WAS THERE A WISDOM TRADITION?

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NEW PROSPECTS IN ISRAELITE WISDOM STUDIES

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Edited by

Mark R. Sneed

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Contents

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Abbreviations

AAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AB	Anchor Bible
ABG	Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AEL	*Ancient Egyptian Literature*. Miriam Lichtheim. 3 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973–1981.
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANE	ancient Near East(ern)
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATM	Altes Testament und Moderne
BAe	Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BARIS	British Archaeological Reports International Series
BEStud	Brown Egyptological Studies
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BIFAO	*Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale*
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BO	Bibliotheca Orientalis
BRLJ	Brill Reference Library of Judaism
BSIH	Brill's Studies in Intellectual History
BZABR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte

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BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CALS	Cambridge Applied Linguistics Series
CANE	*Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. Edited by Jack M. Sasson. 2 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995.
CC	Continental Commentaries
CurBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
CSSH	*Comparative Studies in Society and History: An International Quarterly*
CurBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*
CurBS	*Currents in Research: Biblical Studies*
DSD	*Dead Sea Discoveries*
DtrH	Deuteronomistic Historian/History
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
ECDSS	Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls
Eg.	Egyptian
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
EvT	*Evangelische Theologie*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999.
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HB	Hebrew Bible
HBIS	History of Biblical Interpretation Series
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HO	*Hieratic Ostraca*. Jaroslav Černý and Alan H. Gardiner. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957.
HPBM	*Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum*

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HS	*Hebrew Studies*
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HThKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
IBT	Interpreting Biblical Texts
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	*Interpretation*
IOSOT	International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCS	*Journal of Cuneiform Studies*
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JEOL	*Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Geselschap (Genootschap) Ex orient lux*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JSHRZ	*Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*
JSJSup	Supplements to Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
KBo	Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköy
LBA	Late Bronze Age
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
MÄS	Müncher Ägyptologische Studien
MC	Mesopotamian Civilizations
MT	Masoretic Text
NEchtB	Die Neue Echter Bibel
NIB	*The New Interpreter's Bible*. Edited by Leander E. Keck. 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004.
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OLZ	*Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*
OT	Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library

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OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
PAe	Probleme der Ägyptologie
PIASH	*Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*
PSB	*Princeton Seminary Bulletin*
RB	*Revue biblique*
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SAK	*Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur*
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SESJ	Suomen Eksegeettisen Seuran julkaisuja
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SOTSMS	Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series
SSEA	Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities
StMiss	*Studia Missionalia*
StPohl	Studia Pohl Series Maior
SymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
TB	Theologische Bücherei: Neudrucke und Berichte aus dem 20. Jahrhundert
TLZ	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TRu	*Theologische Rundschau*
TS	*Theological Studies*
TUAT	*Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments*. Edited by Otto Kaiser. Gütersloh: Mohn, 1984–.
T*ynBul*	*Tyndale Bulletin*
TZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
UTB	Universitäts-Taschenbücher
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WAW	Writings of the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WLAW	Wisdom Literature from the Ancient World
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WO	*Die Welt des Orients*

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WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*
ZABR	*Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte*
ZAH	*Zeitschrift für Althebräistik*
ZÄS	*Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare

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Introduction

Mark R. Sneed

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During my days in graduate school, I was taught and read what has been the paradigm position in Hebrew Bible studies concerning the nature of the wisdom corpus. It was described as an alien body in the Hebrew Bible. It never alluded to the pivotal events and persons in Israelite history like the patriarchs or the exodus or the covenants, such as at Sinai. Coupled with this was the view that the priests, prophets, and sages of ancient Israel never seemed to get along and were constantly jockeying for dominance within the political arena. Their respective literatures represent such attempts at persuading others to adopt their perspective. They also were assumed to hold widely differing worldviews and had distinctive theologies and epistemologies. In other words, they saw the world radically differently. The sages were practically empiricists who only considered what could be rationally and empirically verified as legitimate knowledge. Thus, they viewed with suspicion the prophets who received revelations and the priests who divined the future with their Urim and Thummim. They divided the world up into the wise and foolish, the discerning and mocker. The priests were assumed to be obsessed with the purity and cleanness and with ritual matters like sacrifices and circumcision. They saw the world with sacerdotal eyes and divided the world up into the categories of clean and unclean, pure and impure. Both sage and priest were viewed as upper class elites. The prophets were mediators of God's word. They defended the rights of the poor and protested against Israel's many sins, especially unfaithfulness. They challenged the significance the priests gave to the cult and they questioned the piety of the sages. Their world was one of oracles and supernatural revelation. Only they were God's true spokespersons. They emphasized covenant loyalty and social justice. They were viewed as being from the lower classes or at least defenders of those classes. They divided the world up into the righteous and wicked, the faithful and the faithless.

