TIMOTHY J. STONE

The Compilational History of the Megilloth

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of the Megilloth

Canon, Contoured Intertextuality and Meaning
in the Writings

Tᴉᴍᴏᴛʜʏ J. Sᴛᴏɴᴇ, born 1977; 2000 BA in Biblical Studies from Cairn University (PA); 2004 MA in Biblical Exegesis from Wheaton College (IL); 2010 PhD in Old Testament from St Mary's College, University of St Andrews (UK); since 2012 lecturer in Old Testament and Hebrew at Zomba Theological College, Zomba, Malawi.

For Rachel

She is more precious to me than the finest jewels

Preface

This monograph is a revised version of my doctoral thesis defended on November 2010 under the same title at St Mary's College, University of St Andrews. I am grateful to my examiners, Stuart Weeks and Mark Elliot, for their criticism and conversation on that day. Undertaking this thesis and finishing the resulting monograph is an extreme privilege, which would be impossible without the love and support of family, friends, colleagues, academic communities, and teachers. The completion of this work is the culmination of many years of study and the numerous contributions of others. I am thankful to the editors of Mohr Siebeck's FAT series, Profs. Bernd Janowski, Mark S. Smith and Hermann Spieckermann for accepting this work for publication. Hermann Spieckermann kindly suggested that I submit the thesis to FAT and Mark Smith's many insightful comments on the work guided my revision of the monograph. Much thanks also goes to the staff at Mohr Siebeck for their excellent guidance in bringing this thesis to publication.

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For my time in Germany, I am grateful to the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst for a generous grant to finish the thesis there and to Prof. Dr. Hermann Spieckermann for his kind invitation to do so in Göttingen. I cannot imagine a more caring or gracious host. To all my teachers I offer my thanks and sincere gratitude.

This time of study took place within two academic communities and to each I owe a debt of gratitude. There is no way to list the myriads of contributions by the faculty and staff of the Divinity school at the University of St. Andrews or by the Theology faculty and staff at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. Each offered me the opportunity to present parts of my project and gave penetrating feedback on the work.

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My family has supported me in various ways throughout the process. The church family in Trinity Center, California, offered encouragement at the earliest stages and I am especially gratefully to Jerry and Judy Meyer, Annitta Pickard, and Bob and Pat Plumb for their generous assistance in our move overseas. To my parents, Keith and Gracie Stone, I am thankful for a lifetime of loving support. Tom and Jeanette LaMothe, my parents-in-law, have also helped us in many ways through this process, including making many trips by plane to be with us, and by taking wonderful care of our cat during our time in Germany. My siblings and their families, too, have given kind encouragement. Alison and Jason Fried were brave enough to read an esoteric Ph.D. thesis on the arrangement of the *Megilloth* and even sat in a really hot conference room in Rome to listen to me present a portion of it.

My wife, Rachel, has been a steadfast companion on this adventure and read the work more times than anyone reasonably should have to. Her keen editorial eye has improved it immeasurably. In taking wonderful care of our family she has made it possible for me to spend long hours at work. This

project is nearly as old as my older son, and much older than my younger son. Aidan and Graeme, thank you for your patience with 'daddy's fee-sis', for always giving me a reason to smile, and for sharing your amazing lego constructions with me. I dedicate this book to my wife with much affection. She is an אֵשֶׁת־חַיִל.

Zomba, Malawi (Easter 2013)   Timothy J. Stone

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Introduction

The Shape of the Writings

"Meaning is context bound, but context is boundless."[1]
– Jonathan Culler

"Art is limitation: the essence of every picture is the frame."[2]
– G. K. Chesterton

In *God: A Biography*, Jack Miles argues for the significance of the order of the books in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and then says, "One might wonder why this point should have to be made at all. Is the order of presentation not obviously crucial for all literary purposes?"[3] Most Old Testament/Hebrew Bible scholars would agree with this literary judgment, but would then question its historical roots; such concerns are considered by many to be anachronistic – arising only after the invention of the codex or the long scroll and playing no role in the literature's formation. There is, however, a growing body of literature challenging this dominant view.

