

MARKO MARTTILA

Collective
Reinterpretation
in the Psalms

Forschungen
zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe

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Mohr Siebeck

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Collective Reinterpretation in the Psalms

A Study of the Redaction History of the Psalter

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This book is a revised form of my doctoral dissertation that was publicly defended and accepted at the University of Helsinki in December 2004.

Three kinds of support have been vital for the completion of this study. Firstly, I express my gratitude for the scholarly support. The most important supervisor in all stages of my work was definitely Prof. Dr. Timo Veijola (†) from the University of Helsinki. He initially introduced me to the critical research of the Psalms when I was still doing my master's degree several years ago. And it was Prof. Veijola who gave me the idea of studying the collective passages of the Psalter. Having finished my licentiate thesis (2002) on the topic of the collective reinterpretation of the Psalms, I began to elaborate the material to the full-scale dissertation. Discussions with Prof. Veijola, his vast knowledge of the Deuteronomic / Deuteronomistic literature, his useful bibliographical hints and many critical remarks on my manuscript were invaluable. Prof. Veijola's premature death is an enormous loss to international Old Testament research. It is sad that he did not see the final form of the present book – the book whose writing he had patiently guided. At our Department of Biblical Studies in the University of Helsinki there are many scholars whom I would like to thank in this connection: Prof. Dr. Martti Nissinen has intensively read and commented on my drafts, and he also took part in the preliminary examination of my doctoral thesis. Prof. Nissinen's suggestions and corrections have certainly improved my text. Prof. Dr. Raija Sollamo has also shown a keen interest in my topic ever since I started my doctoral studies. Her knowledge in Qumran and Septuagint studies has been of importance for my theme too. Docent Juha Pakkala has been an inspiring discussion partner especially at the later stage of my work. Discussions with colleagues in the postgraduate seminar for Old Testament studies during the past few years have certainly influenced the final form of my study. Outside the biblical department Prof. Dr. Tapani Harviainen (University of Helsinki) has kindly guided me in the sphere of the Semitic languages and cultures. I express my gratitude to him for all those instructive meetings when he taught me the basics of such languages as Syriac and Ugaritic. The knowledge of these ancient languages has been essential in this psalm study. I have also had an opportunity to share my views with some distinguished German scholars. First of all, I address my deep gratitude to Prof. Dr. Christoph Levin (University of Munich), whose sharp-eyed criticism led me more than once to rethink some of my

conclusions. I admire the energy and dedication of Prof. Levin; he has really read my text with a microscopical accuracy. I am proud and happy that he was the official examiner of my thesis. Furthermore, I thank Prof. Levin for the chance to visit the local “Doktorandenkolloquium” in Munich and present there a short essay. For helpful conversations and critical feedback I also thank Prof. Dr. Bernd Janowski (University of Tübingen), Prof. Dr. Hermann Spieckermann (University of Göttingen) and Dr. Martin Rösel (University of Rostock). Michael Cox, M.A., Lic. Theol., has carefully corrected and revised my English. Therefore I wish to thank him warmly. I am also grateful to Annika Ranta-Kielenniva, M.A., who revised the language after the preliminary examination.

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Thirdly, I wish to offer thanks for the important mental support that my friends and relatives have addressed to me during the years of research. Above all, I would like to thank my dear wife Ritva-Liisa who has been my spouse almost since the origins of this study. Hence she knows best what kind of anguish the process of writing occasionally caused me. But she has also shared those numerous pleasant moments I have had with my study.

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Introduction

1. A Historical Survey of Research

The early Jewish commentary on the Psalms, Midrash Tehillim, offers an interesting explanation of the origin of the book of Psalms. According to this Midrash, “Moses gave to Israel five books of law, and David gave five books of psalms.”¹ This statement reveals an analogy between the Pentateuch and the Psalms. Furthermore, it stresses the role of King David as the composer of the Psalms. This utterance is in line with one of the Qumran Psalm scrolls (11QPs^a), which includes the following sentence: “And he (David) wrote 3,600 psalms.”² Later, Davidic authorship was at least occasionally discussed by the rabbis. The textual material of Psalms is remarkably varied and a basic distinction can be made between individual and communal psalms. Could both of these genres have derived from David himself? This topic occurs in the Babylonian Talmud as a dialogue between a few eminent rabbis, as the following example elucidates.³

תנו רבנן כל שירות ותושבחות שאמר דוד בספר תהלים
רבי אליעזר אומר כנגד עצמו אמרן רבי יהושע אומר כנגד ציבור אמרן

¹ MidrTeh 1:1. I have used A. WÜNSCHE's edition and translation of Midrash Tehillim. WÜNSCHE, *Midrasch*, 2.

