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"Review of *Court Oracles in the Psalms: The So-Called Royal Psalms in their Ancient Near Eastern Context*"

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sociological research (e.g., by S. B. Reid) concerning the identity of the group that produced chaps. 10–12, R. adds that the group was a pacifist party made up of scribes formerly employed by the Seleucids.

This is not a technical commentary with translation and text-critical notes, and R. does not presuppose a knowledge of the biblical languages. The commentary falls between academic rigor and popular treatment accessible to lay people in the church. The professional scholar will find here an excellent discussion of previous work on Daniel, as well as R.'s new insights. The book would serve well in college and seminary classes and would be quite helpful for parish priests, pastors, and professional workers in the church. The commentary could be used by groups studying the Bible, if the lay people involved were particularly ambitious.

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SCOTT R. A. STARBUCK, *Court Oracles in the Psalms: The So-called Royal Psalms in Their Ancient Near Eastern Context* (SBLDS 172; Atlanta: Scholars, 1999). Pp. xx + 271. \$37.

In this dissertation completed at Princeton Theological Seminary under the direction of J. J. M. Roberts, Starbuck argues that the oracles incorporated into Psalms 2, 89, 110, and 132 communicate Yahweh's promises to make Israel "a secure royal nation and a light to the peoples, with or without a king" (p. 212). These oracular royal psalms do not express a uniform royal ideology that is the polar opposite of a radical Yahwism. Rather, each psalm merits an examination of the distinctive *traditio* by which it reached its canonical form. In the particular formation of the diverse royal psalms, from early monarchical to postexilic times, S. sees the theological vitality of those psalms emerge. The heart of his study is the detailed textual and exegetical examination of Psalms 2, 89, 110, 132 and of the royal compositions in Isa 8:23b–9:5; 2 Sam 23:1b–7. To prepare the way for such an examination, S. reviews selected scholarly positions on the royal psalms over the past 150 years, gathers comparative data on royal hymns and prayers from other ancient Near Eastern kingdoms, and briefly examines the nonoracular royal psalms (Psalms 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, and 144).

Starbuck notes that the number of psalms which scholars included in the category of "royal psalms" has varied over the past 150 years, because no consensus has been reached on the definition of a royal psalm or on the criteria for inclusion in this category. For Gunkel, a psalm was royal because of its royal content, not because of its distinctive form or *Sitz im Leben*. Within the category of royal psalms Mowinckel included not only those with royal content but also those that might have been recited or performed by the king. Efforts to reconstruct the cultic setting of the royal psalms were built on the assumption that royal psalms were standard texts used for such festivals as the coronations, weddings, and royal anniversaries of several Judaeian and Israelite kings, but S. claims that no textual or archaeological evidence supports the contention that royal psalms were reused by several kings in "stock liturgies."

Starbuck supports his challenge to the reconstruction of stock liturgies as the setting for the royal psalms by drawing upon comparative data in the royal hymns and prayers of other ancient Near Eastern kingdoms. In those neighboring kingdoms, the royal hymns were used in celebrating particular kings, and royal prayers were used in interceding with the gods on behalf of particular kings; in such compositions the king for whom they were composed was named explicitly. In striking contrast, S. notes, a particular king is never named in the Hebrew royal psalms (except in the "Last Words of David," 2 Sam 23:1b-7). He also claims that royal hymns and prayers were never reused or reappropriated *in toto* by later kings, that although motifs, images, structures, and themes of previous compositions might be copied, they were not used in later compositions of another king without modification. Noting, however, that some lyrical prayers in common use were taken over by kings and identified as a prayer of a named king, S. concludes that practice in the ancient Near East would have made it difficult to create standardized royal psalms that could have been used by successive kings without modification or adaptation.

Why, then, are the royal psalms of the canonical psalter anonymous compositions? The answer, according to S., is to be found in the particularities of the tradition history of each psalm, not in the general use of royal psalms as standardized prayers in royal worship. In the conclusion to the book, S. speculates that the names of kings were removed from the Hebrew royal psalms when they were separated from a cultic setting, perhaps by disciples of Isaiah when they were editing Second Isaiah, before the Davidic Psalter was compiled.