That this approach to the sages, the wisdom literature, and the rest of the intellectual leadership in ancient Israel is still dominant or at least alive and well can be demonstrated by two recent publications. In David Penchansky's recent introduction (2012, 83) to the wisdom literature, he explores ways to explain the gaping silence of the sages regarding the covenant and redemptive events in Israel's history and concludes "that the sages did not regard the Israelite covenants to be important … because they were concerned about other things." Even more recently, John McLaughlin (2014, 281–303) challenges other scholars who have argued that Amos reflects heavy influence from the wisdom tradition. He examines the evidence and concludes that Amos does not display any significant influence from the wisdom circles within ancient Israel (303). He points out that Amos's usage of what appear to be wisdom forms, vocabulary, and ideas is a misnomer because all of these phenomena are employed in distinctly unsapiential ways.

This view was not always the dominant position in biblical studies. At least early German scholarship viewed the sages and their literature as complementary to the other genres and their tradents. For example, Hermann Schultz (1898, 2:83–84) viewed the wisdom literature as philosophical and represented a synthesis of Hebrew thinking for the whole of life. Similarly, Bernhard Duhm (1875, 244–45) believed that this corpus represented a mundane ethic that was lacking in the prophetic material. He also maintained that it was based on Israelite revelatory material.

Hermann Gunkel, with his form-critical approach, marks one of the earliest forms of the current paradigmatic position. As for the *Sitz im Leben* of wisdom literature, Gunkel cites Jer 18:18 (2003, 69–70) and connects the counsel of the sages with old bearded men who sat at the city gates and gave advice to young men. He advocated that the wisdom literature was originally secular in character—rejecting the cult—and that its origins go back to Egypt. He contrasts the sober advice of the sages with the fiery words of the prophets. James Crenshaw (2010, 24–25) is in many ways the direct heir of Gunkel, seeing the wisdom corpus as non-Yawhistic and as representing a worldview distinctive from that of the prophets and priests.

But more recently, there have been attempts to backtrack from Gunkel and this consensus. The essay in this volume by Will Kynes will fill in the details of the inception of this paradigmatic position and the reaction to it. This now leads to the present collection of essays, representing the most recent reassessment of the prevailing consensus. They all in one way or another address this issue: the natue of the wisdom "tradition." Is the

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wisdom literature rightly a tradition? If so, what kind? Or is it a mode of literature or discourse? Who were the tradents? Can we know with certainty? Does the wisdom literature represent this group's worldview or not? What relationship does the wisdom literature have with the rest of the corpora of the Hebrew Bible? What are the limits or boundaries of the wisdom corpus? How tightly or loosely should they be drawn? These and other questions are the concern of this volume. The contributors fit a spectrum of positions. Some contributors radically question the notion of a wisdom tradition, at least in the sense that this has been understood (Weeks, Sneed, Saur, Heckl, Kynes, Shupak). Others question the paradigm but not in radical ways (Fox and Hamilton). Others occupy more a middle position of sorts, affirming the paradigm but qualifying it in new ways (Dell, Miller, Schellenberg). Forti stands alone as affirming the paradigmatic position without modification.

In "Deciding the Boundaries of Wisdom: Applying the Concept of Family Resemblance," Katharine Dell argues that there is a wisdom tradition, though she uses the term hesitatively. She argues that we should go beyond Gunkel and turns to the notion of family resemblance to define genre, a term from the linguistic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. From this perspective she sees a continuum of relations, with texts being related more closely and more distantly. She follows closely Simon Cheung, who sees three necessary criteria for defining the category of wisdom literature: ruling wisdom thrust, intellectual tone, and didactic intention. She ends up viewing Proverbs and Ecclesiastes as the parents, that is, genuine wisdom literature, and other texts like Job, for example, as more distantly related but not an immediate family member, that is, a cousin.