² The translation of this passage is by J. A. SANDERS; it can be found in P. W. FLINT's study *The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms*. In this study FLINT also comments on this chapter of the scroll which may be called 'David's Compositions' (11QPs^a, col XXVII); see FLINT, *Scrolls*, 224, 250. In this connection it is worth quoting lines 2–11 of David's Compositions: “(2) And David, the son of Jesse, was wise, and a light like the light of the sun, and literate, (3) and discerning and perfect in all his ways before God and men. And the Lord gave (4) him a discerning and enlightened spirit. And he wrote (5) 3.600 psalms; and songs to sing before the altar over the whole-burnt (6) perpetual offering every day, for all the days of the year, 364; (7) and for the offering of the Sabbaths, 52 songs; and for the offering of the New (8) Moons and for all the Solemn Assemblies and for the Day of Atonement, 30 songs. (9) And all the songs that he spoke were 446, and songs (10) for making music over the stricken, four. And the total was 4.050. (11) All these he composed through prophecy which was given him before the Most High.”

³ bPes 117a. This quotation is also mentioned by MILLARD, *Komposition*, 231.

וחכמים אומרים יש מהן כנגד ציבור ויש מהן כנגד עצמו
האמורות בלשון יחיד כנגד עצמו האמורות בלשון רבים כנגד ציבור

Translation:

The rabbis taught: (The following is valid for) all the songs and praises that David announced in the Book of Psalms:

Rabbi Eliezer says: He said them of himself.

Rabbi Joshua says: He said them of community.

And the wise say: Some of them he said of community, some others of himself. Those which he formulated in the singular, he said of himself; those which he formulated in the plural, he said of community.

All the examples quoted above show that the question of the origin of the Psalms and the question of David's role in this process has been an important topic not only among Christian exegetes, but also in the Jewish tradition of Bible interpretation. In the light of the Psalm superscriptions the rabbis accepted the uncritical view that David composed most of the psalms, at least those which bear his name in the heading. Among Christian scholars Davidic authorship has faced increasing criticism since the Enlightenment.⁴ The first commentary on the Psalms which used the new historical-critical methods was undoubtedly the work of Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780–1849).⁵ The first edition of his commentary was published in 1811. In this commentary de Wette unambiguously rejected the traditional view of the Davidic authorship of the Psalms.⁶

⁴ It is justified to assert that the historical-critical study of the Bible began because of the impact of the Enlightenment. KRAUS, *Geschichte*, 80.

⁵ In fact, DE WETTE placed the Psalms into different categories, as did H. GUNKEL a century later. According to DE WETTE, there are six main categories: 1) hymns, 2) psalms that describe the history of Israel, 3) Zion and temple psalms, 4) royal psalms, 5) complaint psalms, and 6) religious and moral psalms. DE WETTE, *Psalmen*, 3–4. The sixth group of DE WETTE's categorization is nowadays usually called the genre of wisdom psalms. ROGERSON (*de Wette*, 75) advises caution when dealing with the categorization made by DE WETTE, because DE WETTE was not consistent. Occasionally, DE WETTE, commenting on a single psalm text, refers to a completely different genre than in the introduction of his commentary.

⁶ Long before the Enlightenment and the critical era doubts about the Davidic origin of the Psalter had been expressed. In this connection I should like to mention a famous exegete from the early church, Theodores of Mopsuestia. He was of the opinion that 17 psalms depict historical events of the Maccabean period, not phases of the Davidic monarchy. This was quite a radical view under the circumstances in which he lived. However, Theodores mitigated his argument by stating that though it was Maccabean history that was in question, David could have foreseen the events. Therefore Davidic authorship was not seriously threatened. On the exegetical work of Theodores, see BAETHGEN, *Psalmen*, XIII; SMEND, *Entstehung*, 192.