Starbuck's examination of the nonoraacular royal psalms (Psalms 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 144) has led him to conclude that each of these psalms was incorporated into the Psalter for singular reasons; they were not drawn from a preexisting group of royal psalms to fit an editorial strategy calling for royal psalms. While an editor seems to have placed Psalms 2, 72, and 89 in their current position in the canonical Psalter because of their royal character, such does not seem to have been the case for the other royal psalms.

Starbuck defines a royal psalm as a composition, focused upon the institution of kingship, in which the unnamed king is "a typological representative of the 'office' of the institution," so he claims that a royal psalm promotes the ideals of kingship without idealizing a specific king. Such royal psalms, expressing commitment to the institution of kingship, could serve the Israelite community in postmonarchical times as well as in monarchical times, because they promoted ideals for imitation by the people as well as by kings.

Starbuck minimizes but does not eliminate royal ritual as a recoverable component in the reconstruction of the *Sitz im Leben* of royal psalms. For example, in his study of Psalm 132, he notes that the author of this psalm drew upon earlier liturgical material and shaped it into a prayer on behalf of David and his monarchy, but he does so with the idea that this psalm was composed in the ninth century, shortly after secession of the Northern Kingdom. He wants to emphasize the role of particular historical factors rather than of hypothetical liturgical patterns in the *Sitz im Leben* of royal psalms. However, in S.'s analysis of the royal psalms, the potential of

using repetitive ritual forms of expression to communicate the theological dimension of royal rule appears to be shortchanged in favor of the role of the scribes in tapping this dimension through the creativity of their compositions.

This is a rewarding, provocative study whose author draws fruitfully upon comparative materials to support a tradition-historical interpretation of the royal psalms. It is equipped with indexes of authors, of general items, and of biblical and extrabiblical texts.

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ZIPORA TALSHIR, *1 Esdras: From Origin to Translation* (SBLSCS 47; Atlanta: Scholars, 1999). Pp. xii + 305. \$57.

Talshir's investigation of 1 Esdras consists of three main parts: first, the book is compared with Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah in order to establish its *raison d'être*; second, T. offers a text-critical analysis of the *Vorlage* of the portions of text that are paralleled in the MT; third, T. analyzes the translation technique of the translator in order to outline the milieu in which he worked. T. concludes that the book reflects a thorough redaction from a Hebrew-Aramaic work, but that both its *Vorlage* and the text preserved in the MT underwent substantial changes. First Esdras is a revision of parts of Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah during the second century B.C.E., whose sole purpose was to incorporate the story of the three youths (chaps. 3-4). This story was added to provide Zerubbabel a more prominent role in the narrative of the return from exile. The interpolation of the story results in an incoherent composition, because the return of Zerubbabel is related both in the story and in the canonical portion of the text.

Talshir's main argument that 1 Esdras was created around the story of the youths is well supported. Zerubbabel's role is made more prominent at various places in the text (e.g., 4:44, 51, 57; 5:5) and by the tasks he performs. At the same time, Nehemiah's role is suppressed, and his activities are transferred to Zerubbabel. The dating is based on T.'s examination of some of the vocabulary, and particularly on some choices that seem dependent upon Daniel. Though T. contends that 1 Esdras was written to magnify Zerubbabel, she has no explanation for why this occurred. Perhaps this is explored more thoroughly in the commentary that is to follow. The presentation of the content could have been improved through even more editing by someone who knows English well. Occasionally the reader is struck by an odd choice of a word, but the argument is affected as well.

The examination of translation technique provides numerous examples of a variety of phenomena that roughly follow the criteria for literalism espoused by Emanuel Tov and James Barr. T.'s view that the story of the youths reflects translation Greek has some merit, but is not totally compelling. The argument is also hampered when she determines that certain characteristics of the work are similar to the NT, since the NT is not translation Greek! On the other hand, T. seems to be using "NT" to refer exclusively to the Gospels and Acts, though this distinction hardly helps her