Sigmund Mowinckel and the Hebrew Bible:  
His Approach and His Influence  

by  

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Abstract

Sigmund Mowinckel was one of the most influential biblical scholars of the 20th century. This thesis looks at how Mowinckel approached the Hebrew Bible during his academic career by examining four of his Norwegian works over a period of 35 years. The primary aim of this study will be to explore the different scientific methods applied in his research on the Hebrew Bible. In order to address this, this thesis will look at the biblical scholarship and scholars that influenced Mowinckel. Based on the discoveries, this thesis will also look at how Mowinckel’s works and approaches influenced biblical scholarship in the 20th century. This thesis will argue that Mowinckel contributed greatly to the biblical scholarship, especially the study of the Psalter, and approached the Hebrew Bible through a multitude of scientific methods.
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Introduction

Few Norwegian scholars, if any, have received the kind of international recognition for their contributions to the Hebrew Bible that Sigmund Olaf Plytt Mowinckel received. When Mowinckel passed away at the age of 80 he left behind a great legacy of over 20 books, translations of the Hebrew Bible into Norwegian, several translations of academic books into Norwegian, and a multitude of journal articles. Not only was Sigmund Mowinckel an outstanding scholar, teacher, and writer, he also contributed to a scientific translation of the Hebrew Bible into the Norwegian language. For his contributions as a scholar Mowinckel was knighted as a Commander of the Order of St. Olav and as a knight in the Order of the Polar Star, in addition to receiving Honorary Doctorate Degrees from Giessen 1922, Lund 1923, Strasbourg 1927, Amsterdam 1932, and St. Andrews 1956.¹

This thesis will focus on Sigmund Mowinckel’s invaluable contributions to the study of the Hebrew Bible. Undertaking research on such an influential and extraordinary person as Sigmund Mowinckel is no small task. It was with good reason that Magne Sæbø suggested that “a book on [Mowinckel], to some extent, will be a book of Old Testament research in general, for the period of 1910-1965.”² And Mowinckel’s own commentary on Psalm 8 could even have been used to describe himself as he wrote, “only a human being, yet a human being! Dust, and yet one that

God has given the greatest honour.”³ This Norwegian scholar’s interests knew no bounds as he contributed to scholarship on all parts of the Hebrew Bible, publishing works on the Torah, prophets, and writings. It is not surprising that Mowinckel once told his students to stop wasting time in the libraries, and encouraged them instead to, “write the books yourself… that is what I do.”⁴

The aim of this thesis is to clarify and analyze both Mowinckel’s approach to the Hebrew Bible and his influence on academic scholarship. Accordingly, this thesis will have two parts, the first part will offer a descriptive presentation of Mowinckel’s approach to the Hebrew Bible through a bibliographical presentation that highlights his study and work. The second part will be more speculative in nature, in the sense that it is difficult to pin point all of his influences on scholarship, and the conclusion in this section will therefore be more tentative because of the more subjective nature of this task. Yet, such a task is still vital in order to come to a full appreciation of Mowinckel’s contributions to the field of biblical studies.

In the first part, I will describe events and influences on Mowinckel’s life, and examine an assortment of his writings. By placing a greater emphasis on Mowinckel’s Norwegian works than others who have provided overviews of his work, this thesis will consider contributions that span over 35 years and include both material on specific books and ideas that have contributed to a greater over-all understanding of the Hebrew Bible. Accordingly, four primary sources will be used in this thesis:

By narrowing in on some specific works of Mowinckel, it will be possible to see how he approached the Hebrew Bible as early as in his dissertation, namely *Stadsholderen Nehemia*. Furthermore, Mowinckel's two books on the Psalms will allow a deeper understanding of how Mowinckel developed his hypothesis about the Psalter as his career proceeded. And the latter book is of great interest as it was written for lay people, and comes at a very different stage of Mowinckel's life and during a time when the Oxford Group Movement influenced him. These works will highlight some of his influences, and I will aim to give a short overview of some of the people he influenced together with their connection to Mowinckel.

