

## Can wisdom be prayer? Form and function of the psalms of Solomon

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# Can Wisdom Be Prayer? Form and Function of the Psalms of Solomon

STEFAN SCHREIBER

The PsSol are a collection of 18 psalms or songs, each of which has its own history behind it. The literary form of the *parallelismus membrorum* endues these texts with the character of higher language. Their local references revolve around the city of Jerusalem, and it was there, probably, that the collection was compiled after Pompey had occupied Jerusalem in 63 B.C. or, more precisely, after Pompey's death in Egypt in 48 B.C., to which PsSol 2:26 alludes.<sup>1</sup> The PsSol cannot be assigned to any of the known Early Jewish sects, including the Pharisees, an attribution which could still be regarded as a matter of consensus several years ago.<sup>2</sup> The Greek transmission of the PsSol which we possess today can be identified as a translation, roughly dated to the 1st century A.D. from an original Hebrew text.<sup>3</sup> This Greek version is interesting in that it manifests the effort on the part of an Early Jewish group to read the PsSol against the backdrop of Hellenistic culture.

In the context of the topic dealt with in this volume, my main question will be whether the PsSol can be identified as prayers with a recognizable

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<sup>1</sup> This date may be considered a chronological landmark in research; cf. only HOLM-NIELSEN 1977, 58f., and, more recently ATKINSON 2004, 135–139. Before that, ATKINSON had claimed to see allusions to Herod the Great in PsSol 17, thus dating it as late as the year 30 B.C.; ATKINSON 1996; id. 1998; cf. also WRIGHT 2007, 4–7.

<sup>2</sup> On that cf. SCHREIBER 2000, 161f.; ATKINSON 2004, 6–8; WRIGHT 2007, 7–10. In attempting to find a polemic directed specifically against Aristobulus II and his Sadducee followers in PsSol 8, ATKINSON 2003, 62–65 over-interprets the relatively unspecific statements made by the text. He himself is aware that Hyrcanus II is likewise condemned in the text (65; cf. PsSol 8:16f. ).

<sup>3</sup> WRIGHT 2007, 7 dates the Greek translation to the beginning of the Common Era, localizing it in Egypt. Besides that, there is a Syrian version probably dependent on the Greek translation tradition. In several places, however, it may be closer to the Hebrew text than the extant Greek text. On the translations cf. HOLM-NIELSEN 1977, 53–55; WINNINGE 1995, 9–14; SCHREIBER 2000, 162; WRIGHT 2007, 11f.

liturgical (or cultic) *Sitz im Leben* or, more precisely, whether the literary form of these psalms allows us to arrive at conclusions concerning their function and concrete use. In his study on the *Historical Background and Social Setting* of the PsSol, which was published in 2004, Kenneth ATKINSON makes a clear case regarding this question,<sup>4</sup> with which I should like to begin.

## 1. A Liturgical Use of PsSol?

ATKINSON assumes that the PsSol as a collection were arranged with a certain group in view in order “to use these poems in their worship services” (2). By means of a “recitation of these poems during their worship services”, this group assures itself of its own identity: The group’s members comprise the faithful remnant of Israel, and their interpretation of the Torah is the correct one (2; cf. 218). Thus, according to ATKINSON the PsSol mark the beginning of a characteristic development of Jewish prayer: “The *Psalms of Solomon* should be viewed as an early example of liturgical prayers which, following the Temple’s destruction in 70 CE, would become a central component of daily Jewish life” (219).

This notion of the liturgical *Sitz im Leben* of the PsSol is part of ATKINSON’s overall hypothesis regarding the historical background of the group associated with them. He views the PsSol group as an anti-Sadducean sect in Jerusalem: “The writers of the Psalms abandoned the Temple cult because of their disagreement with the halakah of the priests who presided over the Temple rituals.”<sup>5</sup> A redactor put together the collection in answer to what the group specifically perceived to be the defilement of the Temple in Jerusalem. The group ethos, which is thereby created, consists both in the rejection of the Temple cult and the parallel continuation of worship by way of everyday piety and synagogue gatherings. Ritual purity, prayer and fasting, which now effected expiation for sins, replaced the sacrificial cult of the Temple with individual synagogues in Jerusalem serving as the place for the liturgical use of the PsSol.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> ATKINSON 2004; cf. also SCHÜPPHAUS 1977, 142.151–153; WRIGHT 2007, 10f.; WINNINGE 1995, 18f..

