CHAPTER NINE

SONGS OF WISDOM: WISDOM PSALMS
IN THE HEBREW BIBLE AND THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

1. INTRODUCTION

James Sanders, in the official edition of the massive Psalms Scroll from Cave 11 (11QPs\(^a\); 11Q5), argues that the work contains material that is reminiscent of the sapiential tradition.\(^2\) This is an apt observation. Column 21 of this scroll partially preserves a variant of Sir 51:13-30. The composition in column 18 of 11QPs\(^a\) known as Ps 154 declares that “to make known the glory of the Lord is wisdom given” (18:3). One of the earlier examinations of Qumran wisdom literature devotes more attention to 11QPs\(^a\) than any other manuscript.\(^3\) Daniel Harrington’s survey of sapiential literature from Qumran includes the hymns in columns 18, 21 and 26 of 11QPs\(^a\).\(^4\) Gerald Wilson has claimed that these three compositions are “all manifestly wisdom psalms.”\(^5\) Lange does not discuss any hymn from

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\(^1\) The phrase “songs of wisdom” is from S. Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel’s Worship (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004 [orig. pub., 1962]) 2.111.

\(^2\) J.A. Sanders, The Psalms Scroll of Cave II (DJD 4; Oxford: Clarendon, 1965) 69; idem, “Two Non-Canonical Psalms in 11QPs\(^a\),” ZAW 76 (1964) 57-75 (esp. 65).


11QPs in his survey of Qumran sapiential texts, and the Psalms Scroll is not a prominent subject of scrutiny in *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought*, the volume which Lange’s essay introduces. Some commentators consider it obvious that 11QPs should be included in a discussion of Qumran wisdom. Others do not.

The issue of wisdom psalms in the biblical Psalter is an on-going topic of debate. The validity of this designation as a category for biblical psalms has been attacked and defended. The large Psalms Scroll from Cave 11 can contribute to this debate. In this chapter I will examine hymns from 18, 21 and 26 of 11QPs, since they have often been understood in relation to the sapiential tradition. I will argue that Ps 154 (11Q5 18) is a psalm influenced by the wisdom tradition, that the variant of Sir 51:13-30 in col. 21 is a wisdom poem in the tradition of Sir 6:18-37, and that Hymn to the Creator (col. 26) is better understood as a creation hymn along the lines of Ps 104 than as a wisdom text. These texts do not confirm that there is a wisdom psalm genre that can be identified as a distinct *Gattung*. But 11QPs 18 and 21 can be understood as wisdom psalms in the sense that they are hymnic writings that demonstrate substantial influence from the wisdom tradition.

2. WISDOM PSALMS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE—A CHASING AFTER WIND?

Even some who defend wisdom psalms complain about the difficulty of determining whether a given psalm is sapiential. J. Kenneth Kuntz, a leading proponent of wisdom psalms, grants that the

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7 In addition, several small compositions among the Dead Sea Scrolls have been interpreted in relation to both the sapiential and hymnic traditions. Some of these writings, such as 4Q411, 4Q413 and 4Q528, are examined in the following chapter.