Approaches to the Old Testament (OT) have widened over the past forty years, from a focus on the history of the texts' development, to an appreciation of examinations of the final-form of individual books, to a number of final-form readings of collections of books. The Law has been the subject of a series of pure final-form readings of the entire corpus.[4] The first half of the Prophets, known as the Deuteronomistic History (comprising Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings) has been a constant source of scholarly discussion since Martin Noth's groundbreaking work in 1943.[5] Recently, the Latter Prophets has been the focus of renewed interest in the correlation of the disparate parts of Isaiah and the redactional process that led to the association of the collection of the Twelve Minor Prophets.[6] Despite these trends OT scholars widely agree that the third part of the Hebrew canon,

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[1] CULLER, *Literary Theory*, 67.
[2] Quotation from BARTON, *Writings*, 131. He cites chapter 3 of CHESTERTON, *Orthodoxy*.
[3] MILES, *God,* 16.
[4] The first was CLINES, *Theme of the Pentateuch*.
[5] NOTH, *Deuteronomistic History*.
[6] E.g. on Isaiah see WILLIAMSON, *Book Called Isaiah*; on the Twelve see the second half of chapter two below.

the Writings, is a miscellaneous collection, as its name seems to suggest.[7] The Writings, so it is believed, have no purposeful design or shape. This comes from serious historical misgivings about the structural integrity of the collection combined with conceptual roadblocks arguing that a single or original order is requisite for investigation. On a more fundamental level, the books of the Writings are thought to be so drastically different from one another that they could not have been compiled with a view to their interrelationship. I re-examine these assumptions, albeit for the books of the *Megilloth* only. Contrasting the dominant view, this thesis offers an historical and exegetical alternative, viewing the *Megilloth*'s codification into a collection as an integral part of a canonical process rather than a formal feature that is the *result* of an effort to close the canon, or merely a *by-product* of technological advances like the long scroll or the codex.

There are a number of well-established historical objections to this approach to the Writings in general and the *Megilloth* in particular. These objections must be taken seriously for the approach to remain viable. I cannot cover *all* the issues, but I discuss the salient points in the thesis. First, when was the collection of the Writings formed? Erosion of the consensus that the Law, Prophets, and *then* the Writings[8] were each canonized in successive stages has undercut traditional understandings of the Writing's formation. Unmoored from this historical scheme, the collection floats into a category of religious literature without definite boundaries often labeled 'scripture' until the rabbis, much later, trimmed down this category, producing the Hebrew 'canon.' The divide between 'scripture' and 'canon' is fundamental to this understanding, which pushes the formation of the Writings far into the rabbinic period, yet, within this period, there has not arisen a consensus regarding alternative historical reasons for its formation. If the Writings only became a collection sometime in the rabbinic period, then the formation of the collection is severed from the *development*, *selection and,* in my view*, arrangement* of the literature. Consequently, the forces that brought the collection together are not

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[7] MORGAN, *Text and Community*, is the only full-length account to take on the nature of the Writings. For him the Writings are very diverse. The diversity is not argued for in his work, but assumed throughout. BRUEGGEMANN, *Introduction to OT*, directly follows Morgan's assessment noting the "miscellaneous quality" of the Writings (272); when the collection of the Writings is addressed in introductions to the OT, often something is said about its diversity, or that it is a catch-all, or that the books have little in common, e. g. MCKENZIE, *Old Testament*, 303.

[8] These terms for the divisions of the tripartite canon are used throughout the thesis. They are not unproblematic, however. 'Law' is not a good translation of *Torah*; 'Instruction' would be better; 'Prophets' while a good translation of *Nevi'im*, leaves one with connotations that the books are about prophets (perhaps in the narrow sense of predictors of the future), which distorts the Former Prophets more than the Latter; 'Writings' is a good translation of *Ketuvim* and may be a good term to describe the last collection with its miscellaneous implications; this is a question the thesis will probe.

due to the canonical process but some other later, extrinsic historical force. Thus *when* the collection was formed is central. Within the old consensus of canon formation, the canonization of the Writings marked the final closure of a canon that already had a fixed Law and Prophets, while in newer approaches, its canonization halts a process of formation and arrangement which includes an open Prophets and quite possibly the Law as well.[9] Whatever the model, the weight of canon closure falls on the history of the Writings' formation so that its canonization coincides with the OT canon's closure. Since the formation of the Writings and closure of the OT canon are related, I explore them together in chapter two. In particular, chapter two examines these issues as they relate to scholarly definitions of canon, Ben Sira, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the stabilization of the OT text, the use of texts in the NT, Josephus, *4 Ezra*, and Rabbinic literature. There I propose, though unequivocal evidence is not available, that the tripartite canon was likely closed within mainstream Judaism sometime considerably prior to the end of the first century C.E. This canon was not universally accepted, however, nor was it the only arrangement of the canon during this period.