The quotation from the Babylonian Talmud above raises the subject of my own research: How significant is the role of the community or the people in psalm poetry; and to what extent is it justified to speak of probable collective reinterpretation within the Psalms? The solution discovered by the rabbis is an ambivalent one: The Psalms relate either exclusively to the person of David, or David composed them for the community.⁷ Here we may notice a continuity with the theological emphasis of the Deuteronomistic History, interpreting divine promises once given to David and his descendants from the national point of view and transferring these promises to the collective possession of the people of Israel.

The collective interpretation of the Psalms has throughout the centuries found several supporters among Jewish rabbis and scholars. This kind of interpretation has also had a strong foothold in the works of historical-critical scholars. W.M.L. de Wette, in his commentary on the Psalms, occasionally interprets psalms with a clearly individual character as

⁷ GILLIS GERLEMAN states in an interesting article published in 1982 ("Einzelne", 33–49) that the psalms which bear the name 'David' (לְדָוִד) in their superscriptions include such vocabulary and such life situations as fit well with the phases of David's life as narrated in the Books of Samuel. GERLEMAN mentions the following examples: persecution, wild beasts, warriors, rescue from great trouble, praise, David's poetic and musical skills. As a critical scholar GERLEMAN naturally rejected the Davidic authorship of the Psalms, such a view was still represented by FRANZ DELITZSCH (Commentar, 397). But GERLEMAN was a little disappointed that GUNKEL, in his strict historicism, did not pay attention to the theory that the David of the superscriptions should be understood as a kind of 'representative person' (dramatis persona). In other words, these Davidic psalms would originally have been composed to recall the life of David. "Psalmen, die sich auf David beziehen, brauchen nicht David zum Autor zu haben, ebensowenig wie die 'Testamente der zwölf Patriarchen' von den Söhnen Jakobs herrühren. Die Möglichkeit besteht ja, daß die Psalmen im Namen Davids gedichtet und ihm in den Mund gelegt wurden. Gleichviel wer sie geschrieben hat, können sie von Anfang an darauf angelegt sein, von David zu handeln." GERLEMAN, "Einzelne", 36. GERLEMAN's view represents a kind of middle path between the conservative לְאֹתוֹרִיס interpretation and the interpretation which emphasizes that לְדָוִד psalms are only dedicated to David without any actual connection with David's life. In fact, RENDTORFF (Theologie, 299–301) has recently introduced a similar view as GERLEMAN's for scholarly debate. In his article GERLEMAN also mentions that the Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah should be considered to be David. David is an exemplary figure, whose salvation is a precedent for the whole of Israel. GERLEMAN, "Einzelne", 48–49; see also HAAG, Gottesknecht, 165. Of course, it is to be admitted that the superscriptions of the psalms were not created *ex nihilo*, though they are secondary. Certain reasons have led to a number of psalms bearing David's name in their headings. Perhaps a later redactor really saw in these psalms passages compatible with the life and deeds of David. This is highly probable. But it does not mean that the Davidic psalms were originally composed as a reminiscence of David's life, as GERLEMAN supposes.

collective prayers of a larger community. This is how de Wette explains, for instance, Psalms 6 and 38.⁸

In Psalm commentaries by the successors of de Wette the collective interpretation became more and more common. As instructive examples I could mention Justus Olshausen's commentary (1853), Thomas Kelly Cheyne's two-volume commentary (1888)⁹ and Friedrich Baethgen's commentary (1892). According to Cheyne, it is characteristic of Hebrew thinking to maintain a strong feeling of solidarity between an individual and a community. Thus the Psalmists were able to write collective prayers using individual language. Cheyne admits that it is difficult for Western people to understand this phenomenon, and this is an important reason why the collective interpretation has been so widely neglected among Western exegetes.¹⁰

In 1888 Rudolf Smend Senior's article *Über das Ich der Psalmen* was published. Besides the aforementioned commentaries this article proved to be a remarkable turning point in the scholarly debate. Smend interprets the "I" of the Psalms as throughout representing the people of Israel. Smend points out that the "I" of the Psalms was understood as the people of Israel in the Targum on certain psalms, in medieval Jewish exegesis (Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Qimḥi) and in the texts of some Church Fathers, though they usually replaced the term 'Israel' by the term 'church'. Nevertheless, all these features are signs of a wide spread collective understanding.¹¹ Friedrich Baethgen develops these thoughts further in his commentary completed a few years later.¹² The collective interpretation was not confined solely to Europe, but also spread to America. An indisputable example of this development is the commentary on the Psalms by the Americans Charles and Emilie Briggs. This commentary was published for the first time in 1907. In several passages the "I" is given a collective interpretation.¹³

⁸ DE WETTE, *Psalmen* 117, 299.