<sup>5</sup> ATKINSON 2004, 211–222; quotation on p. 221.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 13f. Strikingly, it is from the *lack* of any mention of the Temple cult and from positive references to prayer that ATKINSON concludes the Temple cult to have been rejected and replaced by prayer and personal piety (on p. 182 about PsSol 6, also

It is an interesting question, then, by which *criteria* ATKINSON claims he can infer a liturgical use of the PsSol. I find the following patterns of reasoning in his argumentation:

(1) ATKINSON construes the συναγωγαὶ ὁσίων mentioned in PsSol 17:16 to refer to synagogue buildings in which the group behind the PsSol, the “holy ones”, would gather. In his view, this congregation was a “sectarian community, meeting in their own synagogues in Jerusalem and stressing daily piety as a substitute for worship in the Temple.”<sup>7</sup>

However, the attributive designation συναγωγαὶ Ἰσραηλ in PsSol 10:7 does not include any group-specific restriction regarding the circle of those assembled at all, and the lexeme συναγωγή may also mean the “assembly” as such (without any reference to a particular building).<sup>8</sup> This is made manifest by the use of the syntagma ἐκκλησία λαοῦ in 10:6 which is parallel in meaning and which clearly refers to popular assemblies. Hence, we are not given any information on the concrete use of the PsSol.

(2) ATKINSON interprets the title “the poor” which the PsSol repeatedly use to designate the praying people (5:2.11; 10:6; 15:1; 18:2) as the group’s self-designated name. Inferring their physical poverty from it, he concludes that they assembled in small synagogues inside private houses (215).

However, in the prayer language of the (canonical) psalms, but also in some Qumran texts, the “poor” are identical with the “pious” who trust in God’s salvific favour.<sup>9</sup> It is difficult, therefore, to draw conclusions concerning concrete social circumstances.

(3) The redactor put PsSol 1 at the beginning of the whole collection by way of introduction to facilitate the reading of these psalms in the synagogue. The topic of justice in the face of military menace, which is central to the collection, was thereby introduced (205f.). This would, however, also hold true regardless of the context of synagogue reading.

(4) ATKINSON concludes from the structure of the collection – and here he refers to the five-part compositional scheme suggested by P. N. FRANK-

pointing to PsSol 3:3; 5:1; 7:6f. ; cf. 191.195). That Early Jewish groups *outside* Jerusalem introduced regular daily times of prayer as a replacement for the locally distant Temple cult has been established by ESHEL 1999, 334.

<sup>7</sup> ATKINSON 2004, 213f., quotation 214; cf. 200f.

<sup>8</sup> It is translated in this way (“Versammlung”) in: KRAUS/KARRER 2009, 924.929. FALK 2001, 36, observes that “there is as yet no certain evidence that there was a regular and substantial prayer liturgy in synagogues by this time.”

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Ps 9:19; 25:9; 34:3; 113:7f. ; 1QH 13:22; 1QM 11:9.13. On that cf. WOLTER 2008, 248f.

LYN, which is designed to show a thematic development – that the redaction was meant to support public readings during the service.<sup>10</sup> The whole collection, he argues, may be recited in Greek within 55 minutes.<sup>11</sup> The PsSol are to be understood as part of a regular daily practice of prayer.

In any case, this remains a claim only. I suppose it is the literary form of higher language used in the PsSol which provides the tacitly-assumed basis for the assumption that these texts may have served as public prayers in services. The question remains whether observations on the literary form of the collection allow us to draw conclusions regarding a concrete *Sitz im Leben*.

## 2. Superscripts in the PsSol

With the exception of the first text, in the Greek transmission the PsSol are all furnished with a superscript. Giving them a unitary, characteristic shape, these superscripts are important for the outward character of the collection as a whole. Hence, it is likely that these superscripts were added only in the course of the redaction of the collection (probably already in the Hebrew version).<sup>12</sup> They contain the following elements: an unitary pseudepigraphic attribution of the texts to Solomon, extrapolations of a central thought from the texts (partly by incorporating certain keywords) and details on the literary form of the texts:

(1) With one exception,<sup>13</sup> the attribution to Solomon in PsSol 2–18 has the formula τῷ Σαλωμων. The dative which appears odd in Greek is best explained as a translation of the Hebrew preposition לְ, as it is also used in the titles of the canonical psalms: *l' dāwid*. It can either have a modal (“with regard to”, “concerning”) or a causal meaning (as *l' auctoris*: “by”).<sup>14</sup> In this way, the recipients are provided with the background of understanding that informs the collection: It is to be read and interpreted as

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<sup>10</sup> ATKINSON 2004, 219. FRANKLYN 1987, 1–17: individual (PsSol 3–6; 12–16) and national (2; 7–11; 17–18a) psalms, with introduction (1) and benediction (18b).

<sup>11</sup> With reference to FRANKLYN 1987, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. HOLM-NIELSEN 1997, 58. In contrast, SCHÜPPHAUS 1977, 151–153 attributes the superscripts to another phase of revision, which, in his view, was carried out with regard to the liturgical use.

