The term “Wisdom Psalms” is widely used in biblical research. However, a close examination reveals that the lists of “Wisdom Psalms” compiled by different scholars vary greatly. As noted by R. E. Murphy, who discussed this problem in detail, “no two authors will agree in listing these Pss.”

In the present article we shall approach this subject from a purely linguistic standpoint. Our working hypothesis is that if there is in fact such a thing as “Wisdom Psalms”, i.e. Psalms which were created in a Wisdom milieu, we may assume that these texts have absorbed words and expressions which were current specifically in Wisdom literature. Therefore, by identifying phraseology and terminology characteristic of Wisdom literature, it should be possible to identify “Wisdom Psalms”.

To be sure, this line of reasoning was suggested in the past by various scholars who dealt with supposed Wisdom influences on non-Wisdom texts. However, their works were often severely

---


3 See in particular R. N. Whybray, The Intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament, BZAW 135 (Berlin and New York, 1974), which G. E. Bryce has described as “the most complete treatment of the vocabulary of the wisdom tradition up to the present” (JBL 94 [1975], p. 596. Whybray’s “intellectual tradition” is equivalent to the commonly accepted term “wisdom tradition”).
critized, mainly on methodological grounds. It seems, then, that a fresh examination of the matter is in order.

To this end, we shall first present the general guidelines and philological considerations which underlie our suggested analysis, and then apply them to two concrete examples.

II

The study of Wisdom literature has made great progress in recent years. The abundance of scholarly publications devoted specifically to this subject treat a variety of its aspects, ranging from the social and political roles of the sages within Israelite society, to their literary and cultural contributions to biblical literature. One of the major causes of this intensive interest in ancient Wisdom was, no doubt, the exciting discovery of numerous Wisdom texts all over the ancient Near East. These texts have severely shaken some long-standing theories and demolished time-worn doctrines and conceptions. Another stimulus to the renewed interest in sapiential writings was the extremely influential article of G. von Rad on "The Joseph Narrative and Ancient Wisdom," which inspired hosts of scholars to search for "Wisdom elements" in almost every corner of the Bible. Needless to say, these studies have contributed much to a better understanding of the phenomenon usually referred to as "the Wisdom tradition" or "the Wisdom movement". Unfortunately, however, as various critics have noted, the quest for Wisdom "influence" or "contacts" is often carried to extremes. "The excitement of new directions in scholarship has led to exaggerated claims supported by dubious arguments and assumptions, so that a study of methodology in determining wisdom influence is imperative at this juncture."

5 The subject is treated at length in a special study in progress, which is due to appear as a monograph (in Hebrew).