In "How Wisdom Texts Became Part of the Canon of the Hebrew Bible," Raik Heckl investigates how the books of Job and Proverbs may have entered the emerging canon. He proposes that as the Pentateuch was forming as a semicanonical corpus along with the prophetic books, the books of Job and Proverbs reveal in their frame-narratives a consciousness of this. He argues that their introduction into the larger quasi-canon complements the rest by dealing with the theodicy problem and correcting Deuteronomy (Job) while also providing practical instruction (Proverbs), with both emphasizing that YHWH is a universal deity and not just a god of the Jews with a focus on the individual. Proverbs 8 also connects wisdom with the Torah (Deuteronomy). Thus, even if one could argue that the early wisdom tradition was an elite scribal phenomenon, it becomes democratized by the frame-narratives added to Job and Proverbs. In other words,

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from a canonical perspective, the form of the wisdom literature within the canon is no longer a separate, idiosyncratic tradition.

In "Where Can Wisdom Be Found? New Perspectives on the Wisdom Psalms," Markus Saur investigates the so-called wisdom psalms and concludes that focusing on whether these psalms should be called such is missing the point. It is their broader implication that is significant. The topics they treat (the deed-consequence nexus, Torah, theodicy) are the very topics that the broader Jewish community was negotiating and not limited to some small group of sages. He points out that the Psalter in many ways has been sapientialized through the inclusion of these psalms, as has the rest of the Hebrew Bible. He concludes that the Psalter represents, *in nuce*, a "little Bible," and that the wisdom psalms within it demonstrate that sapiential concerns were those of the Jewish elite and broader society as whole and not just the parochial concern of the sage.

In contrast to Saur, in "*Gattung* and *Sitz im Leben*: Methodological Problems in Identifying the 'Wisdom Psalm,'" Tova Forti believes such a more narrow focus on wisdom psalms is in fact legitimate and helpful. She critiques the imprecise methodology used by previous scholars in identifying this genre. While admitting the great difficulty of the task, she attempts to provide more robust criteria for determining what psalms should be rightly labeled wisdom psalms. These criteria include thematic, ideational, linguistic, stylistic, lexical, and figurative features. She concludes that the following are legitimate wisdom psalms: 39, 104.

In "Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater: On the Distinctness of the Sapiential Understanding of the World," Annette Schellenberg assumes the paradigmatic position but tries to soften the boundaries between the various scribal groups that she sees represented by the literature of the Hebrew Bible. For example, though she believes the sages were open to revelation as a source of knowledge, they did not consider it necessary. While she admits that all the Israelites can be viewed as sharing a common worldview, the Hebrew Bible reflects differing theologies and perspectives that confirm that there is indeed a sapiential weltanschauung, though it reflects a dialectical relationship of influence vis-à-vis the other traditions, for example, the priestly and prophetic traditions. She examines biblical, extrabiblical, and ancient Near Eastern literature and argues that the wisdom tradition distinguishes itself in terms of four categories: cosmology, epistemology, ethics/understanding of society, and theology.

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In "Wisdom in the Canon: Discerning the Early Intuition," Douglas Miller also maintains the paradigmatic position, but he attempts to reformulate the necessary and sufficient criteria for the parameters of the wisdom tradition in a better way. He first examines seven criteria that previous scholars have proposed as necessary features of wisdom literature and its tradents: form, social location, technical vocabulary, humanistic orientation, didacticism, eudemonism, and weltanschauung. In compliance with recent developments in form criticism and genology, Miller reduces this list heuristically to three criteria: rhetoric (instruction), realized eschatology (focus on present mundane existence), and epistemology (rooted in human experience). He then shows how the other seven categories configure within his triadic grid.

In "Three Theses on Wisdom," drawing on ancient Near Eastern evidence (especially Egyptian), Michael V. Fox challenges much of the consensus position, particularly its postulation of a wisdom school and the view that the sages were an insular professional group within Israel. He argues that (1) there was no wisdom school in ancient Israel (2) the authors of the wisdom literature were not a distinct faction, but (3) there was indeed a generic category of wisdom literature. As for the third item, Fox admits that wisdom literature is a modern scholarly construct and that perhaps another name is necessary. Whatever one calls it, he does believe in a wisdom tradition, which is especially evident in the Egyptian literature, and he defines it as ethical instruction about the successful life and its limitations. And it does this without appealing to revelation or legal material.