⁹ I have used the second edition of CHEYNE's commentary, published in 1904. The same is true concerning the commentary of BAETHGEN. Its second edition was also published in 1904.

¹⁰ CHEYNE, *Psalms*, 230.

¹¹ SMEND Senior, *Das Ich*, 56. As entirely collective texts SMEND mentions psalms such as Ps 22, 25, 28, 51, 69, 89, 102, 130 and 131. SMEND's estimation for Ps 131 reflects well his overall view: "Man wird also in v. 1.2 die Gemeinde als das redende Subjekt betrachten müssen, v. 3 wird sie ermahnt." SMEND Senior, *Das Ich*, 138.

¹² BAETHGEN, *Psalmen*, XXIII–XXIV.

¹³ For instance, there is an interesting detail in the BRIGGS's interpretation of Psalm 51. The word פשעים is interpreted as if it referred to the Israelites who remain in their sins after the other Israelites have been completely purified. Therefore the 'true Israel' has a mission to teach deluded Israelites the way and the will of Yahweh (אלמורה פשעים) אלכד ישוב ודרכיך וחטאים אלכד ישוב; Ps 51:15). BRIGGS, *Psalms*, 9.

A radical change, however, was evident after the study *Das "Ich" der Psalmen* by the German Emil Balla was published in 1912. The title itself reveals that the whole book was designed as a critical counterpart to Smend's earlier article. Of course, during the last decades of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century there were some scholars who did not approve of the dominant collective view. Certainly the most famous scholar among them was Bernhard Duhm, who also wrote a commentary on the Psalms. But scholars like Duhm were a clear minority at that time.¹⁴ In fact, Balla was the first to systematically analyze the "I" passages in the Psalms and the examples quoted by Smend. Balla stated emphatically that in ancient Israel there existed individual psalm poetry, and in such poetry the "I" is either the pious poet himself or some other individual.¹⁵ Balla supported his argument by presenting many poetic texts outside the Psalter which are clearly the prayers of an individual (Jer 11:18–23; 15:15–21; 17:12–18; 18:18–23; Job 3:3–26; 10:2–22; the thanksgiving of Hannah in 1 Sam 2:1–10; the prayer of Jonah in Jon 2:3–10; the prayer of Hezekiah in Isa 38:9–20; Ben Sira 51:1–12). As a further argument Balla mentioned that even in ancient Babylonia individual poetry was known.¹⁶

Occasionally Balla had to admit, however, that in some texts the grammatically individual "I" refers to a larger group, especially the people of Israel.¹⁷ Balla mentioned the following examples: Isa 12:1–2; Mic 7:7–10; Lam 1:9, 11–16, 18–22; Ps 129. But Balla hastened to assert that such collective texts are very marginal in the Hebrew Bible. In most cases the "I" of the Psalms means an individual person.¹⁸ Only in Psalm 129 do we encounter personified Israel (יְהוָה יִשְׂרָאֵל – Ps 129:1). In this verse the "I" refers unambiguously to a collective entity. According to Balla, this

¹⁴ Probably one reason for the insipid reception of DUHM's views by scholars was his radical exegesis. DUHM preferred rather late datings for the Psalms. Like Theodores of Mopsuestia, DUHM also noticed in numerous psalms connections with the Maccabean era, but his arguments differed greatly from the ideas of this early Christian thinker. The individual interpretation adopted by DUHM is entirely in line with his commentary on Isaiah (1892), which was published a few years before the commentary on the Psalms. Commenting on the book of Isaiah, DUHM separates the Servant Songs from the rest of the material and interprets these songs as referring to an individual.

¹⁵ "Es hat in Israel eine individuelle Psalmendichtung gegeben, in der das Ich der fromme Dichter selber oder irgend ein anderer Einzelner ist." BALLA, *Das Ich*, 3.

¹⁶ BALLA, *Das Ich*, 4.

¹⁷ "Ebenso sicher ist, daß es eine Personifikation Israels und auch Lieder gegeben hat, deren Ich nicht ein Einzelner, sondern das Volk ist." BALLA, *Das Ich*, 4.