<sup>13</sup> PsSol 4 is titled διαλογὴ τοῦ Σαλωμων – speech of Solomon.

<sup>14</sup> JENNI <sup>2</sup>1981, 294f.

part of the sapiential Solomon tradition.<sup>15</sup> First Kings 5:9–11 praises Solomon as the wisest human being, his wisdom being given by God, and 5:12 knows of 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs that Solomon composed. As a poet, Solomon may well be on a par with David. The pseudepigraphic Solomon attribution of the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the Gnostically-influenced *Odes of Solomon* testify to his early Jewish prominence as a founding figure of the wisdom tradition.<sup>16</sup>

(2) The designations “psalm” (ψαλμός), “hymn” (ὕμνος) and “song” (ὥδή), which are found as superscripts of several PsSol,<sup>17</sup> may at first sight be read as technical musical hints that point to the practical performance of the PsSol with song and music.<sup>18</sup> A comparison with the headlines of the canonical psalms, however, reveals these designations to be part of a fixed repertory of psalm descriptions.<sup>19</sup> And it is already true in the case of the canonical psalms that the designation “psalm” (Hebrew *mizmōr*) permits no conclusions regarding a possible practical performance. Thus, Erich ZENGER, in his *Introduction* to the *Book of Psalms*, points out: “It is questionable, however, whether this may be viewed as testimony of the way of recitation of these texts in biblical time”, since, in the course of the “Davidization” of the Psalter, this constitutes an allusion to David as a lyre

<sup>15</sup> There is perhaps a connecting line running from the canonical Psalter to the Solomon pseudepigraphy of the PsSol, for Ps 72 is already identified as a Solomon Psalm by its superscript. In terms of contents, it bears striking resemblance to PsSol 17 in that God’s appointed king exercises justice particularly for the poor in Israel.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. LATTKE 2004, 805–809. The whole of the Book of Proverbs is also attributed to Solomon in the Septuagint (Prov 1:1).

<sup>17</sup> “Psalm”: PsSol 2.3.5.13.15.17.18; “hymn”: PsSol 10.14.16 (10: “among hymns”); “with a song”: PsSol 15.17.

<sup>18</sup> This is an argument advanced by SCHÜPPHAUS 1977, 151f.

<sup>19</sup> Some examples: The term “psalm” is used in the superscripts of Ps 3–6.8.9.12.13 and others, “hymn” by Ps 6.53.54.60 LXX and in several others (= “with string music” Ps 6.54.55.61 MT), “song” in Ps 4.17.38 LXX and in several others as well (Ps 4 MT “with string music”, 18 MT “song”). It is a matter of dispute how far it is appropriate to speak of “poetry” in this context: According to the Greek and Roman notion, meter is an indispensable feature of poetry. It is lacking in the PsSol, however. The *parallelismus membrorum* in Hebrew texts is not restricted to the Psalms or other texts which we would probably categorize as poetical. The Greek early Jewish reception, at least as it becomes apparent for us with Josephus, *Antiquitates* 7:305 and possibly Philo, *vita contemplativa* 3.10.29f.80, assigns the Psalms to the poetic genre, which is probably part of the process of assimilation to Greek culture. An open terminology which tries to do justice to the notion of the first century may speak of “higher language”. On the problem cf. BRUCKER 1997, 23–35.

player (1 Sam 16:14–23; 18:10).<sup>20</sup> Thus, the analogous designations of the PsSol are aimed at an *imitation* of the *Book of Psalms*: Instead of providing concrete directives for their recitation, they are rather meant as guidance for their reception.

The same function is likely to be fulfilled by the two διάψαλμα notes in PsSol 17:29 and 18:9, which mirror the Hebrew *sela* known from the Psalms and which correspond to the Septuagint version. In addition, they are used for the purpose of structure and reader guidance.<sup>21</sup>

(3) The descriptions of the respective topic, which are part of many superscripts, are intended to guide the reading in terms of contents. They too may be seen as imitations of the Psalms. Regardless of how accurately these descriptions capture the contents of the corresponding texts, they, as a whole, provide a survey of the thematic spectrum of the PsSol: concerning Jerusalem (PsSol 2), concerning the righteous (3), concerning the men-pleasers (4), in hope (6), of turning back (7), into the battle (8), for rebuke (9), unto expectation (11), concerning the tongue of transgressors (12), comfort for the righteous (13), for help to the pious (16), of the king (17), again of the Anointed of the Lord (18).

In a nutshell, the information given in the superscripts tells us a lot about the cultural background of the collection – sapiential tradition, imitations of the Psalms – but nothing about a liturgical or musical use.

