

PSALM STUDIES

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PSALM STUDIES

By

Sigmund Mowinckel

Translated by

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The reader of this translation of Sigmund Mowinckel's classic series of *Psalm Studies* may well find it useful to take account of some of the technical problems encountered in the task of translating and the solutions adopted by the translator. The most prominent challenge, of course, was Mowinckel's German. As a native Norwegian who professed discomfort with the German language and German culture in general, Mowinckel's German diction, consistently prolix, often veers from idiomatic, frequently lacks variety in its vocabulary, and sometimes degenerates into near-pidgin, "Germwegian." Concerns for gender-inclusivity lie far in the future, of course, as do multi-cultural sensitivities, although Mowinckel avoided the blatant anti-Semitism expressed by many Lutheran theologians writing in the 1920s and 1930s. Consequently, this translator faced the typical conundrum: whether to employ an approach, often termed formal correspondence, that would reflect not only the substance of Mowinckel's language but also its style, or to convey the substance in the translator's characteristic English. The translation contained herein is meant as a compromise: evidence of Mowinckel's cultural setting has not been obscured; the English, it is hoped, is idiomatic but often less elegant than it would have been were it my original work. Languages other than German have been left untranslated.

Almost the equal of this fundamental challenge has been Mowinckel's lack of consistency with regard to mechanical details, inconsistency perhaps compounded by the span of time over which these six studies were produced: sources are often cited by author only; when cited in fuller form, bibliographic details are often incorrect; several systems of transliteration are apparent; for reasons I have been unable to discern, Mowinckel sometimes transliterates Hebrew words and sometimes produces them in Hebrew font. With regard to documentation, I, complemented by the editor, have supplied the full data, insofar as it has been possible to reconstruct it. Many of the cited works are no longer in print, of course, and several are no longer in circulation. No doubt, the care and effort exerted notwithstanding, there are yet omissions and errors. *Caveat lector!* With regard to the Hebrew, transliterations have been standardized, but Mowinckel's inexplicable distinction

between transliterated and reproduced Hebrew has been retained. Mowinckel published a second edition of the complete *Psalm Studies* with accompanying addenda and corrigenda. They have been incorporated into the body of the work at the appropriate point.

It is an honor to play a role in making Mowinckel's classic more readily available. Readers may well find, as I have, that summaries of Mowinckel's thought are but poor reflections of the original, that Mowinckel's positions developed and even changed over the time he spent working on the Psalter, and that many of the issues he confronted and positions he represented continue to dominate the discussion among students of the Psalms.

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PSALM STUDIES 1

'ĀWEN AND THE PSALMS OF INDIVIDUAL LAMENT

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PREFACE

I came to the understanding of the word 𐤒𐤍 and the psalms of individual lament presented and substantiated here more than ten years ago, after reading Heinrich Zimmern's translations of Babylonian psalms.¹ I had already presented this understanding orally for some years to my theological friends and students.² Here, for the first time, I test and substantiate it from all sides.³

My understanding of the psalms, as can easily be seen, stands on the foundation of Gunkel's works. As the reader will see, however, I consider it necessary to liberate what is new in Gunkel from its bondage to older views. One must proceed via Gunkel; however, if one wishes properly to understand the psalms of individual laments, one must play Gunkel against Gunkel.

Two matters are noteworthy.

First, one must be able fully to appreciate the importance of the cult in religion and not, as Protestant theologians are so inclined, to disparage cultic religion as though it were absolutely different in kind to ethical and personal religion.

One must, then, with sympathy and understanding, delve into the worldview and thought patterns of primitive human beings—the word *primitive* is not meant derogatorily.

What I am able to contribute in this respect, I owe to Vilhelm Grönbech. In his well-planned and ingeniously executed work, *Vor Folkeæt I Oldtiden*, he succeeded in empathizing with and depicting the primitive view and con-

1. *Babylonische Busspsalmen* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1885).

2. See Anton Fridrichsen, *Hagios-Qadoš* (Kristiania: Dybwad, 1916), 68.

3. Before typesetting could begin, Johannes Pedersen's *Israel: Sjaeleliv og Samfundsliv* [*Israel: Its Life and Culture*] (2 vols.; Copenhagen: Pio, 1920) appeared. In it the author asserted that the same understanding of the word 'āwen and its referent proposed here. I do not know whether Peterson came to his understanding independently of me or whether my comments mentioned above in Fridrichsen's book, to which he refers on page 423, may have given him the first impulse. In any case, I regard this concurrence as confirmation of my understanding.

duct of the world and life as a self-contained entity with great logical force and based on the most primal experience of reality.⁴

4. Published in 4 vols.; Copenhagen: Pio, 1901–1912.