

M.R. SNEED (ed): *Was There a Wisdom Tradition? New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*. Ancient Israel and Its Literature 23, xii + 326 pp. SBL Press, Atlanta, 2015.

This collection of essays grew from an SBL Annual Meeting session in 2012. Under discussion was Mark Sneed's 2011 article 'Is the "Wisdom Tradition" a Tradition?' *CBQ* 73:50-71. Other contributions have been included in addressing this topic, some from other SBL meetings. Sneed's question in particular shapes Part 1 of the present volume, which forms more than half of the book.

Mark Sneed introduces the volume briefly, surveying the contributions in a listing which a little perplexingly does not reflect the order of chapters and makes no reference to the arrangement of papers into the three parts which constitute the overall work. Given that his 2011 article was the basis for the essays which follow, it might have been more useful to reprint that, or summarize it, as part of his opening chapter in the eventual volume. Sneed modestly downplays the role his own work played in the development of the collection. Part 1, 'Genre Theory and the Wisdom Tradition' opens with the radical contribution by Will Kynes, 'The Modern Scholarly Wisdom Tradition and the Threat of Pan-Sapientialism: A Case Report' which helpfully focuses the current questions in the discussion of what constitutes the wisdom tradition, setting out some of the positions presently held in the debate. Sneed's essay '“Grasping After the Wind”: The Elusive Attempt to Define and Delimit Wisdom' continues to develop the details of generic taxonomy, and the consideration of how wisdom fits as a genre. He uses this as a lens to survey a wide range of contemporary wisdom experts and their work. Michael V. Fox's 'Three Theses on Wisdom' – which posit that there was no 'wisdom school', or a distinct faction of authors, but that there was a wisdom literature – respond both to Sneed's 2011 article and the Kynes essay in this volume. This level of engagement between contributors satisfyingly tightens up the relationships between the scholarly views. Douglas B. Miller's 'Wisdom in the Canon: Discerning the Early Intuition' follows which pinpoints and evaluates some intuitive definitions of Biblical wisdom. 'Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater: On the Distinctiveness of the Sapiential Understanding of the World' is Annette Schellenberg's response to the ongoing debate, arguing that what is

particular to wisdom literature is not so much form or genre and content, but rather a deeper worldview which should be held on to, and which influenced writings beyond. Touched on by Schellenberg, the concept of family resemblance is now carefully unfolded by Katharine J. Dell in 'Deciding the Boundaries of "Wisdom": Applying the Concept of Family Resemblance'. Influenced by the work of Cheung (2015), she proposes a more pragmatic method to approaching "Wisdom" than the traditional categorizations of form criticism. Stuart Weeks in 'Wisdom, Form and Genre' provides a cornerstone to the encircling debate of genre or genology within the collection, in an essay which contributes not only to scholarship of wisdom literature, but also significantly to genre criticism in biblical studies. His section appropriately closes Part 1.

Part 2 of the volume is the locus for nitty-gritty textual work. Markus Saur sets the tone with 'Where Can Wisdom Be Found? New Perspectives on the Wisdom Psalms'. Like many of the essays in this collection, Gunkel fittingly takes his place as a starting point before Saur examines closely Pss 37, 49, and 73 as wisdom psalms, drawing conclusions about what that might tell us about the sapiential discourse of ancient Judah and Israel, and the shaping of the Psalter. A similar subject is taken up by Tova Forti, '*Gattung* and *Sitz im Leben*: Methodological Vagueness in Defining Wisdom Psalms'. Exegeses of Pss 39 and 104 are employed to demonstrate the broad influence of wisdom elements on the wider scriptural corpus. Raik Heckl, in 'How Wisdom Texts Became Part of the Canon of the Hebrew Bible', rejoices that, in the framing of Job, and in the connections between Proverbs 1-9 and Deuteronomy, there is evidence to suggest that postexilic editors sought to present ancient sapiential texts in the context of their new contemporary literature. The final essay of Part 2, Mark W. Hamilton's 'Riddles and Parables, Traditions and Texts: Ezekielian Perspectives on Israelite Wisdom Traditions' again addresses perceptions of "tradition" in Sneed's 2011 article. He selects Ezekiel 17-19 as his central text and interrogates the distinction between wisdom and prophetic texts.

Part 3, 'Ancient Near Eastern Comparison', consists of a single chapter, Nili Shupak's 'The Contribution of Egyptian Wisdom to the Study of Biblical Wisdom Literature'. Her survey of characteristics of Egyptian wisdom literature precedes analysis of its intersections with and

divergences from Biblical wisdom literature, leading her to draw conclusions about the very ancient provenance of Biblical wisdom literature and its importance in high-ranking Ancient Near Eastern society.

This volume is thought-provoking in penetrating knotty questions of genre and the “Wisdom Tradition” from a breadth of angles and with a range of insights. Given the intensity of focus on this subject, some essays duplicate background material or surveys, and there is often repetition between each author’s individual bibliographies; yet this is always preferable to a disparate collection where point of contact between scholars and scholarly trajectories are few and far-between. Without a final editorial comment to close the collection - which could for instance have probed the resulting question ‘does genre come before or after the composition of a text?’ - there is a sense of the inconclusiveness of the volume, but this leaves the reader refreshingly free to come to his or her own answer to Sneed’s excellent question which initiated the whole discussion.