### 3. The literary forms of the PsSol

In terms of form criticism, the assumption that the PsSol also imitate the canonical psalms in their outward appearance is supported by the observation that PsSol 1, exactly like Ps 1, begins without a superscript. If we look at the literary form of the PsSol on the basis of the main genres of the canonical psalms,<sup>22</sup> we see that all the 18 texts may be assigned to one of those genres. However, in doing so, we must allow for the dissolution of strict literary schemes and the regular overlapping of literary forms. This is certainly due to the fact that an originally cultic *Sitz im Leben* is already lacking for most of the psalms. It is particularly striking that elements of

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<sup>20</sup> ZENGER 2006, 350.

<sup>21</sup> This is quite obvious in PsSol 18:9, as the verses 10–12 constitute a case of praise of God that, concluding the whole collection, transcends the actual topic.

<sup>22</sup> A survey is given by ZENGER 2006, 360–362.

wisdom psalms like macarisms or typifying reflections on the success or failure of life are constantly being mixed with other genre schemes.

Thus, PsSol 1 starts as a psalm of lamentation (“I cried unto the Lord when I was in utter distress, unto God when the sinners assailed”; 1:1). However, from v. 3 it turns into a more sapiential reflection upon the current situation of the praying “I”. It is the city of Jerusalem itself which gives a summary of its children being lost in sin, arrogance and impiety.

On account of this mixture of formal elements of different genres, exact attributions may well be debatable. The rest of the collection may tentatively be categorized as follows:<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Other attempts, which in my view neglect the sapiential character, are given by HOLM-NIELSEN 1977, 55f.: psalms of lamentation 4.5.7.8.9.12.17, psalms of gratitude 2.13.15.16, hymns 3.6.10.11.14.18; SCHÜPPHAUS 1977, 76–78: past, present and future of the pious 3.6.10.13.14.15.16, historical and social references 1/2.8.17 and 4.7.12(.11), summary 18, praise and plea 5.9; NICKELSBURG 1981, 202–212: psalms of the nation 1.2.7.8.11.17.18, psalms of the righteous and pious 3.4.6.9.10.13.14.15.16; cf. also n. 10. On the influence that the language of early Jewish penitential prayers exerted on the PsSol cf. WERLINE 1998, 109–159; FALK 2001, 40f.



- 2 a supplicatory psalm of an individual 2:1–25; a psalm of praise 2:26–37
- 3 psalm of praise, which, starting with v. 4, has traits of a wisdom psalm (juxtaposition: the righteous one and the sinner)
- 4 a supplicatory/lamentary psalm, culminating in the expression of trust 4:23–25; strongly sapiential traits (characterization of the sinner; “Blessed...” 4:23)
- 5 psalm of praise 5:1–4.19; supplicatory psalm 5:5–8; wisdom psalm 5:9–18 (there is a proverb in 5:13; “Blessed...” 5:16)
- 6 a wisdom psalm (it begins with “Blessed is the man...” 6:1; an element of a psalm of praise in 6:6); a collective supplicatory psalm
- 7 a psalm of the people’s lament: depiction of distress 8:1–23, praise 8:24–26, plea 8:27–30, trust 8:31–33, praise 8:34
- 8 wisdom psalm (with plea 9:8 and trust 9:9–11)
- 9 wisdom psalm 10:1–4; psalm of praise 10:5–8 (it begins with “Blessed...” 10:1)
- 10 Zion psalm (it celebrates God at Zion/in Jerusalem with eschatological exultation)
- 11 supplicatory psalm
- 12 psalm of gratitude with sapiential elements in 13:7–11  
sapiential/didactic psalm
- 13 psalm of gratitude and praise 15:1–3; wisdom psalm 15:4–13
- 14 psalm of gratitude 16:1–5; psalm of plea 16:6–15  
supplicatory psalm with a hymnic opening (17:1–3) and sapiential semantics (17:23.29.32.35.37; “Blessed...” 17:44)<sup>24</sup>
- 15 psalm of praise with sapiential elements in 18:6–9 (“Blessed...” 18:6)

As a matter of fact, the collection of the PsSol may be understood as sapiential texts with the literary form of the “classical” Psalms serving as their outward attire. These literary forms were used to ensure the connection with the tradition of Israel, as it is embodied in the prominent corpus of the *Psalms*. In doing so, an identity of Israel rooted in old tradition is evoked. Hence, what Erich ZENGER points out with regard to the wisdom psalms of the *Tanach* equally holds true for the function of the PsSol as well: “Strictly speaking, they are not prayers, but reflections and meditations on the success of life, on the fate of the good and the evil, on creation and the Law.”<sup>25</sup> And Otto KAISER concludes from the mixture of

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<sup>24</sup> It is very difficult to determine the literary form of PsSol 17. HOLM-NIELSEN 1977, 56, views it as a song of lament; cf. POMYKALA 1995, 160; SCHREIBER 2000, 163. WASCHKE 2001, 138, speaks of a “literary mixture of hymn, lament and plea”. On sapiential elements in PsSol 17 cf. REITERER 2007, 238–240.

