A NOTE ON PS 45,7aa

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In Old Testament research Psalm 45,7aa has often been discussed. The literal translation of this verse would be: ‘Thy throne, God, is for ever and ever’. As in the rest of the first part of the Psalm, vv. 3-10, the suffix of the second pers. masc. sing. of ‘thy throne’, and of ‘thy kingdom’ (v. 7aβ), undoubtedly refers to the king, who is addressed here personally (see v. 2aβ; also 12aa; 16b). This interpretation is adopted in Martin Luther’s translation, the Elberfelder Übersetzung (1897), the Jerusalem Bible² (1980), and is also followed by M.J. HARRIS (1984) and I.R. PORTER (1961). Here ΘΕΟ is taken as a vocative.

The Septuagint translates: ὁ θρόνος σου, ὁ θεὸς; the Vulgata: sedis tua, Deus (Psalterium Gallicanum), thronus tuus, Deus (Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos). In all cases ΘΕΟ, θεὸς and Deus are understood as a vocative.

These translations and interpretations give rise to the question as to whether it is possible in the Old Testament, and more specifically in the Psalms, that an earthly king is addressed as ‘God’. It is not wholly unlikely in view of the fact that the king of Judah/Jerusalem is more than once called ‘son of God’ (2 Sam 7,14; 14,17; 1 Chr 22,16; Ps 2,7), and that God is referred to as the ‘father’ of the king (2 Sam 7,14; 2 Chr 22,10; Ps 89,27). Moreover, the throne and the dynasty of the Judaean king are based on the will of Yahweh (1 Kings 1,37; 1 Chr 17,12; 2 Chr 7,13).

However, it is very unusual to address the human king as God. Therefore many scholars interpret the vocative as ‘O Godlike’, e.g. the Zürcher Übersetzung (Lizenz-ausgabe 1951), Einheitsübersetzung (1980), the commentaries: T.H. GUNKEL⁴ (1926) H. SCHMIDT (1934), H.J. KRAUS (1961), H. RINGGREN (1963); the theological monographs: S. MOWINCKEL (1922), J. SCHILDERBERGER (1959), W. ZIMMERLI² (1975), W.H. SCHMIDT¹ (1987). All these interpretations are influenced by the idea of the oriental ‘Hofstil’ — see H. GREßMANN (1929) and A. NEUWIRTH
(Diss. Graz, 1964). W. STAERK\(^2\) (1920) translates: ‘Gottesheld’, ‘Divine Hero’. It is not worthwhile to dwell here any longer on the method of the myth and ritual school, because in my opinion it is nothing but a transitory period in the history of biblical interpretation — see M. NOTH (1950) and K.H. BERNHARDT (1961).

Since none of these explanations was regarded as satisfying, some scholars preferred to resort to emendations. Let me give some examples. First those based on the fact that Ps 45 belongs to the Elohim Psalms. It has been suggested that the original text read מָלְאָךְ instead of מִלְאָךְ, and that the name Yahweh is a misreading of יְהֹוָה. The text originally read: ‘Thy throne will be (will exist) for ever and ever’ (Chr. BRUSTON 1873, J. WELLHAUSEN 1888, B. DUHM\(^2\) 1923, B. HEHN 1921, F. WUTZ 1925, E. KAUTCZCH / A. BERTHOLET\(^4\) 1922).

However, this emendation is not in accordance with the language of the Psalms and especially not with that of Ps 45. Moreover, the use of מָלְאָךְ as verbum finitum is rare. In later Hebrew it came to be used in such a way more generally under the influence of Aramaic. But the authors of the Psalms tried to write in an archaic style.

T.H. GASTER reads instead of יְהֹוָה מִלְאָךְ (1 Sam 13,13; 2 Sam 7,12; Isa 9,6; 1 Chr 17,11). But this conjecture is very unlikely, because of the word order of the verbal sentence: the object at the beginning of the phrase!

The emendation proposed by Ibn Ezra has found more followers. He added a supposedly lost יָשֵׁב after יָשִׁב and read: ‘Thy throne is the throne of God for ever and ever’. He was followed by D. QIMCHI, F. HITZIG (1863/5), H. EWALD\(^3\) (1866), H. GRÄTZ (1882/3), R. DRIVER (1926), E. KÖNIG (1927), C.R. NORTH (1932), J. SCHILDEMBERGER (1957/59), M. BUBER (1962) and R. TOURNAY (1963).

A similar sense is conceivable, if one considers the brachylogic style of Hebrew poetry: ‘Thy throne is (like) God’s for ever and ever’ (I.R. PORTER 1961, I.A. EMERTON 1968). The RSV translates: ‘Your divine throne endures for ever and ever’. (Footnote: ‘Your throne is of God’). T.H. GASTER (see above) regards this Psalm generally as a solemn song or hymn for a wedding ritual, not particularly a song for/of a king, because according to ancient oriental custom every bridegroom and bride were dressed out and regarded as king and queen on their wedding day. However, this interpretation would contradict what is being said in v. 13. But in view of the brachylogic style an emendation of the text is not necessary.