E. Zenger (ed.), *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*

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Edited by Erich Zenger (1939-2010), *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* is a collection of papers which were presented during at the Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense (LVII), hosted by the University of Leuven, August 5-7, 2008.

Before directly considering the major papers in this collection, it is appropriate to place the Colloquium, and the subsequent book, within the wider context of contemporary research into the Psalms. This research, which since the 1920s and the influence of Herman Gunkel (1862-1932), has focused on individual psalms as isolated units. However, and as this book posits, since the 1970s a more comprehensive and inclusive view of the Psalms has become the norm. The Psalter is now studied as a composition in its own right: from *Psalmenexegese* to *Psalterexegese*.

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Thus, as Zenger notes in his introduction, *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* creates a space in which to take stock of the state of current research amongst the many debates on the psalms. He, himself, sees this book as carrying particular meaning, presenting the diversity of current research into the Psalms. With the help of Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, he has produced a seminal commentary on the Psalms and their methodological research. Sadly, having written the introduction and in the final stages of editing the proceedings of the Colloquium, Zenger died on Easter Sunday, April 4, 2010. This book is a fitting tribute to his memory.

The forty-four contributions of this tome are spread over some 826 pages and divided into three major sections. The first section consists of the ten major papers of the Colloquium; the second section consists of four seminar papers; the third section is comprised of thirty shorter papers. Not only are each of the major papers worthy of their own review but the minor papers also give both good examples of the application of Psalterexegese methodology in all its complexity and diversity. In terms of method, the book, from its major works to the shorter articles struggles for a consistent methodological narrative; this inconsistency is most notable in the third section where the authors of the minor papers offer a rich diversity of opinions and interpretations.

This review will focus on the nine of the ten major papers of the first section of the book: excluding Yair Zakovitsh, “The Interpretative Significance of the Sequence of Psalms 111-112, 113-118, 119”. Zenger’s contribution is the first of these and concentrates on methodology whilst the following three papers treat of the structure and theology of the Psalter in its entirety. These are followed by three papers which focus on the major blocks of the Psalter and then two papers which focus on the block of Psalms from 3 to 41. Finally, the last paper uses the metaphor of the
Temple to explicate the oneness of the Psalter.

1. E. Zenger’s Discussion of Methodology

Erich Zenger’s contribution, “Psalmenexegese und Psalterexegese”, presents the research methodology employed by most of the rest of the book. This paper not only carries great weight in the collection but is also, without doubt, the least controversial. There is great diversity in applying the methodology, but Zenger’s approach itself is widely accepted.

In giving the title, “Psalmenexegese und Psalterexegese”, Zenger has succinctly summed up his whole paper. The “Gunkel School” of exegesis (Psalmenexegese) attempts to examine each psalm individually, Zenger, on the other hand, is proposing the Psalterexegese method, which attempts to read and understand the whole book of the Psalms in a unitary way. Zenger believes these two approaches complement and enhance each other. He is at pains to emphasise that he is not proposing a new methodology but rather an enhanced methodology. For this reason, and in contradistinction to Matthias Millard who, in a 1996 paper, uses the word “zur” (to), “Von der Psalmenexegese zur Psalterexegese”. He italicizes the word “und” (and, plus, and also) in his title.

Zenger’s approach in this paper is to assert both the need to pay attention to Gunkel’s method but also to recognize its limits: including, the recognition that exegesis of an individual psalm is enhanced by understanding not only its position within the whole but also how the overall construction of the Psalter impacts on the individual psalm. In this, he bases the legitimacy of his argument on major structural evidence including the internal coherence to be found within the psalms, the deliberate
editing of the prefaces or superscriptions to the psalms and the natural five book division of the Psalter. Given the seeming irrefutability of this argumen-
tation, it is impossible not to acknowledge the broader and more com-
prehensive meaning to be found by reading the psalms within a contextual manner. The annotated Psalter produced by Hossfeld and Zenger well demonstrates the evidential basis for such an approach.

Nevertheless, doubts remain. In particular, if this methodology intends to understand the form of the final text of the Psalms, is it legitimate to pursue the process of the formation of the individual psalms and of the Psalter based on the elements observed in the final redaction? In fact, in this respect, a wide spectrum of exegetes note the important need to understand the various stages in the process of development of the psalms which eventually gives rise to the final body of work. Whilst other authors frequently do so, Zenger, in his paper, does not avert to the issues pertaining to the historical composition of the Psalter. Perhaps, it is these opposing hermeneutical perspectives which have, since Gunkel, shaped many of the disputes and much of the criticism surrounding exegetical research into the development of the 150-psalm-Psalter. Certainly, these debates have generated a resurgence in interest and dedicated research into the final redaction of the Psalter.