¹⁸ "Die Ich-Psalmen im Psalter und in den übrigen Büchern des Alten Testaments sind sämtlich individuell zu verstehen, ausgenommen diejenigen, in denen durch ausdrückliche Angaben im Text ein anderes Verständnis des Ichs notwendig ist." BALLA, *Das Ich*, 5.

passage is the only case in the whole Psalter where the individual and collective features are intertwined.¹⁹

In the apocryphal Psalms of Solomon the community speaks of itself as an individual: ἐν τῷ εὐθηρῆσαι με καὶ πολλὴν γενέσθαι ἐν τέκνοις (PsSol 1:3b). This is remarkable, of course, but Balla was reluctant to deduce anything on the basis of this evidence with reference to the Psalter, because the Psalms of Solomon are such a late literary product.²⁰ On the other hand, Balla was inclined to regard the patriotic final verses of Psalms 25, 34 and 51 as later additions.²¹ Here we may justifiably ask whether these additions attempt to give a collective slant to the whole preceding text? If the answer is in the affirmative, Balla should have considered the existence or non-existence of collective interpretation in the Psalter more thoroughly. This issue is a rather complex one. Balla simply supposed that the patriotic additions refer to a cultic background.

Hermann Gunkel, the “father” of modern Psalm research, accepted Balla’s basic arguments and developed them further. Due to the detailed and sophisticated analyses by Balla and Gunkel the collective interpretation, that had once enjoyed almost a monopoly, began to vanish from Psalm research. This development took place quite quickly. Gunkel’s famous commentary on the Psalms was published for the first time in 1926. The discussion proceeded in 1933, when the monumental introduction to the form-critical method, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, saw the daylight. This work was commenced by Gunkel, but after his death it was finished by his pupil Joachim Begrich.²²

Balla and Gunkel were undoubtedly right to reject Smend Senior’s immoderate statement that the “I” of the Psalms always means the people of Israel. But trends in scholarship moved perhaps too rapidly from one extreme to another. The collective interpretation disappeared almost completely from scholarly debate. As early as the 1930s Henry Wheeler Robinson criticized Balla for his too rigorous individual interpretation. Wheeler Robinson did not accept Balla’s exegesis of Ps 44.²³ Wheeler Robinson was of the opinion that a kind of collective understanding might explain many difficult passages in the Psalms better than Balla’s view. The solution proposed by Wheeler Robinson was the concept of “corporate personality”, which we may examine more closely in the next chapter.

¹⁹ BALLA, *Das Ich*, 114. I shall investigate Ps 129 more profoundly later, in chapter III.6.2 below.

²⁰ BALLA, *Das Ich*, 119–122.

²¹ BALLA, *Das Ich*, 129.

²² KRAUS, *Geschichte*, 355.

²³ ROBINSON, *Personality*, 37–39. ROBINSON supported the collective Israel interpretation when he explored the identity of the mysterious Servant of Yahweh in Deutero-Isaiah, see ROBINSON, *Personality*, 40–42.

To some degree the Norwegian scholar Sigmund Mowinckel also expressed sympathy with the collective understanding of the Psalms. In his theory, however, collectivism served the wider cultic and mythological view, which was typical of all the works of Mowinckel. It is worth mentioning in this connection that Mowinckel created an interesting concept of “great ego”, referring to collective understanding. I shall deal with this concept in more detail in the next chapter. Nevertheless, it deserves attention at this point that Mowinckel made a list of such psalm passages which in his opinion contained secondary national elements.²⁴ Unfortunately, Mowinckel did not go deeper into this curious issue.

Most of the commentaries on the Psalms published after World War II do not contain any insight as regards the collective interpretation of the Psalms. Hans-Joachim Kraus put this attitude into words when he stated that “the ‘I’ of the Psalms is in almost all cases the ‘I’ of the individual singer”.²⁵ Scholarly discussion hardened for a long time into unfruitful black and white polarization. The belief in the individual interpretation as the only meaningful and legitimate principle of interpretation was so strong that all other attempts seemed very weak by comparison.