The second task of this thesis is to try to identify the contributions and influences that Mowinckel's work brought to later studies of the Hebrew Bible. In this part I aim to address some of the questions and approaches Mowinckel had towards the Hebrew Bible, and how that challenged the current scholarship and influenced future scholars. This chapter will address how individual scholars followed up on some central points in Mowinckel's writings, but it will also look at how he helped form schools of thought. It will not only address those scholars who agreed with Mowinckel, but also include some of his critics.
Chapter 1
Sigmund Mowinckel: Life, Influences, and Writings

1.1 Life and Academic Progress

Sigmund Olaf Plytt Mowinckel was born on August 4, 1884 into a devout Christian family in Kjerringøy, Norway. His father, Jørgen Blydt Mowinckel, was a priest in the Church of Norway and together with Sigmund’s mother Petra Johanne (Meitzner) raised five children. Jørgen Blydt Mowinckel was ordained in his hometown of Bergen in 1883, but was sent to the small village of Kjerringøy, 120 kilometers north of the Polar Circle, to serve as a minister in the Church in Beiarn. The idyllic location just outside of Bodø was far from an easy parish to serve in, as frequent vacancies and short-term stays by young priests demonstrated. Jørgen and Caroline moved to Kjerringøy with the intention of serving there for a short period, but with his wife Petra expecting their firstborn in 1884, Jørgen asked the local Bishop to extend their stay. After Sigmund was born in the summer of 1884, more children followed in rapid succession, and Jørgen was forced to ask the Bishop again to extend their stay in the Northern part of Norway.

Despite the fact that Jørgen had worked as a private tutor up until his ordination in 1883, the records from his years as a student at Bergen Cathedral School showed that he struggled academically having failed 2nd grade. Therefore, the Mowinckels’ decision to take their children out of the public school system attests to the poor state of the schools in northern Norway at the time. Sigmund was therefore

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6 Ibid., 13.
home schooled, his father taught him Latin and Mathematics and his mother covered all other subjects. His parents must have considered their work successful as Sigmund’s younger brother, Rolf, proved to be no less intelligent than Sigmund and later worked as an Art Historian at the greatest Archaeological Museum in Oslo, Norway after having completed his doctorate in 1927.\(^7\)

Like his father before him, Sigmund graduated from the Cathedral School in Bergen after leaving his immediate family in the Northern parts of Norway to live with extended family in Bergen to complete his secondary degree. All in all, he spent four years in Bergen from 1898 to 1902 with an average grade of 1.75 (on a scale where 1 would be the best), and thus finished second highest in his class.\(^8\) Despite this, the school records also present Sigmund as a pupil that could behave inappropriately.\(^9\) He stayed with relatives in Bergen until he passed his exam atrium in 1902, and then moved to Christiania (later renamed Oslo) where he began his theological studies at the University. In the fall of 1902, the University of Christiania housed the only Theological Faculty in the Norwegian capital, so the young aspiring theologian moved for the third time in four years to begin his post-secondary studies. Naturally, Mowinckel had been predisposed to theological studies through his father’s work, but according to Sigmund himself his early interest was more on understanding Christianity based on its context, and so he wanted to study from a scientific perspective in order to find the true aspects of religion. This passion was soon combined with his interests in history and reading the Hebrew Bible in its historic Sitz

\(^7\) Thora Sollied, Slegten Mowinckel II: 1914-1939 (Bergen: John Griegs Boktrykkeri, 1940), 77-78.

\(^8\) Hjelde, Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit, 19-20.

\(^9\) Ibid., 20.
im Leben.\textsuperscript{10} Thus, his studies were driven by his academic rather than spiritual interests.\textsuperscript{11} Therefore, it was not in his desire to get ordained or apply for work in a parish that prompted him to submit the request on October 29\textsuperscript{th} 1908 to take his final examination, and thus receive his degree from the University of Christiania.\textsuperscript{12}