In "Wisdom, Form, and Genre," Stuart Weeks takes on the task of critiquing the many form-critical assumptions that come to play in the issue that this volume addresses. He continually points out the many complexities and difficulties of examining genres that is only exacerbated by the baggage of biblical form criticism. Weeks provides many examples of generic complexity throughout his essay, both from classical literature, as well as biblical studies. He basically argues that biblical scholars would be better off moving beyond form criticism—or at least move *less* form-critically—and to embrace the more up-to-date field of genology and to speak in terms of the family resemblance of texts. He attempts to steer wisdom experts away from rigid categorization and the futile attempt to find the closest generic parallel of a biblical wisdom text among ancient Near Eastern literature.

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Will Kynes's "The Modern Scholarly Wisdom Tradition and the Threat of Pan-Sapientialism: A Case Report" is the most radical essay in terms of the long-standing paradigmatic consensus on this issue. He essentially deconstructs the notion of a wisdom tradition, even suggesting we abandon the term altogether! Kynes's essay swings between the dangerous poles of, on the one hand, arbitrariness about defining and delimiting what a wisdom tradition means and, on the other hand, what he describes as "pan-sapientialism," which is the tendency to see more and more texts and books from the Hebrew Bible as members of the genre to one degree or another. He begins with a critical survey of the emergence of the notion of a distinctive wisdom tradition among biblical scholars, demonstrating how it is a scholarly construct not necessarily reflecting reality. He then shows the difficulties and arbitrariness in defining wisdom by looking at how both ancient Near Eastern and Qumran scholars have adopted the term to describe various texts; he provides an analogy to pan-sapientialism in "pan-Deuteronomism." In the end, Kynes opts for a robust understanding of intertextuality that would allow scholars to creatively reconfigure, organize, and compare biblical texts—including wisdom ones—in a number of differing ways.

In "Riddles and Parables, Traditions and Texts: Ezekielian Perspectives on Israelite Wisdom Traditions," Mark Hamilton questions the traditional paradigm in terms of the airtight boundaries scholars raise between the various traditions reflected in the Hebrew Bible. He does believe that there were sapiential, priestly, and prophetic traditions but that they interacted in creative ways, not limited to merely textual but also oral phenomena. He first defines what "tradition" should mean as applied to biblical texts, which always involves a social facet. He then investigates Ezekiel as a case study, which demonstrates how a prophetic book has been influenced by what can legitimately be called a priestly and even wisdom tradition, a tradition that was diffused broadly throughout ancient Israelite society. He shows how Ezekiel cites *meshalim* and then comments on them.

In "'Grasping After the Wind': The Elusive Attempt to Define and Delimit Wisdom," I take aim at the view that the wisdom tradition has certain necessary and sufficient conventions, what one could call core elements. I emphasize that this determination is highly subjective and heuristic and is more an intuitive pattern our brains recognize in the literature than an objective taxonomical analysis. I also emphasize that such uncertainty is fine for discussion of genre and emphasize that we will never agree on the boundaries of wisdom entirely. Indeed, one should not pursue such consensus. In the essay I also evaluate wisdom experts

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around the globe in terms of their consistency with modern generic theory, which includes the notion of generic realism versus nominalism, and the notion of the systemic nature of generic economies. I also compare biblical wisdom experts with ancient Near Eastern scholars. Finally, I offer suggestions for a more healthy approach to the wisdom tradition and its various genres, which includes giving up on the concept of essential features.

In "The Contribution of Egyptian Wisdom to the Study of Biblical Wisdom Literature," Nili Shupak argues that Israelite wisdom, especially Proverbs, has been heavily influenced by the wisdom tradition in Egypt, both in terms of content, perspective, language, and style. She argues that the Egyptian wisdom tradition started out among an aristocratic scribal class and was secular in orientation, not concerned much with the cult, but became more concerned with religion and piety over time, shifting its focus to a more middle-class audience. She distinguishes between didactic and speculative wisdom, the former being more pragmatic and the latter often challenging the status quo, adopting a somewhat prophetic tone—though she rejects such a label for this literature. She demonstrates that one can trace a distinctive and definitive wisdom tradition in Egypt that remained relatively stable for millennia, even though the social class of its tradents and audience changed over time. Shupak essentially argues that Israelite wisdom represents a similar phenomenon but its intended audience was broader and more inclusive than that of Egypt.

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