A second major objection is the multiplicity of orders for the Writings. Depending on how the various manuscripts in the Jewish tradition are categorized,[10] there are as many as seventy,[11] or as few as twenty-nine different orders for the collection.[12] The sheer variety of orders in antiquity seems to categorically deny the possibility that the collection's arrangement is significant.[13] In particular, the *Megilloth* is almost unanimously considered a late liturgical development; as such, it may be interesting as reception history, but it has no bearing on the formation and codification on the literature itself as it was taking shape. For those considering the Greek order older than the Hebrew, the Hebrew arrangement is minimally significant. Finally, many believe the very concept of 'order' anachronistic since no concept of order existed prior to the codex. Each of these objections raises substantial historical questions and presents a series of complex issues, which I explore in chapter three.

Lest addressing these issues seem too daunting, a few preliminary points are in order, to be developed in chapter three. First, the exact relationship of the Hebrew tradition to the Greek is extremely complicated; available sources leave any final appraisal of the material in serious doubt. Signs indicate that

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[9] It is generally agreed that the Law is a closed collection while the Prophets and the Writings are not, but it may be only a matter of time before the process is pushed back to the Law as well, as CHAPMAN's insights, *Law and Prophets*, are integrated into the discussion.

[10] Within these schemes the manuscripts grouping the *Megilloth* are often excluded – considered a late liturgical development. This practice began with BECKWITH, *Canon*, who includes them in his count, but categorizes them liturgically. His distinction remains uncontested in current literature.

[11] BECKWITH, *Canon*, 450–64.

[12] STEINBERG, *Ketuvim*, 133; BRANDT, *Engestalten*, 148–71

[13] CARR, "Community," 45; LEIMAN, *Canonization*, 28.

the Greek represents an ancient order in certain cases, but one should exercise great caution before generalizing about a Greek tradition that is by no means monolithic. Determining the exact relationship between the traditions remains intractable. Second, if one records arrangements for the Writings up to and including the sixteenth century C.E., there are many orders. If, however, one considers only arrangements *earlier* than the twelfth century, then, based on available historical information there are only two remaining orders in the Jewish tradition:[14] the Talmudic, found in *Baba Batra* 14b (hereafter *BB* 14b), and the Masoretic (hereafter MT), in the Aleppo and Leningrad codices. Here are the two orders:

BB 14b	Ruth	Ps	Job	Pro	Eccl	Song	Lam	Dan	Esth	Ez/Ne	Chr
MT	Chr	Ps	Job	Pro	Ruth	Song	Eccl	Lam	Esth	Dan	Ez/Ne

Without question, these two orders are different – particularly in the case of Ruth, as we will see, but the differences should not be exaggerated. If these arrangements were accidental, or unimportant, one would expect to find the books haphazardly arranged – this is not the case. In this respect, some of my findings are confirmed by Julius Steinberg's *Die Ketuvim: ihr Aufbau und ihre Botschaft,* in which he examines all of the books in the collection based on the order in *BB* 14b from what he calls a "structural-canonical" approach. His findings will be discussed throughout this work. Both of these ancient orders should be probed for possible significance; Steinberg has done this for *BB* 14b, but this thesis focuses primarily on the MT arrangement. For reasons that should become clear throughout the thesis, I am not arguing that the MT order is original. It *does* appear to be the oldest surviving order in the Hebrew tradition; *BB* 14b appears to have developed from the MT order. Regarding Ruth, the Greek order, which has Ruth between Judges and Samuel, appears older than the MT, but this does not transfer into a generalization in which the 'Greek order' (by itself a problematic notion) as a whole is older. The MT arrangement is one arrangement among others; and as far as possible, the *Megilloth's* relationship to other orders will be explored. A possible objection here is the late dates of the two Hebrew orders. The Talmudic, like most rabbinic literature, is difficult to date, because the text is *baraita*; it is usually dated sometime in the second century C.E. and may record a much older tradition. The emergence of the MT order, however, can be dated more pre-cisely to the end of the ninth and beginning of the tenth century C.E. Without

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[14] BRANDT, *Endgestalten*, 125–71. These represent two of the three arrangements Brandt considers prominent in the Jewish tradition generally. They are: The Eastern order, *BB* 14b (no *Megilloth*, Chr last), the Western Masoretic order, (*Megilloth* grouped, Chr first), and the second Rabbinic Bible (16th century) order (*Megilloth* grouped and arranged liturgically, Chr last).

question, this is a late date. Throughout the thesis, however, I examine possible signs of this order's ancient roots.