Nevertheless, since the 1960s Joachim Becker has done pioneer work in shedding new light on this old problem of the “I” of the Psalms. He reintroduced this issue into scholarly discussion, although it was once probably thought that it was already concluded. In several stimulating studies²⁶ Becker attempted to arouse new interest among scholars in the collective interpretation, its extent and its meaningfulness. According to a basic thesis of Becker’s, there were various reinterpretation of the older traditions in ancient Israel.²⁷ Collective reinterpretation is actually only one form of this, but it is a quite remarkable phenomenon. The Psalms were a living reality, and when the religious and social circumstances changed these texts faced reinterpretation in order that they might better correspond to the prevailing situation. Collective reinterpretation means in

²⁴ MOWINCKEL, *Psalmstudien I*, 160–167. Corresponding lists concerning collective passages were framed also by some of MOWINCKEL’s contemporaries; see BAUMGARTNER (*Klagegedichte*, 82) and GUNKEL (*Psalmen*, 14–15).

²⁵ “Das Ich der Psalmen ist in fast allen Fällen das Ich des einzelnen Sängers.” KRAUS, *Psalmen*, 1045. There are some exceptions to this rule, as KRAUS admits. The grammatically individual texts which should be understood collectively are on the whole the same texts as those already mentioned by BALLA.

²⁶ In this connection I should like to mention especially BECKER’s monographs *Israel deutet seine Psalmen. Urform und Neuinterpretation in den Psalmen* (1966), *Wege der Psalmenexegese* (1975) and *Messiaserwartung im Alten Testament* (1977).

²⁷ BECKER, *Israel*, 32. In fact, BECKER was not the first one who got the idea of the collective reinterpretation. As early as 1889 J. Z. SCHUURMANS STEKHOVEN had suggested that some psalms contain traces of a secondary collective interpretation (“kollektivierende Nachinterpretation”); see STEKHOVEN, *Das Ich*, 131–135.

practice one way of pursuing an actualizing exegesis (or hermeneutics). For instance, national emphasis was an ingenious answer to the fervent questions of the Israelites who had to live without their own monarchy after the exile.

A few years after Becker's first monograph, *Israel deutet seine Psalmen*, had been published, the British scholar Peter Ackroyd took a positive attitude towards Becker's conclusions. Ackroyd wrote that it is fascinating to observe how an earlier psalm text can be adjusted to a new situation by means of redactional activity.²⁸

Unfortunately, we may conclude that the discussion of the new arguments for the collective interpretation has been rather modest. The many discerning insights made by Becker have not received as much attention as they deserve. During the past fifteen years the situation has improved due to numerous studies by Erich Zenger and Frank-Lothar Hossfeld. They are convinced about the extensive redactional work included in the book of Psalms. Collective reinterpretation is one of these redactional layers beyond the final form of the text. Furthermore, Timo Veijola's contribution is remarkable and epoch-making for discovering the influential character of the collective theology in the exilic and post-exilic period. On the basis of Veijola's studies it is evident that collective emphases have had an extensive aftermath to several biblical books and passages.²⁹

In my own opinion, the time is at last ripe for a far-reaching new estimate of collective psalm interpretation. It must be asked without any preconceptions what was correct in the collective interpretation which was

²⁸ "Such attempts are of interest in that they recognize the probability that older psalms have not only continued to be used, but have been understood and in some measure modified in a new situation." ACKROYD, *Exile*, 226. BECKER's model of reinterpretation is also accepted by A. DEIBLER ("Mein Gott", 101), who adapted it when analysing Psalm 22. STEVEN J. L. CROFT has analysed the identity of the individual in the psalms. His classification contains three groups: the 'I' of the psalms may refer to king, to whomever private person or to the person who is responsible for the cult. CROFT, *Identity*, 13. CROFT himself, however, absorbs the model according to which nearly all the psalms were originally composed for cultic purposes. Furthermore, CROFT argues that the king had an important role in the ancient Israelite cult. Consequently, CROFT sees references to king even in many such psalms, in which the majority of scholars do not perceive any royal features (e.g. Pss 5, 7, 17, 26 and 139); see CROFT, *Identity*, 90–96. Thus CROFT's research can be regarded as one-sided and tendentious. CROFT's arguments partly base on an earlier work by JOHN H. EATON. In the introduction to his commentary on the Psalms EATON (*Psalms*, 20) plainly writes: "The following Commentary tends to the view that the majority of the psalms of 'the Individual' concern the community's leader, often the Davidic king, in various situations."

