SOME OBSERVATIONS ON PSALM LXXXVII

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There is reason for considering Ps. lxxxvii a problematic text. Its opening with a noun with a third person masculine singular pronominal suffix is uncommon; it is often thought that in the first line a stich must be missing. On the whole, the psalm has an abrupt style and displays unusual ideas. The relation between its different statements is not always easy to understand. The end of the poem, v. 7, has been said to be totally unintelligible. The metre is irregular.

I

It is often thought that these problems have been caused by a serious disarrangement of the text. So, apart from emendations of the ordinary type, reconstructions of the textual order have been proposed, often of a drastic nature. The proposals, however, are open to objections:

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2 Apart from smaller transpositions (v. 5b after v. 1b: F. Buhl, BHK II [1909]; v. 6 before v. 4: R. Kittel, KAT XIII [561929]; A. Weiser, ATD 15 [1963]; v. 6 before v. 5: G. Bickell, Carmina Vetus Testamenti metrice [Oeniponte, 1882], p. 60; v. 4c after v. 6: J. Wellhausen, Skizzen und Vorarbeiten VI [Berlin, 1899], p. 180; v. 4c deleted, v. 5aa before v. 7: E. Beaucamp, Laval Théologique et Philosophique 35 [1979], p. 284), I found the following reconstructions:
- l1b, 5b, 2, 3, 6, 4c.a.b, 5a, 7 (W. Staerk, SAT III/1 [1920]);
- l1b, 5b, 6, 2, 3, 4b.c.a, 5a, 7 (Bible du Centenaire);
- 2, 1b, 3, 6a, 4, 6b, 5a, 7, 5b (H. Schmidt, HAT 1/15 [1934]);
- 2, 1b, 5b, 3, 6a, 4, 5b, 6b, 5a, 7 (S. Mowinckel, Psalmenstudien II [Kristiania, 1922], p. 187);
- 2, 1b, 5b, 3, 6, 4ac.b.c, 5a, 7, 4c (W.O.E. Oesterley, The Psalms [London, 1939]);
- 2, 1b, 5b, 3, 7, 6, 4c.a.b, 5a (G. Wanke, BZAW 97 [1966], pp. 21-2);
- 2, 1b, 5b, 4a.b, 5a, 6, 7, 3 (New English Bible);
- 2, 1b, 5b, 6, 3, 4, 5a, 7 (H. Herkenne, HSAT V/2 [1936]);
- 2, 1b, 5b, 7, 3, 6a, 4, 6b, 5a (E. Podechard, Le Psautier II [Lyon, 1954]);
- 2, 1b, 5b, 7, 3, 6, 4c.a.b, 5a (H. Gunkel, HKAT II/2 [1926]; H. J. Kraus, BK XV/2 [1961]).
(a) In spite of common elements and tendencies, reconstructions differ considerably.
(b) It is not made clear, or not sufficiently clear, in what manner the handed-down sequence came into existence.
(c) The reconstructions are not without their problems. Two drawbacks may be mentioned:

1. In several proposals (of W. Staerk, R. Kittel, etc.) v. 6 or v. 6a is placed before v. 4. The seeming advantage of this is that the oracle of v. 4 is supplied with an introduction in which YHWH figures as a subject. However, the statement of v. 4, with 'azkîr, is obviously of a declarative character. It is questionable whether it really links up with v. 6, where YHWH is described as writing or counting.

2. At the suggestion of J. Wellhausen, vv. 4c and 6b are often joined into a single statement “This one was born here, that one was born there”; “this one” and “that one” would refer to Jews or proselytes, “here” and “there” to different countries. One may doubt whether the proposed order is linguistically acceptable. It implies a close connection between vv. 4a and 4b, to the effect that hinneh introduces further objects of 'azkîr. However, hinneh does not seem to occur in this or a comparable position or function anywhere else in the Old Testament. So it would seem that zeh yullad-šám is a necessary complement of v. 4b.

II

The interpretation of Ps. lxxxvii must start from the current Massoretic text, which, to a considerable extent, is supported by the ancient versions. At one point, however, a correction appears to be justified, namely in v. 6a, where the reading biktôb is strange. It is not plausible that only now, in the situation suggested by the poem, are the nations registered by YHWH. The LXX, Theodotion, the Quinta, the Peshîṭta and the Targum speak of a “writing” or a “list”. This supposes a reading bktb (biktâb), which is indeed found in some Hebrew manuscripts and is to be preferred.

Still, it is imaginable that kîthb must be understood here as a “Canaanized” variant of kîthb; see J. W. Wevers, “Psalm 87 and its Sitz im Leben”, Teologinen Aikakauskirja 82 (1977), p. 281, and cf. e.g. R. Meyer, Hebräische Grammatik I (Berlin, 1966), § 23,1 a.—In v. 5a sometimes šêm is inserted on account of the LXX; the original text would read: wlywn 'm (y)mmr, “and Zion will be called a mother”; or, “and I name Zion Mother”. Presumably, however, ymbrp of the LXX is a corrup-