In the past decade, the questions of (1) whether or not the Psalter received its final form as a result of an intentional arrangement by post-exilic editors, and, if it did, (2) what ritual or thematic impulses drove them, have been at the forefront of Psalms study in the academy. The answer today to the first question is usually "yes," while the answer to the second varies greatly. This line of inquiry actually has its roots in the nineteenth century--and even much earlier--but the current interest is no more than a decade or two old (see my *The Structure of Psalms 93-100* [1997] 1-19, for the most recent survey of the literature).

Norman Whybray has written a book-length treatment in which he answers "no" to the first question, which renders moot the second. He concludes that "There is no evidence that there was a systematic and purposeful redaction of the whole Psalter in any of the suggested ways" (p. 119). The most he is willing to concede is that Brueggemann's approach--which views the collection very broadly, "bounded by obedience [Psalm 1] and praise [Psalm 150]"--could possibly account for the present editorial arrangement (pp. 121-22). His is the first book devoted to the question of the Psalter's editorial arrangement that sees nothing significant about its final form since C. T. Niemeyer's *Het probleem van de rangschikking der Psalmen* (1950).

Whybray begins by surveying the major works that have argued recently for an editorial unity in the Psalter, judging almost all to be deficient in one way or another (chap. 1). In chaps. 2-4, he sets out to test possible perspectives from which the Psalter might have been edited. The first is a private, pietistic wisdom or Torah perspective, the second an eschatological (re)interpretation of the royal psalms, and the third an antisacrificial reinterpretation. He examines the content and placement of the major psalms of each type, searching for evidence of a "systematic" late redaction and reinterpretation. In each case, he judges that no such evidence exists.
Perhaps the most appropriate response to Whybray's work is to say that it would better have been attempted twenty years from now. That is, to level the sustained attack that Whybray does on such a new approach is not entirely legitimate. It is to be expected in almost any new area of study that there should be widely divergent approaches and answers to the basic questions, at least initially. The fact that scholars disagree here and there should not be as troubling as Whybray makes it out to be. He even uses such scholarly disagreements to suggest that nothing can be said one way or another on a given topic, rather than acknowledging that sometimes such disagreements are the necessary prelude to substantive advances in knowledge (e.g., his discussion of how scholars have dealt with the relationship between Psalms 1 and 2 [pp. 78-81]; cf my discussion in Structure, 202-5).

While Whybray has read broadly and carefully in most instances, many of his criticisms ignore work that has been done or create straw figures. For example, although he interacts extensively with Gerald Wilson's work, and criticizes it for being overly broad or impressionistic, he essentially ignores, among other things, Wilson's careful laying of the methodological foundations, whereby he shows legitimate Mesopotamian and Qumran collections of hymnic and psalmic materials that exhibit precisely the type of organizing principles that he then points out in the Psalter (Wilson, The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter [1985] 13-138). Unfortunately, this aspect of Wilson's work has not been very widely noticed. Elsewhere, Whybray devotes attention (chap. 4) to a proposal that no Psalms scholar advances, to my knowledge: that one should expect a redaction from an anti-sacrificial perspective. Here, Whybray has created a problem of his own making and used it to further his case against editorial shaping. Sometimes, he requires an overly precise burden of proof, as when he admits that in several locations the placement of wisdom and Torah psalms is clearly intentional, and yet he is unwilling to concede that this may indicate anything of a systematic wisdom editing (p. 78). Yet many scholars would argue that James Mays ("The Place of Torah-Psalms in the Psalter," JBL 106 [1987]) and Kenneth Kuntz ("Wisdom Psalms and the Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter," SBL Seminar Papers 1992), among others, have made a good start to showing precisely that. Similarly, concerning the broad outlines drawn by Westermann, Childs, Wilson, and others, Whybray draws negative conclusions about their suggestions because, in his estimation, they are overly broad or vague, whereas many scholars find such formulations convincing, or at least helpful starting points from which to pursue the question with more precision.

For Psalms scholars to be successful in identifying clearly by what editorial processes the Psalter came together and what are its overarching themes, research must proceed along at least four fronts. (1) Macrostructures: Most of the research to date is devoted to this level, and it needs to continue. It alone, however, cannot answer the questions definitively. (2) Microstructures: More attention needs to be devoted to the intricate networks of lexical and other connections between and among individual psalms and psalm groupings, including the redactional dynamics where preexisting collections begin...
and end. (3) Semantic Fields: A new approach employed by Jerome Creach (*The Choice of Yahweh’s Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* [1996]) traces the influence of a significant lexeme (*xs*) and its semantic field on the editorial process. Doubtless further such work using other lexemes will be very revealing. (4) Parallels: Further research on other biblical collections (e.g., Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Twelve), as well as extrabiblical ones (e.g., Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Qumran) should offer further insights and controls on the research on the Psalms.

In sum, Whybray is to credited with shining a critical light on this area of research and presenting some valid challenges, but his is by no means the last word.