation to ‘R’ Yehudah the son of R’ Shimon ben Pazi’ and not to ‘R. Johanan’. Hersh Goldwurm, ed., *Tractate Berachos* (Talmud Bavli: The Schottenstein Edition; New York: Mesorah Publications, 1997): 9b⁶–10a¹. The Hebrew is quite clearly רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן, though the *question* which the Talmud is here answering is attributed to one ‘R. Judah the son of R. Simeon b. Pazzi’. It is accurately translated in I. Epstein, ed., *Berakoth* (tr. Maurice Simon; Hebrew–English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud; London: Soncino, 1960): 9b–10a and in Uriel Simon, *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms: From Saadia Gaon to Abraham Ibn Ezra* (tr. Lenn J. Schramm; SUNY Series in Judaica; Albany: SUNY Press, 1991): 104–105 n. 46.

⁴⁷ Rashi, *Rashi’s Commentary on Psalms*, ed. and tr. Mayer Gruber (BRLA 18; Leiden: Brill, 2004): 178; further Rabbinic debate is outlined in Cole, *Gateway*, 3–4.

c. The Psalter's Introduction and Form Criticism

We would expect form criticism to obscure these connections by ignoring the placement of Psalm 1 and the adjacent placement of Psalms 1 and 2. Heinrich von Ewald is exemplary in ignoring the sequence of the psalms and rearranging them chronologically. Psalms 1 and 2 are treated 150 pages apart with no mention of each other.⁴⁸ We find the same in Moses Bittenwieser.⁴⁹ Otto Eissfeldt's introduction is a fine example. He first discusses the 'pre-literary stage' of the whole OT, and classifies poetry into various sorts of songs and poems,⁵⁰ before considering later the 'literary prehistory of the books' and concluding that the Psalter has 'exactly the same phenomenon as in the historical ... and legal ... books ... also to be found in the prophetic books'.⁵¹

Surprisingly, this demonstrates the resilience of the ancient notion of a Psalter with an introduction and possibly wider arrangement. It is the same Eissfeldt whose diachronic approach leads him to discern an introductory function behind the placement of the first two psalms:

Pss. i and ii were probably placed at the beginning rather later, perhaps only by the redactor of the Psalter as we have it. They form a sort of prologue enjoining understanding of the psalms which follow, on the one hand as exhortations to observe the Torah (Ps. i), and on the other hand as testimonies to belief in the Messiah (Ps. ii).⁵²

A. F. Kirkpatrick also finds Psalms 1 and 2 to be an introduction and perhaps a later addition,⁵³ with Psalm 1 itself 'an appropriate prologue to the Psalter, which records the manifold experiences of the godly'.⁵⁴ Similarly, T. K. Cheyne cannot escape the evidence that Psalms 1–2 are linked as an introduction to the Psalter:

It would seem that, in shaping the inserted portion, the editor had in view the need of a preface to a large Psalter of the pre-Maccabæan Greek period, which included the Ethanian Psalter. Ps. 2 doubtless already occupied its present position at the head of the Ethanian Psalms, and the editor sought,

⁴⁸ G. Heinrich A. von Ewald, *Commentary on the Psalms* (tr. E. Johnson; London: Williams & Norgate, 1880–1881): 147–54, 318.

⁴⁹ Moses Bittenwieser, *The Psalms: Chronologically Treated with a New Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938).

⁵⁰ Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction – The History of the Formation of the Old Testament* (tr. Peter R. Ackroyd; Oxford: Blackwell, 1965): 87–127.

⁵¹ Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament*, 153.

⁵² Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament*, 449.

⁵³ A. F. Kirkpatrick, ed., *Book I: Psalms I–XLI* (vol. 1 of *The Book of Psalms*; Cambridge: CUP, 1892): xxxix.