<sup>25</sup> ZENGER 2006, 362.

genres “that these songs, in the strict sense, are not prayers, but didactic poems. They address a readership who entrust themselves to its guidance, who, after re-reading it again and again, see through their inner coherence and who, then, meditating and praying, read it for the sake of their edification.”<sup>26</sup> The literary form of a psalm thus aims at personal reception and adoption. A fine case in point is provided by the wisdom psalm 6, which says with regard to the blessed man:

(4) He arises from his sleep, and blesses the name of the Lord: When his heart is constant, he sings to the name of his God, (5) and he entreats the Lord for all his house. And the Lord hears the prayer of every one that fears God. (6) And every supplication of a soul setting her hopes on him is fulfilled by the Lord.

Praise and supplication are recommended with insistence without the psalm being constructed as a precast prayer itself. The mere form of a psalm is no indication of a liturgical *Sitz im Leben*.<sup>27</sup> It still remains now to inquire into the inner cohesion mentioned by KAISER.

#### 4. The Structure of the Collection

Besides a few formal structuring signals, my compositional schema is mainly directed by thematic aspects. Thus I end up with a three-part structure framed by PsSol 1 as a prooemium and PsSol 18 as an epilogue. The three main parts have a numerical ratio of seven, two and again seven psalms. Parts one and three are each enclosed by two framing texts.

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<sup>26</sup> KAISER 2004, 363.

<sup>27</sup> The non-canonical psalms found among the Dead Sea Scrolls give no hints of a liturgical usage (11QPs<sup>a</sup>; 4Q371–372; 4Q378–379; 4Q380–381); the *Sitz im Leben* remains unclear. This becomes apparent in comparison with prayers and blessings whose intention of divine worship is explicitly stated in their headings and rubrics – for festivals and other ceremonies. Cf. NITZAN 1994, 8–22, who gives some characteristics of those Qumran texts which were intended for prayer (20f.); cf. her overview of fixed prayers in id. 1994, 47–87.

PsSol 1	Prooemium: Jerusalem's lament
2–8	Part One: Historical Background
2.8	Frame: the history of the Roman invasion 63 B.C. – situation and demonstration of God's justice <sup>28</sup>
3–7	The life of the righteous and the sinners in this historical situation
	3 the attitude of the righteous and the sinners (in the face of divine education)
	4 warning against lawless hypocrites and plea for liberation from them
	5 trust in God's justice and goodness
	6 trust in prayer
	7 plea for help against enemies/Gentiles
9–10	Part Two: God's <i>paideia</i>
9	The exile as a model: God's action in judgement – ending in love and mercy
10	Education by God, orientation and guidance: the Abrahamic covenant und the Torah <sup>29</sup>
11–17	Part Three: eschatological foresight
11.17	Frame: the eschatological restitution of Zion (11); the Messiah's kingdom (17) <sup>30</sup>
12–16	Confrontation of the righteous and the sinners in an eschatological light
	12 calumniation
	13 castigation/trust
	14 commandments/law for life
	15 trust in God
	16 plea for rescue and strengthening (involving castigation)
18	Epilogue: summary – God's eternal mercy and concluding praise – the cosmic scope of God's power

This structure of the collection becomes manifest only by intensive studies and reflections.<sup>31</sup> It points to a *Sitz im Leben* in circles who either

<sup>28</sup> Formal signal: In PsSol 8, there is a concluding praise consisting of two lines, whereas there is but one line in the preceding texts.

<sup>29</sup> Formal: a long concluding praise in PsSol 10:5–8. On the exile and the covenant as the theological centre of the PsSol cf. also STEINS 2006, 136f.

<sup>30</sup> Formal: 17:46 inclusion with 17:1 (topic: God as the king). Everything is brought full circle before the epilogue. The reign of the Messiah serves as a contrast to the apostasy of Israel under Roman rule.

individually or as a community were devoted to the study of the scriptures. Hence, it is highly unlikely that the collection of the PsSol was intended as a “book of songs and prayers” for the worship services of an early Jewish community.

