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## Like a Garden of Flowers

### A Study of the Formation of the 'Book' of Psalms

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# Like a Garden of Flowers

A Study of the Formation of the 'Book' of Psalms

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DAVID WILLGREN | LUND UNIVERSITY



LIKE A GARDEN OF FLOWERS | DAVID WILLGREN



DAVID WILLGREN

# LIKE A GARDEN OF FLOWERS

A STUDY OF THE FORMATION  
OF THE 'BOOK' OF PSALMS



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

2016

Doctoral Thesis

*Like a Garden of Flowers:  
A Study of the Formation of the 'Book' of Psalms*

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*When my heart broke in two  
I taught both parts to sing  
#canonfodder*





# PREFACE

The last five years have been quite a journey. When I started this project, I had every intention to work within the field of *Psalterexegese*, acknowledging the *Sitz in der Literatur* of individual psalms and focusing on psalms standing in structurally significant places throughout the ‘Book’ of Psalms. In short, I was following closely in the academic footsteps of Gerald H. Wilson. However, the longer I studied this fascinating collection and the deeper I went into the ancient artifacts, the more I started to realize that something was missing. I set out searching for an appropriate way to frame these issues, and the quest started to lead me away from my original presuppositions. Indeed, after a while, I even began to question them, and an early form of a more thoroughgoing critique had seen the light of day. I became convinced that a study of the formation of the ‘Book’ of Psalms could never focus only on the collection itself, but had to consider various aspects of its transmission and use, always properly situated in the diverse and complex, yet fascinating scribal and material milieus in which it took shape. To be sure, I am not the first to have reached such conclusions, but in my case, it led me to a set of texts that had not previously been brought into the discussion, and to a theoretical framework that had been often overlooked.

As for where I ended up, I will not reveal in this preface, but hopefully this study will shed some new light on the exciting and complex issue of the formation of the ‘Book’ of Psalms.

Needless to say, I have not traveled alone, and my sincere gratitude goes first and foremost to my supervisor, Professor Fredrik Lindström at Lund University. Your constant support and many thought-provoking comments have made this study much better than it could ever have been without them. This goes also for my assistant supervisor, Professor Göran Eidevall at Uppsala University. I have much appreciated both of your abilities to combine words of encouragement with academically sharp and constructive criticisms, and our interaction over the past years has not only improved the text in innumerable ways, but also helped me along the way towards being a biblical scholar.

I also wish to thank the Old Testament seminars at Lund and Uppsala for providing many opportunities to discuss various parts of this study. I have benefited greatly

from intense and detailed interaction with you all. As for the seminar in Lund, I would like to thank my fellow PhD students Lars Berndes, Linnéa Kullenberg, and Elisabet Nord, as well as Drs. Blaženka Scheuer and Ola Wikander, and Professors *Emeriti* Erik Aurelius, Bo Johnson, and, not least, Tryggve N. D. Mettinger who has been incredibly kind and generous in support of my work. At Uppsala, I would like to mention PhD students Natalie Lantz, Richard Pleijel, and Karin Tillberg, as well as Drs. Ulf Bergström and Mikael Larsson. Thank you for valuable feedback and friendship.

I started my exegetical journey at Örebro School of Theology, and it is with great gratitude that I look back not only to the early formative years, but also to the continuing support I have received. Besides the generous opportunity to have a study place at the library for two years (thank you, Pekka Mellergård) I would like to thank the seminar of biblical exegesis, not least PhD student Stefan Green, Dr. Lennart Boström, Associate Professor Mikael Tellbe, and Professors Greger Andersson and Tommy Wasserman. It has been a great privilege to have had the possibility to discuss texts with you experts from a wide range of biblical scholarship, both Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. In this context I also want to mention my New Testament colleagues at Lund University, especially my office roommates Jan Nylund, David Svärd, and Martin Wessbrandt. A thank you also goes to Lars Petersson at David Media, who has provided me with an office in Umeå for the last two years.