⁵⁴ Kirkpatrick, *Book I*, 1.

by the catch-words **אשרי**, **הגה**, **דרך**, and **אבד**, to produce an external parallelism between the two prefaces, Pss. 1 and 2.⁵⁵

From Justyn Martyr to Gunkel, passing through the leading lights of higher criticism, the introductory function of the first two Psalms has kept returning.

2.3 Chain Linking

Just as many linked Psalms 1–2 without including 2 in the introduction, many have linked 2–3 without also linking 1–3.⁵⁶ Cole supplies examples from Midrash.⁵⁷ The Talmud (which links 1–2 as above) again links 2–3, by a comparison of the rebellions in view; however, no link to Psalm 1 is then made.⁵⁸ This ‘chain linking’ sees significance pairwise, but not to a wider context.

Saariah Gaon saw chain links in consecutive Psalms 1–4, without grouping them, and left the rest of the Psalter as an exercise to the reader;⁵⁹ the juxtaposition of Psalms 2–3 is significant, with 3 being a historical example of 2.⁶⁰ Yefet also encourages chain linking,⁶¹ and links 2–3,⁶² but sees no significance in Psalm 1 as introductory.⁶³

David Kimhi sees Psalm 1 as introductory and denies that 1 and 2 are a single psalm.⁶⁴ He developed chain links more fully.⁶⁵ On the placement of Psalm 3, he suggests that just as the Philistines (in his view) had rebelled against David in Psalm 2, so now Absalom does the same in the following Psalm. However, he also points us to the Talmud and quotes as follows:

⁵⁵ Thomas K. Cheyne, *The Book of Psalms: Translated from a Revised Text, with Notes and Introduction*, vol. 1 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1904): 1.

⁵⁶ Modern examples include Amos Hakham, *Psalms 1–57*, vol. 1 of *The Bible: Psalms with the Jerusalem Commentary* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2003): 2, 15.

⁵⁷ Cole, *Gateway*, 152.

⁵⁸ b. Ber. 7b¹¹.

⁵⁹ Simon, *Four Approaches*, 30–31.

⁶⁰ Simon, *Four Approaches*, 217.

⁶¹ Simon, *Four Approaches*, 86.

⁶² Simon, *Four Approaches*, 96–97.

⁶³ Simon, *Four Approaches*, 90.

⁶⁴ David Kimhi, *The Longer Commentary of R. David Kimhi on the First Book of Psalms (I–X, XV–XVII, XIX, XXII, XXIV)* (tr. R. G. Finch; Translations of Early Documents. Series III, Rabbinic Texts; London: SPCK, 1919): 5, 12. Hebrew text available at https://www.sefaria.org/Radak_on_Psalms?lang=bi [accessed 28 September 2020].

⁶⁵ I am indebted to Kim Phillips for pointing me to these references in Kimhi.

Our rabbis of blessed memory who have interpreted the Second Psalm of Gog and Magog have said (Babli, Berakhoth 10 a), ‘Why is the passage about Absalom (Ps. iii) connected with the passage of Gog and Magog? For this reason. If a man should say to thee, Is it possible that a servant would rebel against his master? say to him, Is it possible a son would rebel against his father? But so it was – it really was so.’⁶⁶

Thus, while he himself thinks that Psalm 2 refers to a (past) Philistine uprising against David, not a future final battle at Gog and Magog, he still agrees with the ‘rabbis of blessed memory’ as to method: Psalm 3 has been placed deliberately to illuminate Psalm 2.