## 5. Conclusions: The *Sitz im Leben* of PsSol

The formal shape of the PsSol does not provide any hint of a cultic or liturgical use of these “songs”. It is certainly true that more elevated language is used in imitation of the canonical psalms, and as regards the potential ways of reception, this basic insight into their literary form and its history entails a comparatively high number of possible applications: A whole bunch of different meanings are offered, and the possibilities of choosing from thoughts that are either attractive or disturbing are numerous. Neither, in terms of content, do the PsSol provide any hints to the cultic *Sitz im Leben*. In comparison to numerous prayers originating in Roman culture this becomes apparent, as the latter explain the cultic actions that form their concrete context of application. In the context of the power of words, Pliny the Elder (*naturalis historia* 28:10) would say: “a sacrifice without prayer is thought to be useless and not a proper consultation of the gods”.<sup>31</sup> The right performance of the sacrifice is at stake. A petitionary prayer, transmitted by Cato the Elder (*de agri cultura* 141), may serve as an example of a prayer explaining the sacrifice:

Father Mars, I pray and beseech you to be favorable and propitious toward me and my family and household; wherefore I have ordered this sacrifice of a pig, sheep, and bull to be led around my farm, land, and estate, so that you may prohibit, avert, and ward off diseases seen and unseen, barrenness and devastation, destruction and intemperate weather, so that you may permit the produce, grains, vines, and bushes to grow large and flourish, that you may keep safe the shepherds and sheep, and that you may grant health and wellness to me, my family, and household; wherefore, for the purpose of purifying and making pure my estate, land and farm, as I have spoken, be honored with the

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<sup>31</sup> Other suggestions concerning the structure are offered by KAISER 2004, 364–367; STEINS 2006, 124–127.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted by HICKSON HAHN 2007, 235–248, quotation 235; later, with regard to Pliny the Elder, she puts it more sharply, elaborating: “Without words of prayer to identify the purpose of rituals, neither the divine recipients nor the human audience could understand what was happening” (247); on a variety of ritual contexts cf. 237–239. Some biblical examples of prayers, psalms etc. accompanying sacrifices are given by NITZAN 1994, 37f.

sacrifice of this suckling pig, sheep, and bull. Father Mars, for this purpose, be honored with the sacrifice of this suckling pig, sheep, and bull.

The PsSol never identify such ritual actions.

Hence, while reading the PsSol (as well as other texts of Early Judaism and Christianity which are composed in more elevated language), we have to take into serious consideration the phenomenon of traditional forms being imitated in literary contexts.<sup>33</sup> In these cases, such imitation does not point to a concrete liturgical *Sitz im Leben*, but to the poetical intention of evoking ways of reception and contexts of tradition in order to remind the readers that they are members of a virtual community with *the* faithful, reliable, and binding tradition of Israel.

These reflections on the form of the PsSol, however, can at least give first hints to a concrete *Sitz im Leben* of the corpus. The sapiential character of the collection, which is made apparent by the Solomon attribution and the formative elements of wisdom psalms, and the imitation of the psalms point to a group identifiable in terms of social history: What already holds true for the canonical Psalms<sup>34</sup> and the Early Jewish wisdom literature in general, holds true for the PsSol as well. They were probably read, studied, and passed on in sapiential, scribal circles by way of teachings, reflections, and meditations. The aimed-at reception in both meditation and prayer mirrors those circles' search for a new "inwardness" of a life led in accordance with the traditions of Israel.

These details may be supplemented and expanded by observations on the contents.

(1) The PsSol evince a certain distance *vis-à-vis* the Temple. The Temple is deprived of its significance as the means of the purgation of sins, as the PsSol do not expect any salvation from the Temple. This is substantiated by the fact that the Temple as the place of JHWH's praise (PsSol 3:3; 5:1; 6:1.4f. ; 7:7) or the place where God's name dwells (7:6) is not even mentioned. Likewise, the Temple is absent in the "salvation programme" of 9:8–11<sup>35</sup> (mention is made of God's people, Abraham,

<sup>33</sup> The Qumran texts mirror a copious production of prayers, hymns etc. which, at least partly, are imitations of the biblical Psalms; cf. NITZAN 1994, 10.17f. The existence of a collection like the PsSol is therefore not surprising.

<sup>34</sup> ZENGER 2006, 359f., opts against the assumption that the canonical Book of Psalms was composed as a "book of prayer and song for the synagogal liturgy"; *ibid.* 367, he refers to the milieu of the wisdom schools as the place of the reception of the Psalms.

<sup>35</sup> On this cf. FALK 2001, 41f.; STEINS 2006, 134.

God's name, the covenant with the Fathers, repentance, God's mercy). The praying persons attain purgation of non-intentional sins by means of fasting and self-humiliation (e.g. 3:8) rather than Temple sacrifices, as they are laid down in Lev 4.<sup>36</sup> This is due to the defilement of the Temple decreed by the PsSol (1:6–8; 2:2–5; 8:11f.22 and also 17:30), which, all in all, is the consequence of the personal failure of the priesthood and which impinges upon the effectiveness of the sacrificial cult.<sup>37</sup> From a sociological point of view, the literary distance *vis-à-vis* the Temple is probably occasioned by the historical distance of the group *vis-à-vis* the high priestly Temple elite. The polemic against the Temple elite points to a group-specific rather than a "public" use of the PsSol.