²⁹ See, for instance, VEIJOLA, *Verheißung*, 143–173.

once so widespread among scholars. The purpose of my study is to evaluate the extent, nature and origin of collective interpretation. In fact, I prefer the term *reinterpretation*, because it seems to me that the redactors built upon preceding traditions that were already interpreted from different points of view. Unless the tradition is reinterpreted, it gradually loses its vitality. The importance of reinterpreting sacred texts reminds me of the stimulating hermeneutical model created by Heikki Räisänen. He has developed this pattern on the basis of textual evidence in the New Testament, but it is certainly an instructive construction for Old Testament studies as well. Räisänen's model is based on a dialectic between tradition, experience and interpretation.³⁰ For the first Christians the tradition consisted mainly of the Jewish heritage: the Old Testament, other writings from the Second Temple era, including several apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works. This was their religious background. They also had religious experiences which were difficult to explain (for instance Paul's vision leading to his conversion). Finally, they gave an interpretation to their experiences in an altered situation. Interpretation was based on the earlier tradition (for instance, the resurrection was already a fixed category which enabled the first disciples to interpret their experiences).³¹ But the result always meant a reinterpretation of the earlier tradition. If we transfer this model of interpretation to the texts of the Old Testament, it is easy to notice that experiences of deep crisis were very often important points in the history of Israel that led to reinterpretation of older material. Undoubtedly the most important crisis situation that caused new theological thinking was the period of the Babylonian exile. It was an indispensable watershed in biblical history, though nowadays some scholars either belittle its significance or try even to dispute its historicity. It is true that the extra-biblical sources do not tell as much about the Babylonian exile as we may suppose.³² However, the exile is not the only period that produced literal, theological and actualizing activity. Later the foreign influences of Hellenism led occasionally to severe conflicts even within Judaism itself. In all these incidents a reinterpretation of older tradition and sacred texts was necessary.

³⁰ RÄISÄNEN, *Theology*, 122–136. Experiences can be classified either as positive experiences (like the episode depicted in Acts 10:1–11:18) or as experiences of crisis (like the delay of the parousia in 2 Peter 3).

³¹ RÄISÄNEN (*Theology*, 127) puts this clearly as follows: "It would be correct to say that the disciples experienced something which they interpreted with the help of categories of resurrection belief (which are already known). Had they lacked the conceptual framework supplied by apocalyptic Jewish eschatology, they would have been bound to search for a different explanation of what they had seen."

³² ALBERTZ, *Ernstfall*, 26.

Collective orientation was one alternative for the Israelites who lived more than two thousand years ago. It was a meaningful manner of constructing a personal world-view and understanding the Holy Scriptures. The collective interpretation suggested by critical scholars approximately one hundred years ago was obviously too one-sided. It is unjustified to suppose that the individual “I” always refers to the whole community. But the main stream of research since Balla and Gunkel represented one-sided though opposite view. It is essential to try to find a ‘golden middle path’ between these two extremes.

2. Attempts to Understand the Transitions between the Individual and the Collective in Previous Research

2.1 H. W. Robinson’s Concept of “Corporate Personality”

A scholar who concentrates on the tension and interaction between the individual “I” and the collective “I” can hardly ignore the technical term “corporate personality”. This concept is deeply rooted in Psalm research. It is not only a historical concept, because allusions to this theory are still heard in critical scholarship.³³ Usually, even in Psalm studies in German, the English term is used. Originally, this concept was introduced to Old Testament studies by Henry Wheeler Robinson, who in the 1930s wrote two concise articles concerning the Hebrew way of thinking.³⁴ Though they were not very long, they exercised an immense influence on later studies. Because Robinson’s works are still quoted in modern Psalm research, it is necessary in this connection to introduce the basic arguments of his theory, as well as the most important criticism that his writings have faced.

Robinson states that the feeling of solidarity in ancient Israel was largely based on an old tradition of a common ancestor or even on a fictitious blood-tie between the members of a group. According to Robinson, the group in Hebrew thinking included not only its present

³³ Thus, for instance, EMMENDÖRFFER, Gott, 115, when he deals with Ps 44. See also EMMENDÖRFFER, Gott, 238.

³⁴ ROBINSON’s earlier article bears the title *The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality*, and was published in 1936 in the German series BZAW (vol. 66). The second article is called *The Group and the Individual in Israel*. It derives from the year 1937 and was published for the first time in the composition *The Individual in East and West* edited by E. R. HUGHES. When referring to these two aforementioned articles by ROBINSON, I have used the new edition of 1981 by C. RODD. This edition bears the title *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*. In this edition both of ROBINSON’s epoch-making articles are published with consecutive page numbers.

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