On Psalm 4, Kimhi asserts that this too relates to Absalom’s uprising, as indicated by the superscription of Psalm 3. In verse 7, the repetition of **רבים אמרים** (*rabbim omrim*, ‘many [are] saying’) from 3:3 leads him to identify the same conspirators. The mere fact of juxtaposition of two psalms and a verbal link between them is enough for Kimhi to let missing details in one (the identity of the conspirators in Psalm 4) be filled in by the other (the superscription of Psalm 3). Something similar may be going on in his explanation of the superscriptions of Psalms 63 and 64. The former has a historical notice (‘A David *mizmor*, while he was in the Judaeen desert’), while the latter only has ‘A David *mizmor*’. Having identified the former event as **כשהיה בורח מפני שאול** (*keshehayah boreakh mifney shaul*, ‘while he was in flight from Saul’s presence’), he supplies this data where the superscription of 64 is silent: **גם זה המזמור בברחו אמרו** (*gam zeh hamizmor beborkho omro*, ‘here also the *mizmor* is during his flight, as he said ...’) and in the following verse **מפחד אויב** (*mippakhad oyev* ‘from the enemy’s terror’) is glossed as **זה שאול** (*zeh shaul shemebaqesh nafsho*, ‘this is Saul, who was hunting for his life’).⁶⁷

As we noted briefly above, Saadiah Gaon assumed that chain links between *all* psalms could be established.⁶⁸ That effort to chain link every psalm would be picked up and developed further by Delitzsch and his contemporaries, as we will see below.

2.4 Grouping Beyond Mere Chain Links

We have noted that you can link psalms into chains while only seeing connections between adjacent psalms. Long chains might be formed simply on the basis that a compiler coupled psalms because of shared

⁶⁶ Kimhi’s commentary on Psalm 3:1; tr. R. G. Finch, *Longer Commentary*, 21.

⁶⁷ My translation of Kimhi’s commentary on 63:1 and 64:1-2.

⁶⁸ Simon, *Four Approaches*, 30-31.

keywords without any further meaning. The next level of investigation is to see whether there a logic behind larger collections. For example, is there a connection between Psalms 1–3, not just between Psalm 2 and each of its neighbours independently? Have authors sought a logic, perhaps an intentional editorial hand, behind these three psalms in sequence? Since these three psalms are the first psalms, we can also ask whether they have been viewed as a coherent introduction to the Psalter.

Carolingians, including Geroch of Reichersberg, do connect them as a triplet. Alongside a historical interpretation, they supply a mystical one, which sees Psalms 1–3 as retelling the incarnation, passion, and resurrection–ascension.⁶⁹ I have found no other early authors who include Psalm 3 in the introduction to the Psalter.⁷⁰

However, Salmon ben Yeruham did see them as introductory: Psalm 1 (dealing with retribution against the wicked) is developed by Psalm 2 as dealing with the wicked who arise against the Messiah, and Psalm 3 portrays Israel as unafraid (verse 7) in the face of exactly the same enemies of Psalm 2. Psalm 3 is both historical (of David) and prophetic (of the Messiah’s redemption of Israel). ‘By connecting chapters 2 and 3, Ben Yeruham wants to make clear that the first three psalms ... form a consistent unit referring to the future Messianic times.’⁷¹

The prize, and the original desire (as expressed above by Augustine, for example), is to discern a deliberate editorial hand behind the arrangement of the whole Psalter. We will turn now to giving examples of such efforts.

2.5 Whole-Psalter Readings

It is one thing to establish pair-wise chain links, no matter how long, and quite another to see the resulting chain as forming a significant collection. It is yet another to try this for all 150 Psalms as a collection. An editorial intent has been assumed and investigated since the church

⁶⁹ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 189–90.

⁷⁰ Waltke and Houston tantalise: ‘An early tradition has it that the first three psalms reflect on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ’ (*The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 182). Unfortunately, their reference to Eaton’s commentary (*The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London: T&T Clark, 2003): 49) seems incorrect: I find no mention of such a tradition there. Eaton gives examples of Psalm 3 being read with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in view, but not of the three opening psalms as a group.