As a PhD student in Old Testament exegesis I have had a need to interact more broadly with scholars outside of Sweden, and thanks to the formidable OTSEM network (Old Testament Studies: Epistemologies and Methods), a network consisting of scholars from Northern Europe, Germany, and Great Britain, I have had many opportunities to try my wings in the presence of great minds. A special thanks goes to those who have taken their precious time to provide detailed and engaging responses to my papers, Dr. Urmas Nõmmik, Dr. Habil. Anja Klein, and Professors Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson and Corinna Körting. Your constructive criticisms have had great impact on the way I have structured and formulated my arguments. I would also like to extend a thank you to Professor Hermann Spieckermann, who has not only attended several of my presentations at OTSEM, always with insightful comments, but also invited me to spend a week in Göttingen in 2015 where I had the opportunity to give a lecture on the formation of the 'Book' of Psalms. Apart from being a most generous host, I am grateful for the encouragement to take steps towards publication, and I am proud to say that this study is forthcoming in the FAT II series. I am also deeply indebted to Professor Terje Stordalen, with whom I have had many stimulating discussions, not least during my visit to Oslo in 2014, a visit which was very well timed in my writing process.

A last group of scholars that I would like to thank are the ones I have shamelessly bothered with some of my texts via e-mail. They have all responded graciously and kindly to my blunt inquiries, and helpfully pointed me in the right direction. Thank you, Drs. Trine Bjørnung Hasselbalch, Alexandra Kleinerman, and Anders Mortensen, Associate Professor Angela Kim Harkins, and Professors James P. Allen, Jean-Marie Auwers, Walter Brueggemann, Jenny Strauss Clay, Susan E. Gillingham, Jean-Jacques Glassner, José B. Torres Guerra, J. Clinton McCann Jr., Norbert Lohfink, Richard B. Parkinson, Eileen M. Schuller, and William Yarchin for stimulating feedback. I am also grateful for the important input provided by Professor LarsOlov Eriksson, who served as opponent at my final seminar.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my friends and family for continuous support and encouragement. You all know who you are, but thanks go especially to my wife, Fatima, and our two boys, Samuel and Elias. I could not have done this without you.

Ultimately, I hope that this study will contribute not only to academic discussions, but also, in the long run, to the body of Christ. It is only together with all the saints that we have the possibility to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. If my work has succeeded to shed some light on areas previously dim, it is only by the grace of God. In Christ I take refuge. Lord, let me never be put to shame.

Umeå, 2016-04-01  
*David Willgren*



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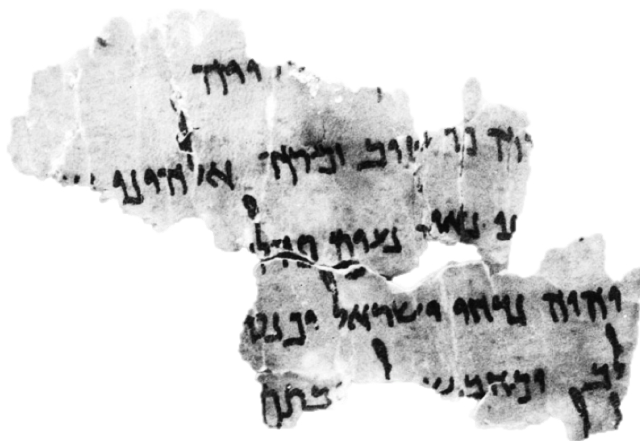
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## Like a Garden of Flowers

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This is a study of the formation of the 'Book' of Psalms that attempts to provide answers to two fundamental questions: "how?" and "why?". The first relates to the diachronic growth of the collection (how are these processes to be reconstructed, and on what grounds?), while the second relates to questions of purpose (to what end are psalms being juxtaposed in a collection?).

By conceptualizing the 'Book' of Psalms as an anthology, and by inquiring into its poetics by means of paratextuality, David Willgren provides a fresh reconstruction of the formation of the 'Book' of Psalms and concludes, in contrast to the canonical approach, that the 'Book' of Psalms does not primarily provide a literary context for individual psalms. Rather, it preserves a dynamic selection of psalms that is best seen not as a *book* of psalms, but as a *canon* of psalms.

*David Willgren* is working within the field of Old Testament Exegesis at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University. This is his doctoral thesis.