(2) As we have seen, it is the practice of fasting that functions as the means of cleansing.<sup>38</sup> A constant, daily custom of prayer also receives frequent mention as an ideal of the everyday practice of religion (3:1–3; 5:1; 6:1f.4–6; 7:7; 15:1.3; 16:5).<sup>39</sup> While the PsSol do not offer any standardized prayer formula, this does not by any means rule out a practice of prayer that is meant to be inspired by the PsSol: Texts like the appreciation of prayer in PsSol 6, the intense plea in 8:27–30 or the expression of trust in 8:31–33 are indeed invitations to a personal shaping of a practice of prayer. These forms of religious practice are independent of the Temple and serve personal piety.

(3) The PsSol perceive the socio-political situation as a challenge (e.g. 5:5.7–17). When they address the suffering of the righteous one, they evidence their reception of the sapientially-imbued tradition of the suffering righteous one (cf. Ps 22; Wisd 2:12–20; 5:1–8).

(4) The group identifications built up within the text are telling. The righteous are juxtaposed with the sinners from Israel's own ranks and the Gentiles, who are likewise viewed as sinners (e.g. PsSol 2:34–36; 3:3–7.9–11). In social reality, there was apparently a confrontation between two different lifestyles, though it is impossible to identify the

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<sup>36</sup> On that cf. ATKINSON 2004, 215f., who concludes, however, that there was a "distinctive sectarian community" behind it (195). The silence of the PsSol regarding the Temple cult and their criticism of its priesthood need not be interpreted as a total separation from the Temple; cf. the criticism by EMBRY 2002, 129f. cf. 121.133; FALK 2001, 49f.

<sup>37</sup> A comparison with the Qumran group is conducted by ATKINSON 2004, 212f.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. ATKINSON 2004, 195 again in comparison with the Qumran writings.

<sup>39</sup> HORBURY 2007, 119–125 recognizes "a practice of prayer and psalmody thought of as continuous" within the framework of a "system of piety" (124) in the background of the PsSol. Cf. already VITEAU 1911, 335.

antagonistic groups with certain socio-religious parties in Early Judaism.<sup>40</sup> I attempt to interpret this from a socio-historical perspective.

Kenneth ATKINSON, whom I mentioned at the beginning, thought of an underprivileged Jewish sect in Jerusalem that had distanced itself from the Temple and that, in fact, addressed its own theodicy question in the PsSol.<sup>41</sup> Inspired by the analogy with the Qumran scriptures, he reconstructs the attitude of this sect as based on criticism of the Temple and its defilement by the hands of the ruling high priests. The difference is that this group continues to stay in Jerusalem, establishing its own liturgical service there. In my opinion, ATKINSON pays only insufficient attention to the confrontation with the Gentiles, which becomes apparent in the PsSol, i.e. the confrontation with the Hellenistic culture that had gained strength in Israel following the Roman occupation. Nor does the sapiential character of PsSol play any role in his reconstruction.

In my opinion, the fact that the texts, strikingly, do not set any exclusive inner-Jewish boundary markers at all contradicts the attempt to attribute the PsSol to an Early Jewish sect. The history of the Roman invasion, as it is characterized in PsSol 2 and 8, concerns *all* the Jews in the country, and the same holds true for the expectations in the *eschaton* (11.17). Likewise, the exile that serves as a model for God's educative actions and the orientation towards the covenant and the Torah (9.10) encompasses the *whole* of Israel. By that, the theology of the PsSol is firmly anchored in the tradition of Israel. However, the authors of the PsSol cannot but see that not everyone in Israel sincerely searches for and follows the way of JHWH (cf. only PsSol 1). It is not visible at first sight who lives "righteously". Thus, there are group boundaries between the groups behind the PsSol and other Jerusalem groups after all, though they are not recognizable at first sight.<sup>42</sup> The sinners, while appearing to be righteous (1:2f.; 8:6), commit sins in secret (1:7; 4:5; 8:9); they "sit in the council of the pious" (4:1) and seem to be successful in fulfilling the commandments of the Torah (4:2f.7f.), i.e. they held a high social status and public authority. Hence results the prayer's wish that God may uncover the sinner's true identity in

<sup>40</sup> SANDERS 1977, 403–414; cf. FALK 2001, 45.

<sup>41</sup> ATKINSON 2004, 220–222; id. 2003, 546–575. Contrary to ATKINSON, SCHRÖTER 1998, 570–572 points out that the line between one's own group and the whole of Israel is drawn far more clearly in the pertinent Qumran texts than in the PsSol.