⁷¹ So Mariano Gomez Aranda, ‘Medieval Jewish Exegesis of Psalm 2’, *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 18:3 (2018): 1–22, esp. 17.

fathers. Theodoret of Cyrus (393–460) shows awareness of a final editing stage later than David, for example.⁷²

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–394) takes an allegorical approach to the superscriptions and considers their sequence.⁷³ He views the first psalm as a summary of the whole Psalter, which concerns the pursuit of blessedness,⁷⁴ and Psalm 2 significantly placed.⁷⁵ He sees a significant sequence in Psalms 1–3:

the first psalm removed humanity from its cohesion with evil. The second ... showed to what we should cling, and that to trust in him is blessed. The third predicts the temptation which rises up against you from the enemy, so that as soon as you have been anointed into the kingdom through faith, and rule with the true Christ, he attempts to cast you out ...⁷⁶

However, he goes further and looks at the macro structure. He notes that the Psalter has been divided into five books by doxologies and he examines the progression through the five sections,⁷⁷ anticipating Wilson and more recent works such as Robertson.⁷⁸

It is in the nineteenth century, in the cradle of higher criticism, that we see these investigations pursued more fully. Hengstenberg argues that Psalms 1 and 2 were composed for the same introductory purpose as each other, and sees Psalms 3 and 4 as a very fitting follow-up to that introduction.⁷⁹ His aims were far more pervasive, though. While he was limited in the macro-features that he noticed, he did exegete them as conveying an *intentional theological message*, and further argued for careful *collocation of all Psalms* to form significant chains.⁸⁰

⁷² Theodoret of Cyrus, *Commentary on the Psalms, 1–72* (tr. Robert C. Hill; FC 102; Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000): 45.

⁷³ See the detailed section on this point in Heine's introduction (Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, 29–49), in which he concurs with previous Gregory scholars that the sequence of the psalms serves Gregory's overarching aim (Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*, 29). Gregory is explicit on this point and also wants to consider the Psalter in its totality: Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms* (tr. and ed. Ronald E. Heine; Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Clarendon, 1995): I.I.2–3 (Heine 83).

⁷⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise*, I.I.7–8 (Heine 95–98).

⁷⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise*, II.VIII.75 (Heine 143–44).

⁷⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise*, II.XI.138 (Heine 165); italics his.

⁷⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise*, I.V.37–41 (Heine 95–98).

⁷⁸ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Structural and Theological Considerations* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2015).

⁷⁹ Hengstenberg, *Psalmen*, vol. 1, 5–7, 58–59.

⁸⁰ Hengstenberg, *Psalmen*, vol. 4, 596, 602.

We find the same instinct in Joseph Alexander's revision of Hengstenberg,⁸¹ seeing in Psalms 1–3 'a sensible gradation or progressive development of one great idea', namely the opposition of the righteous and the wicked.⁸² He went beyond chain links and discerned pairs, triplets, and 'even more extensive systems of connected psalms ... together forming beautiful and striking combinations'.⁸³ What Saadiah had assumed to be possible was being tried out thoroughly.

Hengstenberg's pupil, Delitzsch, sees Psalms 1 and 2 as a couplet which introduces the whole Psalter, with 146–149 as the conclusion of the whole (and 150 excluded as the doxology of book V).⁸⁴ This is as well as, not instead of, chain linking every psalm.⁸⁵

This kind of work led to bolder and more explicit attempts to identify the intention behind the arrangement of the Psalter. Christopher Wordsworth argues christologically that the arrangement, not being chronological, was driven by the 'divine foresight of Christ, which animated and guided the composers of the Psalms'.⁸⁶ Thus, Psalm 3 is placed after Psalm 2 to show Absalom and David as a prophetic type of 'the unnatural rebellion of unthankful men against Christ, his Divine Antitype'.⁸⁷ He notes such juxtapositions throughout, e.g. 'Psalms 8. 15. 19. 20. 23. 24. 32. 38. 42. 45. 46. 47. &c.').⁸⁸

John Forbes set out even more boldly, arguing the Psalter to be a prophetically arranged collection, edited by someone such as Ezra, with the intention of preparing his contemporary worshippers to expect the Messiah through their sequential singing:

⁸¹ Joseph Alexander, *The Psalms: Translated and Explained* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot; James Thin, 1864): 19.

⁸² Alexander, *Psalms*, 19.