Third, as aforementioned, the *Megilloth* is considered a late liturgical development, thus by association making the MT also late. This view has remained unchallenged for at least a hundred years, which means it is time for a thorough examination. I offer several objections to this construal, providing an alternative proposal for why *all five* of the *Megilloth* are read liturgically. Fourth, objecting that the idea of arrangement is anachronistic is a legitimate concern that must be examined carefully. How would the order of the scrolls be understood, if at all, in Second Temple Judaism? This issue is difficult and complex. I examine scholarly findings regarding the comparative evidence of purposeful arrangement in collections in the ancient Near East (hereafter ANE) and the possible role the Temple's sacred space played in the arrangement of the OT within Judaism's conceptual world. Fifth, the Law, the Former Prophets, and the 'seams' of the tripartite OT canon are investigated for signs of compilation binding books together into collections. These five points are developed in chapter three.

If these historical objections do not dissuade one from exploring the possibility of a purposeful design to the Writings, looking at the vast variety of books within the collection might. Those attempting historical explanation for the Writings conclude that it is an anthology.[15] What relationship does Proverbs have with Ezra-Nehemiah, or Ruth with Daniel? While I would have to agree with judgments construed in this manner, randomly pairing books in the collection disregards their arrangements in *BB* 14b and the MT, therefore misunderstanding the canonical approach attempted here. Nevertheless, one can see good reasons for these judgments; the Writings are not as integrated a collection as the Law, the Former Prophets, the Twelve, or the Psalter.[16]

What is the Writings' structural situation as found in *BB* 14b and the MT, and what does this indicate about the integration of the collection? I want to give an overview of the Writings in *BB* 14b and the MT. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to substantiate this entire sketch, although it depends to some degree and aligns well with Steinberg's conclusions regarding *BB* 14b.

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[15] DE PURY, "Le canon," 17–39, views the collection as an anthology; STEINS, *Abschlussphänomen*, 512, cf. 514, considers the collection to comprise disparate writing contrasting with the first two canon parts. For Steins, Chronicles ends the canonical process by closing and crystallizing the collection, although other texts could certainly be added later; MORGAN, *Text and Community*, does not feel compelled to demonstrate the Writings' vast diversity, instead he operates under this presumably self-evident assumption. Morgan's work largely follows Sanders and does not push beyond his basic idea that the canon enshrines diversity, which is adapted by the community to fit its changing circumstances.

[16] CHAPMAN, *Law and Prophets*, does not explore the Writings in any detail; SEITZ, *Fellowship*, notes the level of integration in the Law and the Prophets compared to its absence in the Writings with the possible exception of the *Megilloth*; cf. STEINS, *Abschlussphänomen*, 512.

Even if the details cannot be substantiated here, it remains vital to see at least the possibility of how the Writings function as a complete collection because the *Megilloth* cannot be examined in isolation from the collection within which it is embedded. This bird's-eye view of the Writings locates the more specific examination of the *Megilloth* within a broader context and shows, at least theoretically, how my observations might fit with the shape of the Writings as a whole. This broad sketch will also make it clear that this thesis is only a beginning and a limited one at that.

No one overarching scheme unites the Writings. Rather, excepting Ruth, there are two sub-collections to which Chronicles and possibly the Psalter are related. Ruth's locations are the most varied; it comes directly before the Psalter in *BB* 14b, presumably as an introduction to the Psalms and directly after Proverbs among wisdom books in the MT, apparently due to associations with Proverbs 31:10–31.

Working with *BB* 14b's arrangement Steinberg calls the first sub-collection a "wisdom series," (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song, in that order) and the second a "national-historical series" (Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, and Ezra-Nehemiah, in that order).[17] In the MT, the wisdom corpus is arranged the same, except Ruth is appended to Proverbs and the Song comes before Ecclesiastes instead of after it. Job may come first in this corpus due to its associations with the Psalter on the one hand and the wisdom corpus on the other. Proverbs may come second in order to link it with the Song and Ecclesiastes, which follow in its wake due to their Solomonic associations. As long as the Song and Ecclesiastes follow Proverbs their exact order appears to be of little consequence.[18]

The "national-historical series" in both the MT and *BB* 14b follows the wisdom corpus. In both the MT and *BB* 14b, this corpus *always begins* with Lamentations and *ends* with Ezra-Nehemiah. Between, one finds Daniel and Esther, which exchange places in the two arrangements but remain directly juxtaposed. As I argue, the limited movement within this collection is commensurate with the corpus' compilational logic.[19]

The Psalter and Chronicles do not disturb these two corpora; they either bracket the collection (*BB* 14b) or are juxtaposed in the order Chronicles, Psalms, at the head of the collection (MT). Considering how Chronicles was linked to Ezra-Nehemiah without dividing the national-historical corpus is

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[17] STEINBERG, *Ketuvim*, esp. 444–54.

