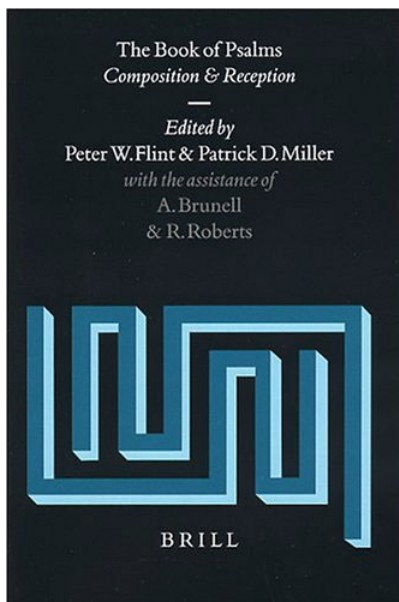


RBL 07/2005



Flint, Peter W., and Patrick D. Miller, eds.

The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception

Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 99; Formation and Interpretation of Old Testament Literature 4

Leiden: Brill, 2005. Pp. xx + 680. Hardcover. \$241.00. ISBN 9004136428.

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Whoever studies the book of Psalms more closely no doubt senses the fascination and the depth of human experience that radiates from its single poetic texts and at the same time from the composition as a whole. Thus, it is not surprising that the Psalms have been received and commented on up to now. Volume 99 of Supplements to Vetus Testamentum and at the same time the fourth volume of Formation and Interpretation of Old Testament Literature to be reviewed here marks a sort of stock-taking that “should serve to identify the issues and concerns that belong generally to the study of the Psalms in the early years of a new millennium, as well as the emphases to be found in the present engagement of those issues by scholars in the field” (1). Therefore, “a wide range of contributors—from Europe, North America, Asia, and Africa—were selected,” whereas such a collection of essays never ever can be exhaustive, as the two editors, Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller Jr., concede. Be that as it may, the two editors—assisted by Aaron Brunell and Ryan Roberts—succeeded in assembling essays by scholars whose listed names read just as the *crème de la crème* of those scholars who dedicate their research mainly to the Psalms.

Generally, the volume is divided up into five parts with twenty-seven essays, each with an individual bibliography of its own at the end. Of course, this is not the place to discuss all the inspiring studies in detail, so that only some are singled out in order to exemplify

the value of the scholarship that comprises that heavy volume ; all the others are just mentioned here. After lists of contributors, terms, sigla and abbreviations, and the editors' "Introduction and Overview of Psalms Scholarship in this Volume" (1–8; incorrectly listed among the essays of the first part of the volume in the table of contents on page v), two essays form part 1, "General Topics." Klaus Koch deals with "Königpsalmen und ihr ritueller Hintergrund: Erwägungen zu Ps 89,20–38 und Ps 20 und ihren Vorstufen" (9–52), a study that has previously been published (in *Ritual und Poesie* [ed. E. Zenger; HBS 18; Fribourg: Herder, 2003], 211–49). Starting with Hermann Gunkel's characterization of the origin of the book of Psalms as "ein Andachts- und Hausbuch für Laien" (9), Koch then defines the relationship between "poetics" and "ritual" and how they refer to the king. Even if readers may be struck by some peculiar German spellings—for example "Jahwäh" and "Papyros"—Koch presents a fundamental thesis backed by concise deductions from Pss 89 and 20. Then Rolf Rendtorff concentrates on "The Psalms of David: David in the Psalms" (53–64), a somewhat central topic of the Psalms because seventy-three of them include the name of David (in the Septuagint even 84 and Ps 151) in their headings and/or text bodies. The question he tries to answer is: "what David is it who could be seen as the author of psalms"? (53).

Part 2 of the volume is titled "Commentary on or Interpretation of Specific Psalms." This second section, comprising twelve essays, is opened by Adele Berlin's "Psalms and the Literature of Exile: Psalms 137, 44, 69, and 78" (65–86), before David Noel Freedman and David Miano tackle the problem of "Non-acrostic Alphabetic Psalms" (87–96) in a quite technical way and conclude that, for instance, "the alphabetic pattern is not confined to the acrostic poems of the Bible but carries over into over poems" (95). However, this is not that surprising to those familiar with the *Sibylline Oracles* or papyri from the Greco-Roman period. Then Sigmund Mowinckel's theory of the enthronement is reviewed by J. J. M. Roberts ("Mowinckel's Enthronement Festival: A Review" [97–115]). Beat Weber circumscribes the phenomenon of "Stimmungsumschwung," the spontaneous alternation between complaints and requests or even pleas in some psalms ("Zum sogenannten 'Stimmungsumschwung' in Psalm 13" [116–38]). Weber is right in criticizing the term "Stimmungsumschwung" initially because this German compound may be misleadingly understood as a change of atmosphere or emotions (116 n. 1). Finally, he formulates criteria for a further assessment of Ps 13 (131–36).

Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford presents "An Intertextual Reading of Psalms 22, 23, and 24" (139–52) principally based on the structure of the three texts, and D. Pardee focuses "On Psalm 29: Structure and Meaning" (153–83). Even if Pardee's scrutinizing research on Ps 29 is impressive, it remains disputable whether the structure of a text should be of such a great importance for its meaning as some of Pierre Auffret's studies illustrate, in which he overstresses structure as a means of interpretation of specific psalms. The next three

essays deal with other individual psalms: John S. Kselman writes about “Double Entendre in Psalm 59” (184–89), Richard J. Clifford about “Psalm 90: Wisdom Meditation or Communal Lament?” (190–205), and Michael L. Barré about “The Shifting Focus of Psalm 101” (206–23). Then the final three essays of part 2 are dedicated to more universal topics and deal with specific traits: Sung-Hun Lee describes “The Lament and the Joy of Salvation in the Lament Psalms” (224–47), Craig C. Broyles offers fresh insights into “Psalms concerning the Liturgies of Temple Entry” (248–87), and James W. Watts sheds new light on “Biblical Psalms outside the Psalter” (288–309).