⁸³ Alexander, *Psalms*, 4.

⁸⁴ Franz Delitzsch, *Die Psalmen* (5th edn; Leipzig: Dörflin u. Franke, 1894; repr., Giessen: Brunnen, 1984): 15.

⁸⁵ *Contra* 'Franz DELITZSCH. Dessen Kommentar, 1860 zum erstenmal erschienen, zeichnet sich vor anderen Kommentaren dadurch aus, daß bei jedem Psalm inhaltliche Bezüge und Stichwortverbindungen zu den Nachbarpsalmen angegeben werden. Kein späterer Kommentator hat das weitergeführt.' (Franz DELITZSCH. His commentary (first published in 1860) distinguishes itself from other commentaries by noting connections to neighbouring psalms for every Psalm: both thematic connections and key-word links. No later commentator has developed this.) Norbert Lohfink, 'Psalmengebet und Psalterredaktion', *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 34 (1992): 8.

⁸⁶ Christopher Wordsworth, *The Book of Job; Psalms; Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon*, vol. 4 of *The Holy Bible: In the Authorized Version, with Notes and Introductions* (3rd edn; London: Rivingtons, 1872): II.v.

⁸⁷ Wordsworth, *The Book of Job; Psalms*, II.v.

⁸⁸ Wordsworth, *The Book of Job; Psalms*, II.v.

Not individual Psalms merely, but the Psalter as a whole, is shown to have been arranged by the final editor, under the guiding hand of God, with great minuteness and delicacy of finish, and with one grand purpose dominating all ... The contention of the author of this book is that ... he arranged the whole in the present highly artistic form so as to prepare his fellow worshippers in each series for further revelations of the Coming Messiah.⁸⁹

His analysis includes macro-features, such as identifying seven books within the Psalter, the first three arranged by ‘amen’, the last three by ‘hallelujah’ and a central bridge.⁹⁰ However, the concern is also for the deliberate placement of every Psalm:

But whatever may be thought of the original purport of these Psalms, when we look at the place which has been assigned them in the Psalter as now constituted (arranged certainly in its present form a considerable time before the Septuagint version), and to the order and connection in which they stand, it becomes impossible with any fairness to deny that they were intended to excite in the Jewish worshippers an expectation of the Messiah ...⁹¹

Forbes produced detailed commentary on the sequential reading of runs of Psalms, including each of the first ten.⁹² Not only does he show their connection to each other individually, but sees Psalm 1 as ‘preface’ to the whole Psalter,⁹³ while also seeing Psalms 1 and 2 as ‘preparatory’ to the whole Psalter,⁹⁴ and Psalms 3 and 4 as a pair, which link to Psalm 2, but which through larger structural considerations link also to Psalm 5.⁹⁵ Forbes even labels these larger structural links as ‘parallelism’, which anticipates and even goes beyond what has only recently been brought to the attention of biblical scholars.⁹⁶ In short, a great deal of the method that has reappeared post-Wilson was there in Forbes. As Wordsworth before him, he argues that Psalm 2 is placed to prepare the reader for the

⁸⁹ John Forbes, *Studies on the Book of Psalms: The Structural Connection of the Book of Psalms, Both in Single Psalms and in the Psalter as an Organic Whole*, ed. James Forrest (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1888): v-vi.

⁹⁰ Forbes, *Studies on the Book of Psalms*, 1-2.

⁹¹ Forbes, *Studies on the Book of Psalms*, 3.

⁹² Forbes, *Studies on the Book of Psalms*, 194-241.

⁹³ Forbes, *Studies on the Book of Psalms*, 194.

⁹⁴ Forbes, *Studies on the Book of Psalms*, 199.

⁹⁵ Forbes, *Studies on the Book of Psalms*, 204.

⁹⁶ See the work of Roman Jakobson, which expanded the modern definition of parallelism to cover devices such as *inclusio* within a text (Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, (rev. edn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008): 3, citing unpublished papers by Dennis Pardee). A century earlier, Forbes had gone even further by noting such devices beyond the bounds of the single poem.

occasion of the divine promise to David, namely, Absalom's rebellion in Psalm 3.