2. Papers on the Psalter in General


Jean-Marie Auwers’ paper is a status quaestionis of Psalter research.
Regarding Books I-III of the Psalter, he presents a discussion on which part of the Psalter is the first to be formed. Many scholars insist that the Elohistic Psalter (Ps 43-83) was the first to be consolidated and the remainder of the psalms, the books before and after, were added later. However, and a position that Hossfeld develops in a later chapter, recent approaches posit that Psalms 3-41 came first and the other two books followed later. Then again, some view Psalms 2*-89, christened the Messianic Psalter, as a single unit: see, for example, Christoph Rösel, Die messianische Redaktion des Psalters. Auwers, accepting the arguments made by Steymans below, advances a five-book theory of the Psalter in which the first three books are taken as the Davidic collection and the latter books are associated with the sovereignty of God. However, problems arise with how to integrate the Royal Psalms found in the latter books. To this problem, Auwers offers a collective interpretation which finds support amongst many interpreters. In addition, there is a consensus on the theory that the Psalter, as a whole, moves from entreaty to praise of God, from the kingship of David to the divine kingship of God.

2.2. S. E. Gillingham, “The Levitical Singers and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter”

Susan Gillingham focuses her research on temple language positing the theory that the Psalter was edited to suit the needs of ritual worship during the second temple period. She points out the so-called “temple markers” to be found in 73 of the psalms. She begins by summarising the results of her previous research: including, about the Songs of Ascent (Ps 120-134); various other psalms and collections of psalms used in connection with the temple; and, in particular, considering the unit, Psalms 15-24,
with its explicit ritual worship function and various superscriptions. Gillingham deduces that this evidence compels a conclusion which holds the psalter was constructed for use in the temple. For this reason, she posits that the Levites of the Book of Chronicles, even if not the original authors, played a pivotal role in the construction of the final Psalter. The centrality of David and the theological specificity of the Torah provide further evidence to support their pivotal role.

It is towards the end of her contribution, however, where Gillingham diverges from Zenger and his view that the Psalter was compiled in the Diaspora rather than the temple. Indeed, this dispute is still one that, even today, separates scholars. Sometimes I think a lot more research needs to be done when scholars so disagree about the interpretation of the same evidence: for example, the significance of the Torah or the teachings of Wisdom literature. There is a real danger in making absolute assumptions about the Psalter when there is still so much about the influence of the Temple in the development of the psalms which is yet to be discovered.

2.3. K. Seybold, “Dimensionen und Intentionen der Davidisierung der Psalmen: Die Rolle Davids nach den Psalemüberschriften und nach dem Septuagintapsalm 151”

Just like the Temple debate, this essay deals with the already much-debated issue of David mentioned in the bodies and superscriptions of the Psalms. Specifically, if David is not the author of these psalms, then what explains their attribution to him? Klaus Seybold starts his analysis by examining the various contexts within the psalms which refer to David. For example, in the Royal Psalms he is promoted as the exemplar of king-
ship while in others he is identified as the actual author; then again, in Psalm 151 (per the LXX) he is identified as the slayer of Goliath and the maker of musical instruments; moreover, in the colophon of the Qumran Psalms (Col 27 of 11QPs\textsuperscript{a}) he is identified as the prophetic composer of over 4,000 psalms and songs of praise. From this evidence, then, Seybold attempts to reconstruct the process of attribution to David. His position, which by his own admission is (extremely) hypothetical, starts from Psalm 40 and assumes the Davidic Psalms were originally composed as personal prayers but later recorded and redacted onto scrolls to be used for temple worship.

Seybold suggests several reasons for the development of the superscriptions and their attribution to David. These include the deliberate association of anonymously written psalms with a famous person and the intimate link with David’s personal life and experiences. Most importantly, both Psalm 151 and the colophon of 11QPs\textsuperscript{a} seem to not only suggest but actually canonize David as the inspired author. Seybold provides a good synthesis of commentary on the psalms as well as providing, towards the end, a fresh perspective on the redaction and construction of the Psalter.

3. Papers on Sections of the Psalter


Auwers above has already drawn attention to the Messianic Psalter. Employing Greimas’ method of semantic analysis, Hans Ulrich Steymans, who takes Rösel as his basic starting point, fleshes out the meaning of the
Hebrew word, *messiah*. In general, Steymans differs from Marcus Saur by not employing the Royal Psalms classification but rather a classification based on the use of the word, *messiah*. As he elaborates, *messiah*, which is a designation applied to human beings, appears in the first three books of the Psalter but is absent from books four and five. Indeed, from Psalm 90 forwards the designation, king, is used exclusively of God. It is the evidence of these latter books, particularly the fact that the messiah designation occurs only in Psalms 105 and 132, which shows where Steymans’ position diverges significantly from other exegetes of the psalms. In particular, by excluding Psalms 101 and 110, he makes his point of departure significantly different from Saur.

