A CONSIDERATION OF THE CLASSIFICATION, ‘WISDOM PSALMS’

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The pioneer work of Hermann Gunkel in literary analysis of the Psalms has been rightly acknowledged as fundamental for understanding them 1). Since his time there has also been some refinement of his methods. H. Schmidt 2) offered a more detailed study of the complaints, and the studies of C. Westermann 3) have also centred upon this category, as well as upon the distinction between hymn and thanksgiving psalm. G. Castellino 4) added a new classification, liturgia della fede
dal fede Jahwistica, independently of A. Weiser 5), whose feast of covenant renewal provided another frame of reference for psalm interpretation. S. Mowinckel 6) is in a class by himself, dependent upon Gunkel as he himself affirms, but going beyond him in many aspects (cultic emphasis) of the classification and life-setting of the Psalms. Despite this progress it may be said that perhaps not enough attention has been paid to refining the methods of form-analysis in the case of individual types of Psalms 7).

In one area, that of the so-called Wisdom Psalms, this is particularly true, because no two authors will agree in listing these Psalms 8).

1) H. Gunkel-J. BEGREICH, Einleitung in die Psalmen (Göttingen, 1933).
2) H. Schmidt, Das Gebet der Angeklagten im Alten Testament (BZA 49; Berlin, 1928).
3) C. Westermann, Das Loben Gottes in den Psalmen 2 (Göttingen, 1961); see CBQ 21 (1959) 83-87.
4) G. Castellino, Libro dei Salmi (La Sacra Bibbia; Roma, 1954).
5) A. Weiser, Die Psalmen 4 (ATD 14/15; Göttingen, 1955).
6) S. Mowinckel, Psalmenstudien (Oslo, 1921-24; Amsterdam, 1961).
8) See note 4, p. 161 for more details. But we may note here the treatment by O. Eissfeldt, Einleitung in das Alte Testament 2 (Tübingen, 1956) 147 ff., who admits: “Wie überall die Grenzen zwischen den Gattungen, denen die innerhalb und ausserhalb des Psalters stehenden Lieder angehören fließend sind, so lässt sich
GUNKEL himself did not classify them in the same way he did the others 1). He entitled his study, "Weisheitsdichtung in den Psalmen", since there did not seem to be any clear characteristics that could be pointed out for these, as had been done for other psalm types. He spoke of Weisheitsgedichten and numbered among them 49, 1, 91, 112, 128, 37, 73; and perhaps not all would agree that these seven poems are the list GUNKEL intended, since he is not explicit 2). He spoke of eine ganz umfassende Gattung, that embraced both saying and poems. The vagueness of his characterisation has not been eliminated by studies since his time.

Recently, there has been a tendency to recognize a milieu sapientiel to which many Pss besides those generally recognized as sapiential, are ascribed. This view is found among those scholars who are particularly alert to the style anthologique found in postexilic Hebrew literature, A. ROBERT, A. DEISSLER, R. TOURNAY 3).

This sapiential milieu has been concretely described in the most recent treatment of the problem of wisdom and Pss by S. MOWINCKEL 4). Characteristically, he approaches the problem from the point