These nineteenth-century efforts at Psalter-shape reading can be seen as developing a tradition that has gradually built up, but which is rooted in the most ancient of assumptions: that there is a deliberate, theologically driven arrangement to be discerned in the book of Psalms. Form criticism, as we have seen, largely crowded this out, but what we find in Wilson is the next stage in a quest that had been going on for millennia.

3. Wilson as Part of a Modern Momentum

3.1 *Wilson's More Immediate Predecessors*

Not only did Wilson have nineteen centuries of effort behind him, but he also had more immediate predecessors. He was part of a reawakening in Psalms studies that was independent of Brevard Childs. Before Childs's seminal *Introduction* (1979), several authors, such as Anton von Arens in 1968, had already begun to examine the sequence and shape of the Psalter as a book.⁹⁷

In 1972, Hartmut Gese sought to reconstruct the arrangement of collections that led to the five-book division and identified nine collections. He lets Psalm 119 stand alone outside a collection as *sui generis*, and Psalms 1–2 are outside because they introduce the Psalter.⁹⁸ He accepts Westermann's thesis that an early Psalter was ended by royal Psalm 89, introduced by royal Psalm 2, and a later one ended at Law Psalm 119, introduced by Law Psalm 1.⁹⁹

Michael Goulder's massive project of investigating the editorial shaping of collections and Psalter books began in 1975.¹⁰⁰ In his later works he focused particularly on connecting the superscriptions of psalms with events in historical books and suggested cultic uses for the

⁹⁷ Anton von Arens, *Die Psalmen im Gottesdienst des Alten Bundes: Eine Untersuchung zur Vorgeschichte des christlichen Psalmengesanges* (TThSt 11; Trier: Paulinus, 1968).

⁹⁸ Hartmut Gese, 'Die Entstehung der Büchereinteilung des Psalters' in *Vom Sinai zum Zion: Alttestamentliche Beiträge zur biblischen Theologie* (BEvT 64; München: Kaiser, 1974): 161; repr. from *Wort, Lied und Gottesspruch. Festschrift für Joseph Ziegler*, ed. J. Schreiner (Würzburg: Echter, 1972).

⁹⁹ Gese, 'Entstehung', 165 n. 21.

¹⁰⁰ Michael D. Goulder, 'Fourth Book of the Psalter', *JTS* 26 (1975): 269–89.

collections.¹⁰¹ He states his point of departure with disarming simplicity: 'The oldest commentary on the meaning of the psalms is the manner of their arrangement in the Psalter.'¹⁰² He contrasts this with the experience of a student under Gunkel's paradigm:

The dazzled student soon suppresses as naive his instinct that it is proper to study 1 before 2, and that there is something curious in beginning a book on the Psalter with the 110th, or 89th psalm. In time the student suppressing his instincts becomes a professor, teaching what he does understand, and ignoring what he does not. ... The instinct that the order of the psalms may be important is not however naive, and is far from irrational.¹⁰³

He goes on to show that unordered 'assortments' are a phenomenon of modern hymnals, and that liturgical traditions of Psalter reading (ancient and modern) assume sequential readings, as did ancient temple hymn collections.

So it is entirely proper to begin the study of the Psalter with the expectation that it will be an ordered and not an assorted collection; or, at the very least, that it will contain elements that were rationally ordered.¹⁰⁴

In 1976, Christoph Barth sought keyword concatenation between all psalms.¹⁰⁵ From 1977, Joseph Brennan finds significance in the sequence of psalms in book V¹⁰⁶ and Psalms 1–8.¹⁰⁷ He views 2–149 as the collection, with 1 and 150 as prologue and epilogue.¹⁰⁸ In 1978, Kraus tells us: 'Der 1. Psalm war einst der Sammlung des Psalters als Einleitung, als Proömium, vorangestellt worden. ... Für das Verständnis des 1. Psalms im Rahmen des Psalters wird diese Beobachtung von nicht