Steymans classifies the first three books of the Psalter, concluding with Psalm 89, as the “Messianic Psalter” whereas Saur, who places much greater emphasis on the final redaction of the Psalter, argues for a consistent designation for the “Royal Psalms” to be found across the five books. In my opinion, whilst Saur’s interpretation supports the importance of the final redaction of the Psalter, Steymans’ Messiah thesis is noteworthy for dismantling Gunkel’s Royal Psalm thesis.

3.2. F.-L. Hossfeld, “Elohistische Psalter Ps 42-83. Entstehung und Programm”

Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, in setting out to address which part of the Psalter was written first, makes a comparative investigation of the Davidic Psalms 3-41 with Psalms 50-72. Comparing the overlapping Psalms 14 and 53, as well as Psalms 40:14-18 and 70, he concludes not only were Psalms 3-41 the first to be redacted but also that Psalms 69-71 and the Royal Psalm 72 form a Second Davidic Psalter because of the similar
doxologies this group shares with the more original Davidic corpus. In all likelihood, the 3-41 blocks were the first to be written and consolidated because of its air of lamentation. Moreover, Hossefeld details the layers of reflexive modifications which occurred as the Sons of Korah Psalms (84-85, 87-89) were inserted into the Elohist Psalter and later incorporated into the entire corpus.

Despite the fact that the Elohist Psalter has been extensively researched, however, there remain many riddles yet to be solved. It seems a distant work to understand the theological rationale behind why this section of the Psalter, which favours using Elohim instead of YHWH, also makes extensive use of the Tetragram. Perhaps this apparent contradiction exists for the same reason as we can observe the use of both Elohim and YHWH in the Pentateuch.

4. F. Hartenstein and W. P. Brown, 
Essays on the Psalms 3-41

Both Friedhelm Hartenstein and William P. Brown address Psalms 3-14 and 15-24. Their respective contributions on this, the most researched, first book of the five books of the Psalter hold different viewpoints but share much in common. The two authors focus their research on the standard view of the transcriptions which, after Psalms 1 and 2, are usually divided into the following subsections 3-14. 15-24. 25-34. 35-41.

Over and above their meticulous research, what sticks out is the difference in research methodology between these two authors. Hartenstein’s contribution, “Schaffe mir Recht, JHWH!” (Ps 7:9). Zum theologischen und anthropologischen Profil der Teilkomposition Psalm 3-14”, follows
Hossfeld and Zenger and examines not just the final redacted version of the Psalms 3-14 collection but also traces its construction as well. Thus, it is posited that the present composition of this section comes from the insertion of the Psalms 9 and 10 into the original collection of Psalms 3-8 and 11-14. Thus, Psalm 8, which is central to the collection, cannot be properly interpreted without addressing the changes caused by the influence of the psalms immediately alongside.

In contrast, William P. Brown’s contribution, “‘Here Comes the Sun!’: The Metaphorical Theology of Psalms 15-24”, builds on P. Miller’s work and focuses on Psalms 15-24 as the context for understanding the individual psalms. Indeed, there is relatively little contention surrounding this unit as being part of the first book of the Psalter. The author, cognizant of the state of contemporary research, focuses on Psalm 19, which he believes is central to the unit, and examines its figurative language as representative of the whole block. It is here that I begin to think again about the question raised by Zenger above. These two contributions clearly demonstrate the differences between synchronic (symbolic) and diachronic (historical) methodologies. Whilst both methods can be used to read the Psalter as one book and commentate on its final redaction, they are both different and should be kept as separate methodologies.

Zur theologischen Architektur des Psalters”

Bernd Janowski’s contribution serves as a summation of the debates featured here. Beginning with Jerome’s parable which compares the Psalter to a house, Janowski investigates the opening two psalms and the final
four psalms in a panoramic journey through the Psalter. This journey leads him to highlight three aspects concerning the psalms as whole: firstly, the anthropological movement from lamentation to praise; secondly, the cosmic movement from Sheol (and death) to the Temple (and life); thirdly, the historical theological movement from David to Zion (in this final point he agrees with Gillingham). Thus, his view of the overall structure of the Psalter leads him to define the psalms as the word of the Temple.

6. Conclusion

As we have seen, there is both lively debate and many problems surrounding research into the composition of the Psalter. Consequently, there is also a pressing need for on-going dialogue over methodology. Within this context, the Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense (2008) and the resulting publication of The Composition of the Psalms is a significant signpost. Fittingly, Erich Zenger’s influence, as the book’s editor, is to be felt throughout the text. This, his final testimony, is more than just a summation of research but a true guide to the future direction and development of research into the fascinating world of the Book of Psalms.