[18] The grouping of the wisdom corpus, with the possible exception of the Song, under the heading of 'wisdom literature' is a standard scholarly practice. Even though scholars have made diverse arguments about their relationship, they have noticed the similar subject matter in this corpus.

[19] Apart from associations based on genre between Esther and Daniel 1–6 and, in a very few cases, based on the general date of Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah, scholars do not recognize a relationship between these books.

instructive. At some time, probably late in the collections' growth, Chronicles was linked to Ezra-Nehemiah, not least by Chronicles' closing sentence, which overlaps verbatim with Ezra-Nehemiah's beginning sentence. The shape of the national historical corpus appears to be solid because although Chronicles directly precedes Ezra-Nehemiah *chronologically,* it is not placed there, which would then seperate the collection of the national-historical series. Instead, in *BB* 14b Chronicles directly follows Ezra-Nehemiah as the final book of the Writings; in the MT it comes first structurally forming an *inclusio* with Ezra-Nehemiah, which ends the collection. It is fundamental to recognize that Chronicles was composed or redacted in direct relationship to Ezra-Nehemiah and that the arrangement of the canon, in both *BB* 14b and the MT, highlight this fact. For Steinberg, who analyzes Chronicles' position in *BB* 14b, it forms an *inclusio* around the Writings with the Psalter.[20] Steinberg concedes that the logic of Chronicles' relationship to the Psalter is the same if they are juxtaposed at the beginning of the Writings as they appear in the MT.[21] In both arrangements, Chronicles appears to maintain a structural relationship with Ezra-Nehemiah and the Psalter. Apart from Chronicles, the Psalter may have some kind of relationship to Job; in both orders, Job directly follows the Psalter.[22] Perhaps, though, the Psalter stands alone in the collection without a strong bond to other books. The books are diverse; but perhaps 'anthology' does not best describe them.

The books' movement within these two different arrangements is limited, according to a logic of association that (excepting Ruth) is similar in both arrangements. Different orders, if limited, rather than pointing *away* from the arrangement's importance may well *highlight* it. Perhaps it is helpful to think of the collection as a small solar system in which each book exerts, to a greater or lesser degree, a gravitational pull on the rest of the system. Size and proximity are important forces in the collection; a kind of magnetism is at work, exerting pressure on books and drawing them into the orbit of other books. Like a system of planets, the movement of the collection is limited, predictable, and almost always constrained by each book's relationship to one or more books in the Writings. For instance, Esther moves around, but in these two orders it always follows Lamentations and is juxtaposed to Daniel.

The amalgamation of the Writings is not a uniform or standardized process, but variegated and messy in accordance with the long history of the collection's growth. No single redactor or compiler arranged the Writings in some homogeneous fashion. The collection's compilation reveals a long

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[20] STEINBERG, *Ketuvim*, 445–6.

[21] Ibid., 446.

[22] E.g. FREVEL, "Schöpfungsglaube," 496–7, who observes Job's "intensiven innerkanonischen Dialog mit dem Psalter." KYNES, "Reading Job Following the Psalms," develops Job's relationship to the Psalter by showing how specific texts and forms in Job subvert and play off of the Psalter, thus assuming that the reader is already familiar with Psalms.

process in which collections were codified into groups, and, sometimes, arranged in relationship to other books. To describe the collection as an anthology is helpful because it highlights the diversity in form and subject matter in the collection, but with this diversity clearly in view, I prefer to describe the collection as a mosaic. The tiles are different in shape and color, yet when viewed as a collection a larger pattern emerges. Again an examination of the whole collection of the Writings in order to fill in the above sketch is desirable but lies outside this thesis' scope. Instead, I offer three different exegetical probes into this complicated issue from the books of the *Megilloth*. First, in chapter four I explore Ruth's different positions in the Greek tradition and the Hebrew tradition. Ruth is a particularly good candidate; it has a relatively stable position in the Greek tradition, while in the Hebrew its different positions (in the MT between Proverbs and the Song; in *BB* 14b as the first book, preceding the Psalter) are more variable than any book in the collection. I examine the reasons for Ruth's inclusion in these locations and sketch the possible effect this has on Ruth and its surrounding context.