¹⁰¹ Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah* (JSOTSup 20; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982); *The Prayers of David (Psalms 51–72): Studies in the Psalter, II* (JSOTSup 102; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); *The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch: Studies in the Psalter, III* (JSOTSup 233; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996); 'The Songs of Ascents and Nehemiah', *JSOT* (1997): 43–58; *The Psalms of the Return (Book V, Psalms 107–150): Studies in the Psalter, IV* (JSOTSup 258; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998).

¹⁰² Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah*, 1.

¹⁰³ Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah*, 8.

¹⁰⁴ Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah*, 8.

¹⁰⁵ Christoph Barth, 'Concatenatio im ersten Buch des Psalters' in *Geschichte und Religionswissenschaft. Bibliographie*, ed. Brigitta Benzing, Otto Böcher, and Günter Mayer, vol. 1 of *Wort und Wirklichkeit: Studien zur Afrikanistik u. Orientalistik: Eugen Ludwig Rapp zum 70. Geburtstag* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1976): 30–40.

¹⁰⁶ Brennan, 'Some Hidden Harmonies'.

¹⁰⁷ Joseph P. Brennan, 'Psalms 1–8: Some Hidden Harmonies', *BTB* 10 (1980): 25–29.

¹⁰⁸ Brennan, 'Psalms 1–8', 26.

geringer Bedeutung sein.¹⁰⁹ Equally, the question of whether Psalm 1 should be read independently from Psalm 2 was still debated, with Willis arguing that Psalms 1 and 2 are not a unit.¹¹⁰

In 1980, Joseph Reindl categorically denied that the final editor of the Psalter merely gathered pre-existing collections together in an accidental manner. He argues that not only is it not a haphazard collection of individual songs, but that the whole has been given deliberate shape, as demonstrated by the way that Psalms 1 and 150 introduce and conclude the collection.¹¹¹

Nonetheless, the seeds of current research were, if not planted, then effectively watered in 1979 by Brevard Childs. He saw that Gunkel had troubled and challenged the ability of Jewish and Christian believers to read the Psalter, because of the hermeneutical significance of his cultic setting, and eschewed rear-guard efforts to reappropriate the Psalter within the parameters of Gunkel's paradigm.¹¹² He tackled Gunkel, charging that his work 'suffers from not dealing seriously with the role of the canon as it has shaped this religious literature'.¹¹³ Childs used the superscriptions to guide a canonical approach, connecting the thirteen superscriptions which relate a Psalm to particular events in the life of David as told in narrative in Samuel, and arguing that these were a Midrashic interpretation on Samuel. The psalms present to us an intra-canonical hermeneutic.

Two of Childs's doctoral students explored this approach. One was Wilson; the other was Gerald Sheppard, whom we have mentioned above in connection with Psalm 1 as an introduction.¹¹⁴ Clinton McCann's

¹⁰⁹ 'The First Psalm was moved to the front of the Psalter collection as an introduction, a prologue. ... This observation will be of no small significance for understanding the First Psalm within context of the Psalter.' Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen 1–59* (vol. 1 of *Psalmen*; 5., grundlegend überarbeitete und veränderte Aufl.; BKAT 15; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978): 132. He notes that Ps 2 was once the first of an earlier Psalter, but finds no significance in its position (Kraus, *Psalmen 1–59*, vol. 1, 144). He rejects reading the two as a pair and sees intertextual connections between Ps 1 and many places, but never to Ps 2 specifically (Kraus, *Psalmen 1–59* vol. 1, 132–42), though he does see Ps 1 as governing the reading of the whole Psalter, since the Psalter is the Torah of Ps 1:2 (Kraus, *Psalmen 1–59*, vol. 1, 142).

¹¹⁰ Willis, 'Psalm 1'.