During Mowinckel’s years at the University of Christiania the battle between the liberal and conservative wings in the Church of Norway reached its climax in the conflict over who was to replace professor Fredrik Petersen in Systematic Theology at the University of Christiania. Petersen was known as the “man that introduced modern theology” in Norway, but when he passed away on January 9, 1903, the conservative and liberal Christians clashed in a tremendous debate that would last for years. At that time it was the government in Norway that appointed the professors, but the conservative side within the Church of Norway refused to accept that the liberal Johannes Ordning could fill the shoes of Petersen, as they doubted whether Ordning aligned himself with traditional Lutheran faith.\textsuperscript{13} The conflict was not settled until Ordning was appointed as professor in Theology by the Norwegian government on January 27, 1906.\textsuperscript{14} This conflict undoubtedly influenced the students at the time, and not surprisingly Mowinckel aligned himself with the liberal wing in the conflict. In general Mowinckel identified with the liberal Protestant theology both in his understanding of the essence of religion, and in his own personal faith.\textsuperscript{15} Consequently, Mowinckel was not highly esteemed among the orthodox in Norway.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{13} Einar Molland, \textit{Norges Kirkehistorie i det 19.\århundre, vol. 2} (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1979), 271-73.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 313.
\textsuperscript{15} Hjelde, Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit, 123.
\textsuperscript{16} Johan B. Hygen, ”Mowinckel: The Man”, 6.
However, because of periods of sickness and his later involvement with *The Oxford Group Movement*, Mowinckel gradually shifted towards the ecclesiastical center of the Church of Norway.\footnote{Hjelde, "Sigmund Mowinckel."}

Since the young theologian had shown no intention to take on a parish following his theological education, Mowinckel had not taken practical theology courses. Instead, with the permission of his father, Sigmund had been allowed to do another semester of theological studies in order to work towards his first theological publication.\footnote{Hjelde, *Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit*, 38.} Mowinckel published the fruits of his work in two articles in *Norsk Theologisk Tidsskrift* titled “Om nebiisme og profeti” (1909, “On Nebiism and Prophecy”) and “Profeternes forhold til nebiismen” (1910, “The Relationship of Prophets to Nebiism”).\footnote{Hjelde, "Sigmund Mowinckel."} These articles give clear insight into the future path of the young theologian, as they show that Mowinckel was intent on furthering his studies in the Hebrew Bible early on. Moreover, Mowinckel also highlighted Hermann Gunkel in these articles as a scholar who had introduced the academia to many new perspectives.\footnote{Hjelde, *Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit*, 39.} However, upon the completion of his publications, life soon caught up with Sigmund, and, like so many other students, he wrote his family members describing a difficult financial situation and the need to find a source of income.\footnote{Ibid., 44.} This was probably the reason for his three-semester stay in Egersund (from January 1910 to June 1911) teaching Religion, Norwegian, and History at the public Middle School.\footnote{Hjelde, "Sigmund Mowinckel."}
In the fall of 1911, Sigmund was granted a scholarship by the University of Christiania, which enabled him to leave for Germany to study Assyriology under Peter Jensen at the University of Marburg. Mowinckel had first intended to study in Berlin under the great Assyriologist Hugo Winckler, but Professors Frants Buhl and Johannes Christian Jacobsen warned Mowinckel about the failing health of the German scholar. Furthermore, during a visit to Vilhelm Grønbech’s lecture series in Copenhagen on “Modern Religion” in the fall of 1911, Grønbech had recommended Mowinckel to travel instead to Marburg to study under Jensen. Thus, in November 1911, Sigmund arrived in the university town in Central Germany.

There Mowinckel and Jensen established a strong relationship, and Mowinckel realized that the study of Assyriology was essential as he wrote his professor Michelet in Oslo stating, “as far as I can see, their significance for religious history is essential as they are parallel to the Psalms.” Despite this, Mowinckel became convicted that Marburg was “no place for Old Testament studies”. Therefore, Mowinckel ended up spending the summer of 1912 in Giessen under the leadership of Herman Gunkel. During that summer, Sigmund showed an interest in writing his dissertation on the Book of Daniel, but was advised against this by Gunkel, and instead he chose to go back to his previous desire to write it on the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

However, Mowinckel’s years in Germany would prove to be significant in more than an academic sense, as in March of 1913 he was hospitalized with tuberculosis. After a three-month stay at the hospital, Sigmund was sent home to Norway in order to fully recover. Mowinckel was not able to resume his work on Ezra and Nehemiah and

23 Hjelde, *Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit*, 49.
24 Ibid., 53.
25 Ibid., 53.
26 Ibid., 55-56.
27 Hjelde, "Sigmund Mowinckel."
complete his dissertation for more than two years.\textsuperscript{28} The illness was significant to his personal growth as it showed him the fragile nature of human life.\textsuperscript{29}

