Psalm of Kings, King of Psalms
The Formation and Theology of Psalm 72
in light of the Redaction of the Psalter

Theses

1) In its current form the Book of Psalms is not an “amorphous set” of separate poems but a
consciously edited, conceptional work. The methodological consequence of this is that instead of
the entirely isolated analysis of the psalms, the broader literary context – also relevant for the
analysis of the psalms, and represented by (sub)collections and the whole book – must also be
considered. By the parallel assertion of both diachronic and synchronic approaches and by
applying redaction-critical methods, this dissertation aims to contribute to a new paradigm, still in
formation, of contemporary international Psalm research.

2) In the composition of the Book of Psalms those psalms deserve accentuated attention
which are situated at structurally crucial positions. When interpreting these, it is not merely
possible but necessary to overstep the boundaries of the psalm in the interpretation. Considering
how the formation of the Book of Psalms shows a pattern of expansion from the centre outwards,
Ps 72 found its way into the Psalter relatively early; furthermore, it played the decisive role of the
final poem in the structure of its collectional context. Therefore, the literary development of Ps 72
is not independent from the literary development of the Book of Psalms; and the issue of the
formation of Ps 72 cannot be detached from the question of the formation of the book.

3) The analysis of Ps 72, together with the critical revisitation and specification of existing
results of literary- and redaction-criticism, has revealed six literary strata.

The basic stratum of the psalm from the 7th century BC is located in verses 1ab–8.12–
14.16–17a.ab. In the period of the exile, at the middle of the 6th century BC, the poem, once
independent, was integrated into a collection. This was the time Ps 72 became part of the Asaphite
Psalter (Ps 50–83*) and was complemented with the addition 1a.a.4*.14*.20. A more voluminous
extension (Ps 72:9–11) can be dated to the second half of the 6th century BC, reacting to the
international situation changed by the expansion of the Persian Empire and to the end of the
period of exile; in terms of redaction-criticism, this is connected to the compilation of the
Elohistic Psalter (Ps 42–83*). The perspective of the Elohistic Psalter towards gentiles is
reinterpreted by a Korahite appendix edited into the book in the 5th century BC (Ps 84–88*). This
redaction resulted in the additions of Ps 72:15.17a.g.b. Lesser modifications to verses Ps 72:3*.7*
are connected to the redaction of Ps 2–89* edited by the end of the Persian period (the middle of
the 4th century BC). The final, Hellenistic addition to the psalm (ca. 4th/3rd century BC) is the
doxological clause (Ps 72:18–19), placed at the end of the royal psalm by the redactor of Ps 2–
106*.

4) The literary growth of Ps 72 depicts a theological relecture process in close connection to
the formation of the theological conception in the book, in which bipolarity is observable between
tendencies of representative (or indirect) theocracy and of absolute (or direct) theocracy which
leaves any earthly ruler out of account.

The current form of the Book of Psalms witnesses to how the transfer of royal psalms
continued after the kingdom was lost; their interpretation, however, was constantly changing in
light of the formation of historical situations and social contexts. The reinterpretation of the
theology of Ps 72 can be observed from the era of monarchy (7th century BC) until the beginning
of the Hellenistic period (3rd century BC). The basic psalm is a theological-liturgical
programmatic text, legitimising the (Judean) king and kingdom, which, when the kingdom is lost,
transforms into a prayer inducing hopes of restoration and reinforcing national identity – as a part
of an early collection of psalms. After the exile, the idea of universality and a “proto-Messianic”
character become enhanced in the psalm; and, finally, the doxology indulges in a dialogue with
direct theocracy. The process of reinterpretation thus appearing in the psalm correlates with the different theological emphases visible during the successive growth of the Book of Psalms. Thus, in the final text of Ps 72, and in its theology, we can observe the conceptional model of the Book of Psalms.