Second, in chapter five I analyze Esther's position within the national-historical corpus and vis-à-vis Daniel. I then explore its theology within this canonical frame. Third, in chapter six, I probe the work of scholars who have examined the Song, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations with a view to their inter-relationship. The Song and Ecclesiastes are associated with Proverbs by their superscriptions; these associations may be increased by the Song's intertextual resonances with Proverbs 1–9 and a possible collection-conscious *inclusio* formed between Ecclesiastes' epilogue and Proverbs' prologue. Lamentations' primary compilational function is to set the stage for the national-historical corpus. Lamentations is a stable dividing line in the Writings between the 'wisdom' texts (plus or minus Ruth) and the national-historical corpus. I then explore a possible structure for the *Megilloth* as a whole.

Within these three exegetical probes I appeal to similar work on the Psalter and the Twelve. Based on the work of scholars in these two collections I develop a *compilational grammar* encompassing the various ways in which authors, redactors, and compilers situate and associate books within larger collections. Regarding the Twelve, I explore related questions of diachronic development and intention within the collection as well as the different orders for the collection. This is presented in the second half of chapter one to provide some methodological controls for the project, while recording the presence of similar scholarly findings in other portions of the canon. This methodological section is at the beginning because it should be kept in mind throughout the rest of the thesis. In sum, this thesis will be an historical and exegetical investigation into the poetics of canon shaping.

For clarity's sake, I will outline the entire project in terms of three primary theses:

Thesis 1: The tripartite Hebrew canon was closed sometime considerably prior to the end of the first century C.E., even though it did not attain universal dominance in terms of scope or structure. The count of 24 books aligns with the tripartite arrangement, while the count of 22 probably means that Ruth was appended to Judges as one book and Lamentations to Jeremiah as one book; both of these schemes appear to have existed simultaneously well before the end of the first century C.E.

Thesis 2: There are two primary arrangements for the Writings in the Hebrew tradition prior to the eleventh century C.E.: *BB* 14b and the MT. It is unlikely that the order of the *Megilloth* in the MT is the result of the liturgical practice of reading them at festivals in Judaism; therefore, the MT order is not automatically a late development. Furthermore, the MT order is closely related to *BB* 14b and probably predates it.

Thesis 3: The books in the *Megilloth* are purposefully arranged even if in various (but limited) orders. With the exception of Ruth, the books of the *Megilloth* as found in both the MT and *BB* 14b exhibit a similar logic. The *Megilloth* stands at a crossroads in the Writings with a wisdom corpus (plus or minus Ruth) on one side and a national-historical corpus on the other. Proverbs is the flagship of the Solomonic section of the wisdom corpus and the Song and Ecclesiastes, regardless of their exact order, follow in its wake.[23] The national-historical corpus exhibits a tighter structure. Lamentations is always first, followed by Esther and Daniel in the MT (although they switch positions in *BB* 14b) and Ezra-Nehemiah concludes. Lamentations remains solidly in its place, dividing these two sub-collections. Ruth is a different case. It migrates from its place in the Greek tradition between Judges and Samuel into the Writings where it follows Proverbs (MT); then, within the Writings, it moves to stand directly before the Psalter (*BB* 14b).

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[23] Job may be related to the wisdom corpus but pursuing this issue is beyond the scope of the thesis. For an exploration of this possibility, see STEINBERG, *Ketuvim*; SCHULTZ, "Unity or Diversity."

Chapter 1

Canon and Compilation

Context is now context within the literary shape of the final form of the canon.[1]
– Christopher Seitz on the Twelve

The deliberate combination of psalms by means of keywords which are recognizable above all by references to the opening and ending of consecutive psalms offers a subtle connection by association and meaning which the reflective reader may further deepen.[2]