Part 3 comprises six essays, and its heading—“The Psalter as Book, Including Smaller Collections”—is programmatic. First of all, Harry P. Nasuti addresses “The Interpretive Significance of Sequence and Selection in the Book of Psalms” (311–39). J. Clinton McCann Jr. detects a correlation between “The Shape of Book I of the Psalter and the Shape of Human Happiness” (340–48). Michael Goulder reflects upon “The Social Setting of Book II of the Psalter” (349–67) based on “the order in which the psalms have been placed in the Psalter, and the Headings that introduce them” (366). Klaus D. Seybold reveals a quite logical history of book 4 of the Psalter in his “Zur Geschichte des Vierten Davidpsalters (Pss 138–145)” (368–90). The royal psalms are in the center of interest of Gerald H. Wilson’s “King, Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter” (391–406) and Erich Zenger’s “Theophanien des Königsgottes JHWH: Transformationen von Psalm 29 in den Teilkompositionen Ps 28–30 und Ps 93–100” (407–42).

Personally, I most favor part 4—“Textual History and Reception in Judaism and Christianity”—due to my involvement in translating and commenting on the Septuagint in the project *Septuaginta Deutsch*. As usual, Albert Pietersma presents his theses in a clear and concise way and without beating about the bush. His “Septuagintal Exegesis and the Superscription of the Greek Psalter” (443–75) starts off with some preliminary remarks on “translation,” “meaning,” and “interpretation” before he exemplifies levels of interpretation with the help of some subcategories. So we have “interpretation by transcription,” that is, names or words not understood by the translator (such as $\mu\alpha\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\theta$); “interpretation at the word level” (e.g., $\psi\alpha\lambda\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ or $\acute{\omega}\delta\eta$ for specific Hebrew words); “interpretation at the phrase level” (see $\psi\alpha\lambda\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ $\acute{\omega}\delta\eta\varsigma$ in Pss 29; 47; 66; 89; 91; and $\acute{\omega}\delta\eta$ $\psi\alpha\lambda\mu\omicron\upsilon$ in Pss 65; 82; 87; 107 and other examples of longer phrasings); “interpretation at the sentence level,” something he denominates for Ps 3 as “intra-clausal exegetical activity” (471); and “interpretation at the paragraph level.” Pietersma offers a vast amount of data on the superscriptions that has to be proved in detail and may help to interpret those interesting features of the Septuagint more appropriately in the future.

Moshe J. Bernstein brings in a Jewish perspective in his “A Jewish Reading of Psalms: Some Observations on the Method of the Aramaic Targum” (476–504) and so helps to widen the scope of the present volume. Unfortunately, probably due to its possibly late date the Aramaic Targum is often neglected in research. However, it can help to avoid some misinterpretations of the Psalms. Bernstein demonstrates the value of this Targum for Psalms studies by concentrating on some exemplary texts. Again—as noted by Pietersma for the Septuagint—here the translation (into Aramaic) marks a first step of exegesis and, thus, interpretation. Analogously, the significance of the Syriac must be pointed out. Robert J. V. Hiebert, too, does so occasionally in his “The Place of the Syriac Versions in the Textual History of the Psalter” (505–36), but he focuses on a comparison of the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and Syriac versions for a few psalms. Therefore, he successfully demonstrates “the textual relationships that exist among the profiled versions” (532). On page 535 he provides a supplemented apparatus of Rahlfs’s *Psalmi cum Odis* for Pss 23; 24; and 4. In order to get an even more complete picture of the role the Syriac tradition played and still has for an appropriate exegesis of the Psalms, the reader should not make a break here and immediately continue with Harry F. van Rooy’s “The Psalms in Early Syriac Tradition” (537–50). Finally, Craig A. Evans introduces his “Praise and Prophecy in the Psalter and in the New Testament” (551–79): “Quotations of and allusions to the Psalter abound in the New Testament.” This is a definite *must* for the interpreters of the New Testament and should be read together with Ulrich Rösen-Weinhold’s monograph *Der Septuagintapsalter im Neuen Testament: Eine textgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004).

Part 5—“Theology of the Psalter”—somewhat summarizes the previous essays on a hermeneutical basis. First Walter Brueggemann discusses the practical use of the Psalms (“The Psalms in Theological Use: On Incommensurability and Mutuality” [581–602]) and applies his results to our present-day situation by writing (600): “My concern in the end, however, looks through these theological issues and beyond them to the crisis of humanness now to be faced in our culture. I suggest that it is precisely an uncriticized incommensurability ... that is fundamentally at work in the brutalizing military and economic power among us.” Later he continues: “It is mutuality that permits the lesser, denied, silenced ones to dare make noises about their worth and their future, noises that oddly enough are heeded.” Basically that is what the Psalter is all about. Correctly and definitely well chosen to be the final essay of such a massive volume Erhard S. Gerstnerberger’s “Theologies in the Book of Psalms” (603–25) once more refers to the uniqueness and at the same time manifold character of the Psalter as a whole, a fascination that is still responsible for the ongoing popularity of the book of Psalms.

Detailed indices—in quite a small font—enable the readers to find their way easily through the more than six hundred pages of excellent studies on the Psalms: Scripture,

Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, other ancient writings, and modern authors (627–80).

Without any doubt this volume represents the fascinating facets of the finest scholarly research into the book of Psalms, in other words, the actual and present state of the art. Those who are seriously interested in the Psalms will have to utilize the wide-ranging studies offered in this volume by leading experts in the field.