Upon the completion of his doctorate degree, Sigmund was hired on July 1, 1917, at the University of Christiania as an associate professor in Old Testament.\textsuperscript{30} This position was established in order to hire him, because Sigmund’s great potential was clear to the faculty who wanted to secure him for the long run.\textsuperscript{31} Mowinckel’s hard work was recognized, and in 1922 he was promoted to extraordinary professor, and was made professor in 1933, a position that he held until his retirement in 1954.\textsuperscript{32} Mowinckel remained at the faculty at the University in Oslo throughout his entire career, despite being offered honourable positions at universities in Basel and Marburg.\textsuperscript{33} According to some of his students, “Mowinckel was fond of lecturing. He seemed to feel at home behind the lectern… Mowinckel’s lectures were solid and well prepared.”\textsuperscript{34} Furthermore, Mowinckel was also known for criticizing those that he did not agree with in his lectures stating, “Gunkel and several other authors are of opinion so and so, common sense and myself, however, are of a different view.”\textsuperscript{35} For the most part, Mowinckel lectured on the Psalms, ancient Israelite history, and Isaiah, but from 1933 he also taught several courses on the “Messiah expectancy” in the Hebrew Bible.\textsuperscript{36} Mowinckel was dedicated to research and academia even in his years after retirement, and he continued to write extensively and lecture until his death.\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{flushleft}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Hjelde, \textit{Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit}, 57.
\item Ibid., 66.
\item Hjelde, ”Sigmund Mowinckel.”
\item Hjelde, \textit{Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit}, 136.
\item Hjelde, ”Sigmund Mowinckel.”
\item Ibid.
\item Hygen, ”The Man and the Teacher,” 2.
\item Ibid., 5.
\item Hjelde, \textit{Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit}, 147-48.
\item Hygen, ”The Man and the Teacher,” 2.
\end{enumerate}
\end{flushleft}
Mowinckel continually proved his linguistic talents, publishing works in Norwegian, German, English and French.\textsuperscript{38} Among other publications, Mowinckel contributed to an academic translation of the Hebrew Bible into Norwegian together with two of his colleagues, Simon Michelet and Nils Messel, from 1929 to 1963.\textsuperscript{39}

Outside of his life as a renowned scholar and author, Mowinckel lived a quiet and ordinary life in the greater Oslo area. When Sigmund was recovering from tuberculosis at the sanatorium in Harastølen, Sogn og Fjordane, he met the 26-year-old nurse Caroline Thorine Simonsen. A few years later on, the two married on May 9, 1917, and spent over 46 years together until the death of Caroline on June 6, 1963.\textsuperscript{40} Together Sigmund and Caroline bore two children, Wenche (1918) and Vibeke (1923),\textsuperscript{41} and were described to live a harmonious life together.\textsuperscript{42} Caroline also played an important part in Sigmund’s spiritual life as she got them more involved in \textit{The Oxford Group Movement} in the 1930’s, where she took on important leadership tasks.\textsuperscript{43}

In 1934, the leader of \textit{The Oxford Group Movement}, Frank Buchman, travelled to Norway and held house-parties, often targeting elite members of the society.\textsuperscript{44} The movement was also known as the \textit{Moral Re-Armament} (MRA), and was a nondenominational movement that “sought to deepen the spiritual life of individuals and encouraged participants to continue as members of their own

\textsuperscript{39} Hjelde, ”Sigmund Mowinckel.”
\textsuperscript{40} Hjelde, \textit{Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit}, 71.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 93.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 94.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 95.
\textsuperscript{44} Hallgeir Elstad and Per Halse, \textit{Illustrert norsk kristendomshistorie} (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2002), 188.
churches." Sigmund and Caroline became involved in the movement from the very beginning. According to Sigmund, it was like he was awoken from a dull and half-dead Christianity to meeting God again through Jesus. This renewal of Sigmund’s personal faith had a great impact on him. Despite having completed the semester of practical theology back in 1915, Mowinckel did not get ordained until 1940. However, Mowinckel never sought to work as a priest in a parish like his father had done, but helped sporadically, filling in for priests when needed in different parishes. Moreover, through contact with the Oxford Group Movement, Mowinckel would define his scientific work as theology, and not “science of religion,” which he had done earlier in his career. All through his life, Sigmund had a personal faith and felt a strong love for the Church and Mission, this love was strengthened through his influence in the Oxford-Group Movement. Furthermore, the renewal of his faith would have a great impact on Mowinckel’s later works. Thus, his faith did not come into conflict with having a career focused on reading the Bible through the historical-critical method, and seeking to understand the Hebrew Bible from sources and scholars outside the Christian faith. Just as important as the movement had been to Sigmund, he was also equally important to the movement as Mowinckel helped form its development through his written contributions in newspapers and magazines, as