– Erich Zenger on the Psalter

A. The Canonical Approach

This project builds upon Brevard Childs' work; the following discussion takes place in critical conversation with his approach. Yet I hesitate to call my approach a canonical one – in search of the canonical context – due in part to the confusing way that Childs uses these terms, which are often misunderstood by those attempting to follow or critique his approach. My approach and Childs' certainly overlap, but we focus on different aspects of the canon and the canonical process in theory and in practice. My understanding of 'canonical context' includes his primary use of the phrase but emphasizes the intertextual contours of a book as it stands within the structure or shape of the canon. In other words, the shape of the canon, its collections and sub-collections, and even the arrangement of the books within these blocks create an intertextual foreground and background that gives each book a profile and specific dialogue partners. For instance, Ruth's inclusion in the Former Prophets after Judges and before Samuel in the Greek tradition foregrounds its intertextual relationship with these books while maintaining, albeit in the background, Ruth's many intertextual connections to Genesis. This specific example will be explored in chapter four but my understanding of canonical context is illustrated throughout the thesis.

Before examining some key aspects of Childs' approach, it is necessary to define what I mean by canon and canonical process, which will make it easier to see the similarities in our approaches but also their different focuses. *Can-*

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[1] SEITZ, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics*, 179.
[2] ZENGER, "New Approaches," 43.

on is a fixed list of scrolls (books) received and recognized as holy by a faith community. This is a definition of the OT canon in the Second Temple Period and the first three centuries CE only; I do not intend it as a universal definition of canons in ancient or current times. For this reason, the term 'holy' is placed where one usually finds the word 'authoritative;' authoritative is not the preferred term describing these books in antiquity. The term 'authoritative' has narrower connotations than 'holy' and does not adequately address the sacred dimensions in which these texts were treasured. If they are considered holy, it follows that they are authoritative; the reverse is not necessarily so. Additionally, it is vital to note (because the distinction is seldom consistently made) that *a faith community* recognizes this canon as holy.[3] It is not universally held across faith communities and even within a single faith community it is a dominant position from which there may be occasional dissent.

The *canonical process* is far harder to define because it must cover a lot of ground in order to accurately describe the historical situation. In my judgment, canon is organically linked to the canonical process so that the connection between the two is seamless. The judgments between the two may be qualitatively different,[4] but the key feature is the intimate relationship between them. In this regard, the canonical process overlaps with canon. Yet, unlike the term canon, it includes everything that leads to the canonization of these texts and can be used synonymously with canon consciousness. Within the canonical process there is both composition and redaction, which renders *individual* books authoritative and holy for future generations, thus moving them towards canonization. The heart of the canonical process, however, appears to be the various ways in which books have been composed, redacted and compiled with a view to their *interrelationship*.[5] This is the case, as Steins observes: "Der Kanon entsteht durch Integration und zwingt zur In-

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[3] In historical time, the faith community that produced, shaped and canonized the OT has changed over time where one can even track this activity. A comparision of the accounts of VAN DER TOORN, *Scribal Culture*, and SCHNIEDEWIND, *Bible Became a Book*, reveal the significant difficultly in tracking these developments. Beyond the obvious fact that kings, priests and scribes were primarily responsible for the OT literature due to their positions in society, wealth and literary competence Van der Toorn and Schniedewind offer significantly different accounts of who was behind the OT becoming a collection of Scripture.

[4] DOHMEN, *Biblischer*, 92, notes the continuous nature of their relationship and that canon is the logical consequence of the canonical process, Oeming and Dohmen nevertheless hold to a *qualitative* difference between the two. This appears to be nuanced against Childs' position on which see below.

[5] STEINS, "Bibelkanon," 180, judgment "dass der Redaktionsprozess koextensiv zum Kanonprozess ist," is a helpful corrective to the debate, but emphasis on redaction should not discount the possible role of composition and compilation within the canonical process. CHAPMAN, "Canon Debate," 273–94, highlights "the literary interrelatedness found among the various writings contained within the biblical corpus" (291).

tegration."[6] This process of integration occurs not only within individual books but also across collections of books. Through composition, redaction, and compilation, books are shaped within the intertextual parameters of the canon *and* at times as they are structurally contextualized within collections. I will use the phrase *compilation consciousness* to refer to the way books are framed alongside of or structurally associated with other books within the canonical process. In this respect, compilation consciousness addresses one aspect of the canonical process but is not synonymous with it. The text's authority, a primary concern for Childs, is a presupposition of this process of integration and amalgamation, which is a key aspect of the canonical process. The interrelation of these sources is not primarily due to literary and aesthetic judgments, but rather, as Christopher Seitz contends, to the theological conviction that "God's one word" has been spoken through various sources.[7] As the canonical process comes to an end, the results are crystallized in terms that can be rightly labeled 'canon.'[8] With these definitions in view, it is now time to address Childs.

