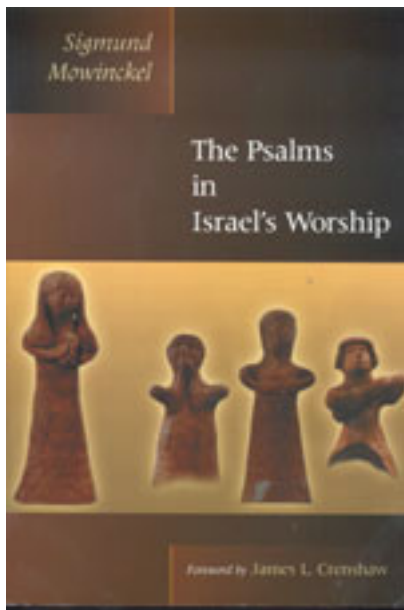


RBL 07/2005



**Mowinckel, Sigmund**

***The Psalms in Israel's Worship***

Translated by D. Ap-Thomas

The Biblical Resource Series

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004. Pp. 605. Paper. \$40.00.  
ISBN 0802828167.

Erhard S. Gerstenberger  
Philipps-Universität Marburg  
Marburg D-35032, Germany

One of the two standard works of the age of form criticism is available again (the other being H. Gunkel and J. Begrich, *Introduction to the Psalms*, first German edition 1932)! Originally S. Mowinckel published this compendium of his psalm research at the age of sixty-seven in Norwegian under the title *Offersang og sangoffer* (1951). The English translation, done expertly by D. R. Ap-Thomas, came out in 1962 in a joint venture of Basil Blackwell of Oxford and Abingdon (Nashville). The author was able to contribute a short preface to the English edition, exposing some of his basic intentions; it is contained in both the original English edition and the present reprint. How did the re-editors of Mowinckel's work proceed in order to get it on the market again almost half a century after its first appearance?

The main concern of the modern editors apparently was to give to present-day readers the most authentic English version extant on this globe. (We may muse about a certain suspicion that economic interests dictated this approach, though.) They, in fact, simply used the old plates of the first English edition, which may have survived in Oxford, to reproduce the body of Mowinckel's book. That is to say, although the reprint now unites the two original volumes into one stately, and economical, paperback, the text is structured in a bipartite way. Pagination runs from 1 through 246, putting seven chapters

into “volume 1,” that is, the first part of the new edition. Immediately following we find the front-page of “volume 2,” another full table of contents (chs. 8–23) taken from the original plates, and the traditional text of the second volume comprising pages 1–302, including list of abbreviations, bibliography, and indices of old. Of course, quotations of and references to this very often cited book in this way stay exactly the same and are directly identifiable. On the other hand, it should prove somewhat cumbersome to have two different pagination-systems between just two book-covers.

Other consequences of the drive for authenticity are more disturbing. The original copy, so it seems, has been taken from the archives, cleaned, photographed, and made the completely unaltered matrix of the new book. Thus all errors of setters, printers, former editors, and every possible awkwardness on the side of the translator are neatly preserved in the new book. I fully realize the technical difficulties of meddling with old set type. There are no suitable signs available to make adequate corrections. Still, it is annoying to stumble across the very same misprints and errors already encountered in the old first edition. (e.g., “mother goddess” [1:51 line 7]; “kind” instead of “king” [1:67 line 26]; “Chap. XIV.3” instead of “XIII.3” [1:97 line 2]; “pp. 238f” instead of “228f.” [1:238 line 11]; there is a mess-up of footnotes on 1:14, notes 54–56, which do not confer; hundreds of errors can be discovered, and the number of awkward renderings in English is equally high). The minimum one would like to expect of an undertaking like this, in my opinion, is a comprehensive list of “corrigenda” added to the new book. But that is missing, and the problem of using the old copy is not even addressed by the editors, who, by the way, stay anonymous altogether.

The very first segment of the book, however, has been reworked typographically or, for that matter, does constitute an addition to and a certain evaluation of Mowinckel’s great compendium. The pages concerned indeed display a modern type-script. Several parts simply have been transcribed from the old originals, thus the lengthy table of contents for both volumes (v–xvii), giving headlines for subchapters and, as a rule, little abstracts of what they contain. In general, the typist has done a good job. Several errors of the old tableau have been corrected, separating dashes have been replaced by decorative dots. The format of the pages was adapted to the measurements of the book. The use of cursive signs is different from that in the first edition. Chapter headings are in bold face as against caps in the old book. Modernization has made its way. Hyphenization, though, is miserable (no block-setting, like in the original). Some obvious mistakes and omissions, however, have not been discovered, for example, in the listing of chapter 17 (p. xiv). While the missing numeral “3” has been added to the title of the third subsection, nobody noticed the absence of a fourth headline: “4. Mystical trends in the psalms, p. 143” (of the second volume). Similarly, nobody took offense at the Scandinavian-Germanic word “tradents” instead of “transmitters” (xiii, in chapter 15, no. 3: “The singers as tradents of

the psalm tradition, 94”). British “metre” for American “meter” (xv) remained unchallenged. So there is something to be criticized in redaction policy and execution. The short prefaces of author and translator of 1961 (xli–xliv) have been transformed into modern typescript; they indeed give an inkling of the contemporaneous discussion of the psalms.

Most important to a new edition of the veteran handbook on the Psalms is James L. Crenshaw’s compact and rich foreword (xix–xxxii), venturing to locate Mowinckel’s summarizing study in the history of exegesis, followed up by a succinct list of further readings. Each of the books given (xxxiii–xl) is briefly characterized to inform the Bible student of research and theological interpretation after 1962 down to our own time. To localize Mowinckel in the context of past and present Psalm exegesis, Crenshaw briefly and competently sketches developments from Qumranic interpretation to present-day conceptualizations. The Enlightenment for Crenshaw is a certain scholarly watershed; he pointedly includes Jewish exegesis in his purview. Lately, he notes, psalm interpretation is reverting to canonical, integralistic approaches. But the historian of psalm exegesis has only fifteen pages to spend on an immense field of study. Small wonder, therefore, that he is not able to work out in more detail the specific, ongoing discussions around the real Mowinckelian topics of Psalm research: cultic use of extant Hebrew psalms; festivals of enthronement, New Year, liberation; relationship between prophets and psalms; function and use of “learned psalmography,” and so on. Another essay would have been in order for such very important issues to be properly voiced. These hints about the continuing impact of S. Mowinckel’s psalm research on present-day scholarship may suffice at this point. I could refer to my own review of the first edition of *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, which I wrote more than forty years ago (*JBL* 82 [1963]: 333–36). My thinking has been very much influenced by S. Mowinckel (and, of course, also by H. Gunkel), so that I am extremely happy to be able to comment now, so much later, on the new edition of his famous work and recommend it to all people who love the Hebrew psalms for deep and extensive study.