¹¹¹ Joseph Reindl, 'Weisheitliche Bearbeitung von Psalmen: Ein Beitrag zum Verständniss der Sammlung des Psalters' in [*IOSOT 10th*] *Congress Volume: Vienna, 1980*, ed. J. A. Emerton (VTSup 32; Leiden: Brill, 1981): 333–56, esp. 336.

¹¹² Childs, *Introduction*, 511.

¹¹³ Childs, *Introduction*, 511.

¹¹⁴ See also his later work Gerald T. Sheppard, 'Theology and the Book of Psalms', *Int* 46 (1992): 143–55.

unpublished doctoral thesis included forty pages on psalter shape as an interpretive key, and was being written at the same time as, but independently of, Gerald Wilson's Ph.D.,¹¹⁵ 'The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter'.

3.2 *Uneven Progress*

The above historical sketch has merely sought to demonstrate that Wilson's project is not to be classified as a historical idiosyncrasy. This should not be taken to mean that the Psalms have enjoyed sustained attention to their shaping, nor even that progress has been consistently incremental. It surfaces as a desire and an assumption, with various partially developed efforts scattered through the centuries.

Examples of an approach which pays scant attention to the editorial shaping of the book are most easy to find. As two test cases, Psalm 53 is an almost verbatim repetition of Psalm 14; Psalm 108 consists entirely of two quotations from earlier psalms. Location is therefore almost everything in Psalms 53 and 108. Yet here is the sum total of Calvin's comment on Psalm 108: 'Because this psalm is composed of parts taken from the fifty-seventh and sixtieth psalms, it would be superfluous to repeat, in this place, what we have already said by way of exposition in those psalms.'¹¹⁶ It may be objected that this is in character for Calvin; he wrote no commentary on Exodus–Deuteronomy, but on a 'harmony of the Law', and likewise with the Synoptic Gospels. However, here is Delitzsch, whom we held up above as an example: 'Neben der kritischen Aufgabe erübrigt hier für die exegetische nur das Eigentümliche der abweichenden Textgestalt.'¹¹⁷ On Psalm 53, Hengstenberg is even more concise: 'Psalm 53. Vgl. zu Ps. 14.'¹¹⁸ Similar examples post-Wilson are disappointingly abundant.

If we seek a commentator who thinks that Psalm 53 deserves a fresh, full commentary and not a reference back to notes on Psalm 14, we must go back to the fifth century and Theodoret.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ As he reports in J. Clinton McCann Jr, 'Changing Our Way of Being Wrong: The Impact of Gerald Wilson's *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*' in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, ed. Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford (SBLAIL 20; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014): 21.

¹¹⁶ Calvin, *Psalms*, vol. 4, 268.

¹¹⁷ 'Apart from the critical task, all that is needed here for exegesis is to attend to any peculiarities in this deviant form of the text.' Delitzsch, *Psalmen*, 381.

¹¹⁸ Hengstenberg, *Psalmen*, vol. 3, 49.

¹¹⁹ Theodoret of Cyrus, *Psalms 1–72*, 308–10.

4. Conclusion

In one sense, it may seem pedantic to point out that efforts were being made before Wilson's publication when his *Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* has set the tone for the last thirty-five years. However, as we showed in the introduction, the mistaken impression that Wilson's project was a complete innovation has raised questions about its legitimacy. We have seen that desires and attempts, sometimes very thoroughly worked-out attempts, at reading the Psalter, not just the Psalms, have existed since pre-modern times. We have found ancient readers willing to see the first psalms as introductory, to imagine that chain links can illuminate every psalm, to find intentional sub-collections, and to ask what the overall shape of the book communicates. We have found modern but pre-Wilson readers taking up that challenge with a vengeance, and we have also seen that (even apart from Childs) not a few of Wilson's peers and seniors were asking the same questions.

Wilson may have done it better, more convincingly, with a more defensible methodology, but what he sought to do – reading the Psalms as a significantly ordered collection – was not in itself a new project.