<sup>42</sup> On this cf. FALK 2001, 45.48. In a different fashion, WINNINGE 1995, 125–136 distinguishes between sinners, the sinfully righteous and the righteous (i.e. the Messiah and God).

judgement (2:17f.; 4:6–8). Thus, it is all the more important to recall Israel's genuine identity. What should, in fact, hold true for the whole of Israel is at least to be realized in an outstanding way by the "righteous one" as the role model of the group behind the PsSol. The life of Israel assumes a recognizable shape in the life of the righteous one.<sup>43</sup> This also accounts for the fact that the texts, besides the whole of Israel (e.g. 10:7f.; 11:7–9; 12:6), also look at the *house* as the place for the community of the righteous one's life (3:6–8; 12:5)<sup>44</sup> – the place where the righteous do those very things that constitute the identity of the PsSol: fasting, acceptance of the negative experience of the situation as God's castigation, reflection and prayer as an expression of a new inwardness.

My argument is that the PsSol fit in conservative, sapiential, and scribal circles in Jerusalem taking issue with Hellenistic culture. Sapiential circles principally maintained "a certain distance *vis-à-vis* the Temple aristocracy and its Hellenizing tendencies."<sup>45</sup> In the time of the Roman reign, this Temple elite managed to find a *modus vivendi* with the political rulers.<sup>46</sup> This provoked the formation of opposition movements. The PsSol strive to oppose the undeniable attraction of Hellenistic and Roman culture by reinforcing the tradition of Israel and encouraging their own ethos to be guided by this tradition, as it is encapsulated in the Torah. The sapientially-shaped juxtaposition of the role models of the "righteous one" and the "sinner", as it is to be found throughout the whole of the PsSol,<sup>47</sup> exhibits this dividing line between two different cultural guiding paradigms. After all, not only does the term "sinners" refer to Gentiles, but also to the Jews who open themselves to the influence of Roman and Hellenistic culture, thereby risking the undermining of their own identity from within. It is telling that the Jewish "sinners" are subject to the same

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<sup>43</sup> Incidentally, in PsSol 16:7f., which warns the praying person against an evil and lawless woman and her beauty, it becomes quite clear that the texts are informed by an androcentric perspective.

<sup>44</sup> 4 Macc 18:10–19 sheds some light on the transmission of Israel's scriptures and the traditions that they contain.

<sup>45</sup> ZENGER 2006, 367.

<sup>46</sup> Thus, the High Priest Hyrcanus II was made a "Friend of Rome" under Caesar, cf. SASSE 2004, 240. On the collaboration of Sadducees and Roman governors in Judea, cf. EBNER 2004, 64–67.

<sup>47</sup> The contrast between the righteous and the sinners is sapiential in character; cf. STEINS 2006, 138f. FALK 2001, 39–49 delineates in what ways the PsSol draw a line between their own group and the others, recognizing the rhetorical function "to reinforce sharp group boundaries" (43).



charges as the “Gentiles” – they behave “arrogantly”, they are “sinners”, and they have defiled the Temple.<sup>48</sup> Against this background, there is one distinction that the sapiential group behind the PsSol finds imperative and urgent, namely the recognition of what is, in fact, a “sinner”, i.e. one who adapts to Hellenistic culture,<sup>49</sup> and the rejection of this process of assimilation. PsSol 3, for instance, seeks to heighten caution *vis-à-vis* foreign influence by virtue of a practice of fasting. At the same time, it is crucial to give meaning to the inevitable disadvantages incurred by such a life of unrelenting Jewish conviction. The PsSol use the idea of the “castigation” or education that God employs to guide his own people towards a deeper comprehension of his salvific plan. In terms of social history, it is very likely that conservative circles in Jerusalem, who had in reality distanced themselves from the community of the Temple cult, indeed experienced severe economic disadvantages.<sup>50</sup>

Hence, the PsSol do not stand for an exclusive sect, but for a movement among the educated circles of Jerusalem (and beyond) that had distanced itself from the Temple elite, but advocated a determined commitment to the traditional ethos of the Jewish people.

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<sup>48</sup> PsSol 1:5–8; 2:3.9.12; 4:5; 8:9.12f.22; 17:6.15. Cf. FALK 2001, 44.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. only the *alleged* justice of Jerusalem in PsSol 1 and the comparison of the “sinners” with the “Gentiles” (1:8; cf. 8:13). “Transgressors” (4:23; 12), “uncleanness” (8:22) and “lawlessness” (e.g. 15:8.10) point to a divergence from the tradition of Israel. This is pointed out with great clarity in PsSol 17:14f.

<sup>50</sup> This might be the background of notions like “the poor”, “the needy”, “the humble” (5:11f.). On that cf. WERLINE 2006, 78.85 (with reference to PsSol 4:9–13.20–22; 5:1–5). WERLINE himself thinks of “a group of scribal retainers” who had lost their power and social position under these political circumstances (82.85).

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