46 Hjelde, Sigmund Mowinckel, 127.
47 Hjelde, ”Sigmund Mowinckel.”
48 Dagfinn Rian, ”The Insights I Have Gained: Professor Sigmund Mowinckel as He Saw Himself” in Text and Theology: Studies in Honour of Professor Dr. Theol. Magne Sæbo presented on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday, ed. Karl Arvid Tångberg (Oslo: Verbum, 1994), 230-234.
49 Hygen, ”The Man and the Teacher,” 6.
well as being one of the leading speakers. He carefully described it as nothing more than a restoration of the old Christianity. Even though the Mowinckel’s involvement in the movement died down after a few years he continued to be a supporter of the group.

After the death of Caroline, Sigmund married a retired teacher and close friend of many years, Ingeborg Wilhelmine Wiborg (born Schibbye) on October 7th 1964. On Friday June 4th 1965, two months before his 81st birthday, Sigmund Mowinckel died of heart failure, and was buried at Vestre gravlund in Oslo.

Having looked closely at key moments in Sigmund Mowinckel’s life, the paper will now focus on some of the influences on Mowinckel’s approach to the Hebrew Bible.

1.2 Influences on Mowinckel’s Approach to the Hebrew Bible

As seen above Mowinckel was fortunate to have been influenced by many great scholars and people, and thus represents a clash between a multitude of disciplines, scholars, theologies, and schools of thought. The first and most important influence for Sigmund was his father who introduced him to *The Ancient Orient* from an early age as his father Jørgen subscribed to the magazine, and was an “amateur Orientalist” according to Sigmund. Sigmund inherited his father’s passion for history, and especially the ancient Orient and the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, Sigmund was

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50 Hjelde, *Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit*, 126.
51 Ibid., 127.
52 Ibid., 131.
53 Ibid., 93.
54 Ibid., 79, 103.
55 Sigmund Mowinckel, ”Mowinckel’s Letter” in *Luther Theological Seminary Review*, no. 5 (1967): 43.
56 Sollied, *Slegten Mowinckel II*, 74.
certainly predisposed to theological study through his father. However, for Sigmund it was clear that his desire for theological studies was not driven by the intention to pursue a career as a priest.

Sigmund’s interest in the historical context of the Hebrew Bible only grew as he met his professor Simon Michelet at the University of Christiania. Michelet was originally intended to replace the ageing Carl Paul Caspari at the University of Christiania. Due to Caspari’s conservative approach to the Bible, the more modern biblical research focused on the historical context was first introduced in Norway through Michelet. His approach was much more critical and Michelet was often described as a heretic in the contemporary Christian debates. Nonetheless, Michelet was a modern apologist in the sense that he balanced the historical-critical method with preaching the everlasting meaning and purpose of the Hebrew Bible.

Therefore, Michelet saw the task of the historical-critical method as casting new light onto the everlasting truths of the Hebrew Bible. As Sigmund Mowinckel’s professor, he was a mentor who had a great influence on Mowinckel. Despite this, Mowinckel’s choice of focusing his research on the Hebrew Bible can hardly be attributed to the faculty at the University of Christiania.