In his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture,* Childs argued for the priority of the "final form" of the "canonical context" as found in the Masoretic tradition, which he considered to be the "vehicle" of retrieval and understanding for the canonical text of the OT.[9] The heart of Childs' canon terminology seems, though this is where he confuses almost everyone, to be in the authoritative actualization of the text for future generations. He says: "the heart of the canonical process lay in transmitting and ordering the authoritative tradition in a form which was compatible to function as scripture for a generation which had not participated in the original events of revelation. The ordering of the tradition for this new function involved a profoundly hermeneutical activity, the effects of which are now built into the structure of the canonical text."[10] Here "canonical" seems to be concerned with the *authority* of the final form of the text. Childs labels Israel's growing awareness of the text's authority beyond its particular historical situation in terms of a "canon

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[6] STEINS, *Abschlussphänomen*, 506.

[7] SEITZ, "Canonical Approach," 67; Cf. SHEPPARD, *Future of the Bible*, 29.

[8] STEINS, *Abschlussphänomen*, 509, instead of the terms "Formierung" and "Ablschuss" Steins prefers the terms "Halte" or "Kristallisationspunkte," in order to make room for additional texts in the Greek tradition and Qumran. Cf. CHAPMAN, "Canon Debate," 284, who uses the language of "delimitation" and "hardening of boundaries" for the canon.

[9] This is not the place to set out Childs' approach or critique it in detail. Both NOBLE, *Canonical Approach*, and BRETT, *Crisis*, attempt to explain Childs, but each in different ways fails to get at the heart of Childs' approach. For a careful and insightful assessment of Childs revealing Noble's and Brett's shortcomings and explaining how the evaluations of Barr and Barton have led to a misunderstanding of Childs, see DRIVER, *Biblical Theologian*; cf. SEITZ, "Canonical Approach," 58–110.

[10] CHILDS, *OT as Scripture*, 60.

consciousness."[11] Following his form-critical instincts, for Childs, 'canon' denotes the text's *scriptural authority* that has been invested in the final *form* of the text*,* as the title of his introduction suggests;[12] the form of the OT is scripture. This is why Childs is so concerned by those who break apart the categories of scripture and canon – he considers them, at least at times, synonymous. Within Childs' approach it is meaningful to speak of an "open canon" because the "formation of the canon was not a late extrinsic validation of a corpus of writings, but involved a series of decisions deeply affecting the shape of the books."[13] In other words, the authoritative force that led to the formation of the canon is present at earlier stages in the process. Canonization is not a dogmatic judgment passed down from above, but rather one at work in the canonical process. Thus "the earlier decisions were not qualitatively different from the later."[14]

It is vital to note that Childs talks about the canonical process affecting the shape of the individual books, but not the shape of the OT corpus, or, for that matter, how the individual books were shaped in relationship to each others during the canonical process. In practice, Childs' investigation focuses on the individual books though at times he speaks of larger collections. For instance, he notes a cross-referencing phenomenon between the Former and the Latter Prophets. Concluding that the sequence of the Latter Prophets is insignificant, he goes on: "the major effect of the canonical process lay in the shaping of the *individual prophetic books*, and in producing a new entity of a prophetic collection which functions within the canon as a unified block over against the Law."[15] His nods toward the canon's structure are rare and undeveloped, at least in his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. His continual defenses of the Hebrew canon's limits appear to stem from a concern to determine which books are authoritative regardless of the canon's structure. Thus when Childs says that "canonical" "denotes a context from which the literature is being understood,"[16] this is not primarily in terms of intertextuality, as in Genesis read in the context of the rest of the canon, or more specifically in its place as the first book of the Law,[17] but rather in terms of the canonical context, meaning the final form of the text as opposed to the history

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[11] Ibid..

[12] For more on this see DRIVER, *Biblical Theologian*.

[13] CHILDS, *OT as Scripture*, 59.

[14] Ibid..

[15] Ibid., 310, italics mine. This statement includes the Twelve.

[16] Ibid., 16.

[17] CHILDS, "Intertextual," 180, critiques Moberly for "not following the canonical structure" by which he means the sequence of Genesis followed by Exodus and not the reverse. He alleges if Moberly had followed this canonical sequence, "a very different interpretation emerges." This article was published in 2003, 24 years after the publication of his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. It appears that the importance of canonical sequence began to be a concern for Childs late in his career.