PSALM CXXXII AND THE ROYAL ZION FESTIVAL

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In his monumental commentary on the Psalms\(^1\) H.-J. Kraus avail[s] himself of every occasion to rebut S. Mowinckel's theory of the "New Year Festival" of Yahweh's Royal Inthronization. "There is no trace to be found in these texts (on which Mowinckel bases his thesis, 2 Sam. vi; 1 Kgs viii; Ps. cxxxii) of an accession to the throne by Yahweh" (p. 1059). This is quite acceptable, and few will nowadays oppose it, but Kraus is not willing to give up completely the Cultic King's Ideology of the Scandinavian School. What he is proposing instead, the "Royal Zion Festival"\(^2\) is strikingly similar to the idea of Mowinckel. According to this hypothesis, there was during the Davidic monarchy (from David/Solomon to 587 B.C.) every year on the first day of Tabernacles (15th of Tishri, in the autumn) a festival with a procession and cult-dramatic performance of the hieros logos by which Zion and the Davidic dynasty had been "chosen" by God. The heart of the festival was, of course, the carrying of the Ark into the Temple (first it had to be carried out, however) in remembrance of the first transfer of the Ark from Kiriath-jearim to Jerusalem under David (about 990 B.C.; see 2 Sam. vi) or from the Tent to the Temple under Solomon (about 950 B.C.; see 1 Kgs viii). As the Ark was considered the throne of Yahweh (the footstool, according to others), the idea of an inthronization feast combined with a cultic role for the King does not seem to lie far away, and the date of

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\(^{1}\) *Psalmen* (5th edn., Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1978). This new edition differs from the first (1960) by nearly 200 pages (994 against 1171). I shall refer only to this edition. For a rich bibliography on our Psalm see pp. 1053f. Besides this, there appeared a third part of this commentary in 1979: *Theologie der Psalmen*.

\(^{2}\) Kraus has stuck to this hypothesis ever since his book *Die Königsherrschaft Gottes im Alten Testament* (Tübingen, 1951), pp. 27ff., up to his *Theologie*; cp. p. 146: "Wie aber war das aus Ps 132 zu erschliessende Königliche Zionsfest gestaltet?"
Mowinckel's New Year, the 1st of Tishri, is not far distant either.³

The main source in establishing this cultic drama for Kraus⁴ as well as for Mowinckel⁵ is Ps. cxxxii (besides other psalms, 2 Sam. vi and 1 Kgs viii). This is the only psalm where the Ark is mentioned explicitly, and here the dramatic action of the procession seems to be palpable in verses 6-9, unfortunately the most obscure part of the psalm. Apparently, the whole theory of the Festival hinges on the interpretation of these few lines, which since Mowinckel have stirred the imagination of so many authors. The vivid description of the drama, given by Kraus⁶ mainly from this psalm, is impressive — if taken seriously. In fact, however, there are other eminent scholars who fail to see the evidence for a procession in the psalm,⁷ or even its pre-exilic origin.⁸ How can the weight of a far-reaching theory like the Royal Ideology be based on the shaky foundation of an unexplained psalm verse?

In order to reconsider the interpretation of Ps. cxxxii we should not start from the controversial reference to the Ark, but leave it to the end. It cannot be merely by chance that the Ark is mentioned so little in the psalms. During the nearly six centuries of the Second Temple, when the Book of Psalms received its present form, there was no Ark in the Temple, for the Ark had perished in, or since, the destruction of the first, Solomonic Temple of 587 B.C. It is remarkable that the Ark is mentioned even once, as if to renew the pain its loss must have caused for the faithful in Jerusalem.

Some general considerations will provide a more reliable orientation for the right approach to the psalm from the point of view of method. The text, as is commonly admitted, is relatively well preserved; it is divided symmetrically into two halves of ten verses

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³ This induced J. R. Porter to combine the view of Mowinckel with that of Kraus; see his "The interpretation of 2 Samuel vii and Psalm cxxxii", JTS, N.S. 5 (1954), pp. 161-73.
⁴ The commentary on Ps. cxxxii includes a detailed excursus on the Festival (pp. 1057-61), and he refers to it in other places where he mentions the Festival (e.g. p. 784 on Ps. lxxix).
⁵ See his Psalmenstudien II: Das Thronbesteigungsfest Jahwës und der Ursprung der Eschatologie (Kristiania, 1922), pp. 117-18.
⁶ See the comments on vv.6-10 on pp. 1062-4; similarly Mowinckel, pp. 113-17.
⁷ E.g. A. Weiser, Psalms (London, 1962, E. tr. of Die Psalmen [5th edn, Göttingen, 1959]), pp. 778-80. "There is no question here, as many commentators have assumed, of carrying the Ark in procession; according to v.7 it is, after all, already in the Temple" (p. 781).
⁸ To mention only C. A. and E. G. Briggs, The Book of Psalms 2 (Edinburgh, 1907), p. 468, who put the psalm in "the early Greek period".