The most recognized influence on Mowinckel’s scholarship was Hermann Gunkel. Much of the foundation of Mowinckel’s theory about the Psalter was based on Gunkel’s cultic interpretation of the Psalms through his formgeschichtliche (form-

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58 Ibid., 19.
59 Hjelde, Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit, 39.
critical) and *gattungsgeschichtliche* (type-critical) methods.\(^{60}\) This new approach to the Bible sought to recover some of the remnants of the oral compositions on which the Bible was built.\(^{61}\) Mowinckel acknowledged that Gunkel was the “pioneer” of the “discovery of the fixed traditional types and forms” together with Hugo Gressmann.\(^{62}\) Gunkel was best known for his application of these discoveries to his study of the Psalms. Despite Gunkel commencing his studies in the New Testament in Göttingen, the Prussian authority appointed him to Halle to pursue studies in the Hebrew Bible. Gunkel decided to relate his previous work to parallels in ancient Near Eastern studies.\(^{63}\) Throughout his career, Gunkel valued learning from others in a variety of fields and addressed much of his work towards non-specialists in his field with hopes that they might benefit from his work. Moreover, Gunkel had a profound impact on the study of the Hebrew Bible through his ability to connect different aspects of biblical studies. As Martin J. Buss so elegantly pointed out, “[Gunkel] made it a point to see connections among the life situations, the content (including the emotions) and the verbal form of texts. This interweaving is the scholarly angle of his work that has the most lasting significance.”\(^{64}\) This approach made a lasting significance on Mowinckel’s work. Even though Mowinckel was influenced by and held deep respect for many great scholars, he was not afraid of critiquing them.\(^{65}\)

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\(^{64}\) Ibid., 502.

\(^{65}\) Hygen, ”The Man and the Teacher,” 4.
upheld the notion that the psalms were composed in a “noncultic setting on the model of earlier cultic prototypes, Mowinckel used internal evidence to claim that in most cases their own social setting or *Sitz im Leben* was the temple.”

The Assyriologist Peter Jensen was a key character in Mowinckel’s work due to his significant influence on Mowinckel, despite the vast differences between their opinions. Mowinckel travelled to Marburg to study Assyriology under Peter Jensen (1861-1936) with the intention to applying this knowledge to the study of the Hebrew Bible. Jensen had received the most recognition for his extensive contributions to the study of the Gilgamesh epic, through the comparison between the epic to other myths of kingship in the ancient Near East. While Jensen continued to compare myths and legends to parallel ancient Israelite legends, he denied the historicity of the narratives in the Hebrew Bible. Sigmund Mowinckel applied the comparative approach to his studies, which was heavily influenced by Jensen. The concept of comparing narratives to kingship and royal ideals in the ancient Near East played a big part in Mowinckel’s understanding of the royal psalms, which was fundamental in the role of Assyriology throughout his career. However, Mowinckel was adamant that Jensen contributed to very little influence on his work.

While in Marburg, Mowinckel met the literary critic and lifelong friend, Gustav Hölscher (1877-1955). Hölscher had spent time in Norway and was fluent in

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the Mowinckel’s native language.\textsuperscript{71} Even though the correspondence between the two scholars has been lost, it is believed that Mowinckel wrote Gunkel and brought up his close friend Hölscher. In the letter, Mowinckel classified Hölscher as the most intelligent person he knew and someone whom had much expertise that could be learned from someone from whom many people could learn a lot.\textsuperscript{72} The pair of friends brought two different perspectives to their field of expertise and differed in their understanding of the parts of the Hebrew Bible. Hölscher’s influence on Mowinckel contributed to his frequent use of historical criticism and critical analysis of text to reveal the literary relation between the different sources.\textsuperscript{73} Mowinckel was aware of the important influence Hölscher had on his own work and frequently recommended that his students read Hölscher’s book \textit{Geschichte der israelitischen und jüdischen Religion} (1922).\textsuperscript{74}

One of the main reasons Mowinckel travelled to Marburg was Wilhelm Grønbech (1873-1948). The Danish anthropologist together with Gunkel greatly influenced Mowinckel’s study of the psalms.\textsuperscript{75} Grønbech originally studied philology, which cultivated a deeper understanding of the texts he studied and helped him to overcome the linguistic difficulties in primitive religions.\textsuperscript{76} Primitive religions, which he referred to as “classical religions,” captured Grønbech’s fascination with all forms of religions, including “literary expressions, religious leaders, cultic rituals, religious forms and beliefs among the general populace as well as those in organized

\textsuperscript{71} Hjelde, \textit{Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit}, 160.
\textsuperscript{72} Smend, “Mowinckel und Deutschland”, 92.
\textsuperscript{73} Hjelde, \textit{Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit}, 202-03.
\textsuperscript{74} Hjelde, \textit{Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit}, 160.
\textsuperscript{75} Susan Gillingham, \textit{Psalms Through the Centuries: Volume 1} (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 269.
Moreover, as a historian of religions, Grønbech had an extraordinary gift in understanding the ideals of primitive cultures, and became the first to present many characteristic elements in primitive religions. He believed that the key to understanding ancient religions was through understanding the cult, which was where he believed they acted out “cultic rituals and festivals in the form of drama.” This was an eye-opener for Mowinckel and it furthered his appreciation for “the individual’s dependence of the collective entity in the old society” based on Grønbech’s works. Grønbech has been criticized for having an overwhelming missional emphasis in his writings, which overshadowed his works for some scholars. However, it was exactly when Grønbech was giving a lecture series for priests in Norway that the works of the Dane convinced Mowinckel about his cultic interpretation of the Psalms.

In addition to specific people and scholars, Mowinckel was also influenced by schools of thought and was naturally a product of his time. As seen above, there was a conflict between the liberal and conservative sides in Norway when Mowinckel first began his studies. This conflict was partially due to the spark of the historical critical method, which “sought to approach the Bible similarly through so-called objective, scientific means.” This approach shifted the views of many biblical scholars from reading Scripture as the revealed Word of God to treating it as any other literature.

78 Hvidtfeldt, “Vilhelm Grønbech.”
79 Knight, "Scandinavian Interpretation,” 22.
80 Rian, ”The Insights I Have Gained,” 230.
81 Hjelde, Sigmund Mowinckel und seine Zeit, 84.
82 Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard Jr., Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, 52.
83 Ibid., 52.
In fact, Mowinckel defined his scientific work early on in his career as “science of religion.” The historically conservative Nordic countries were opening up to this “newer” approach, which was “[b]asing itself on a radically different reconstruction of the development and history of Israelite religion and the Old Testament literature.” There should be little doubt that Mowinckel was deeply rooted within this new approach to the Bible, which was commonly known as the Literary Critical School. Thus, the Norwegian brought continuity to the school of thought that was established by Julius Wellhausen. Nonetheless, Mowinckel also opposed many of the arguments proposed by this school of thought. Mowinckel’s relation to the Literary Critical School could be described as “a continuity with creative renewal. He did not abandon the literary-critical approach but combined it with form-critical as well as tradition-historical methods.” Moreover, during the beginning of Mowinckel’s time biblical studies in Scandinavia were heavily influenced by the founding of Bible Societies. In Norway the first Bible Society was formed in 1816, which meant, “private Bible reading became an increasingly important part of many people’s personal religious lives.” However, a Norwegian translation based on the original languages of the entire Bible was not complete until the publication of the New Testament in 1904, two years after Mowinckel had begun his theological education.

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84 Rian, "The Insights I Have Gained," 234.
86 Smend, From Astruc to Zimmerli, 158.
88 Ibid., 35.
89 Høgenhaven, ”Biblical Scholarship,” 225.
Consequently, Mowinckel was stepping into an academic field that saw the emergence of a new and radically different approach to the Bible simultaneously to the Bible’s first publication in his native language based on the original languages.

As described, Mowinckel had the privilege of being able to stand on the shoulders of the previous giants in his discipline, while also allowing himself to be transformed by individuals in a variety of disciplines. Therefore, the words of Magne Sæbø summarize Mowinckel’s influences in that: “[h]e was not really a philologian, or an orientalist, or a historian of religion, or an archaeologist; but all the time he crossed the borders of these areas adjacent to the study of the Old Testament and ‘brought home’ new insights that enabled him to read its well known texts in a broader context, and to set them in a new light.”

After having looked closer at how Sigmund Mowinckel approached the Hebrew Bible and at concrete examples from his writings and some of influences, the next section will look closer at how Mowinckel approached the Hebrew Bible in Stadsholderen Nehemia: Studier til den jødiske menighets historie og litteratur, Kongesalmerne i det Gamle Testamentet, Offersang og sangoffer: Salmediktningen i Bibelen, and Det Gamle Testament som Guds Ord.

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1.3 Mowinckel’s Writings: His Approach to the Hebrew Bible

1.3.1 *Statholderen Nehemia: Studier til den jødiske menighets historie og litteratur* (1916) (The Stadholder Nehemiah: Studies on the Jewish Congregation’s History and Literature)

In February/March 1916 Mowinckel submitted his dissertation to his committee: Simon Michelet, Alexander Seippel, and Wilhelm Schencke. They approved Mowinckel’s research on Nehemiah as a dissertation on September 23rd of the same year. Seippel was a leading Orientalist in Norway at the time and Schencke was the first Norwegian professor in the History of Religions, both of whom worked at the Faculty of History and Philosophy at the University of Christiania.  

On Saturday December 2, 1916, Sigmund Mowinckel presented his dissertation “*Statholderen Nehemia: Studier til den Jødiske Menighets Historie og Litteratur*” (The Stadtholder Nehemiah: Studies on the Jewish Congregation’s History and Literature). Mowinckel seemed to be pleased with his dissertation. He described the product of his research in a letter to Michelet stating, “"my results, therefore, are partly very conservative, some very radical, sometimes they coincide with those of earlier investigators, and they are entirely new Ways."” During Mowinckel’s studies in Germany, he wavered between pursuing research on Nehemiah and the Book of Daniel for his dissertation. However, in November 1911, Sigmund wrote to his professor Michelet in Oslo declaring that he had abandoned his intention to write his dissertation on the Book of Daniel on Gunkel’s recommendation, thus Mowinckel returned his focus to the Books of Nehemiah and Ezra.

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93 Ibid., 56.
94 Ibid., 55-56.
Mowinckel applied the literary-critical approach to the Hebrew Bible in his dissertation. He demonstrated his dissatisfaction with many conclusions drawn by other scholars when it came to the scientific study of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In the foreword of the dissertation, Mowinckel clearly identified that he believed the Wellhausen school had prevented further critical reflection on the book of Nehemiah and relied too heavily on its presentation in the Masoretic Text (MT).\textsuperscript{95} Therefore, Mowinckel researched the book of Nehemiah on the basis of Gunkel’s \textit{Religionsgeschichtliche Schule}, which, alongside other scholars, challenged the older school’s view on sources.\textsuperscript{96} In other words, Mowinckel approached his dissertation by applying and combining the form-critical and literary-critical methods.\textsuperscript{97} As many other scholars had noted, the Nehemiah text as it is now preserved in the MT consists of many different sources, and therefore does not offer a natural flow to the narrative. However, Mowinckel was under the impression that 1 Esdras has preserved an older tradition of the Nehemiah narrative than the MT, and that the apocryphal book was originally longer and a source for which Josephus used to write his version of the Nehemiah history.\textsuperscript{98} On this basis Mowinckel compared Josephus’ account of Nehemiah in his \textit{Antiquities of the Jews} (XI 5:6-8) to Nehemiah 1:1-2-10; 2:11-18; 3:1-32; 12:27-43; 7:15-12:26 in the MT, where he determined that the historian did not rely on the Septuagint (LXX) or MT, buts namely the Nehemiah source/memoir.\textsuperscript{99} This Nehemiah source/memoir would have been an independent source to the story of Nehemiah and still have been in circulation at the time of Josephus. Based on his

\textsuperscript{95} Sigmund Mowinckel, \textit{Statholderen Nehemiah: Studier til den jødiske menighets historie og litteratur, 1. samling} (Kristiania: Olaf Norlis Forlag, 1916), xi.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., xii-xiv.
\textsuperscript{97} Sæbø, "Literary Critical School," 29.
\textsuperscript{98} Mowinckel, \textit{Statholderen Nehemiah}, 26.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 69.
discoveries, Mowinckel combined his findings in Josephus’ account of Nehemiah with the narrative in the MT and offered a plausible version of the text in Norwegian.\footnote{Ibid., 74-89.} Another great and notable distinction about this work was that Mowinckel seems to have been the first in Scandinavia to pick up on the oral transmission of biblical traditions. According to Mowinckel, it was important to pay attention to the study of tradition, by which he emphasized the oral transmission in the prophetic literature.\footnote{Knight, “Scandinavian Interpretation,” 26.}

\begin{quote}
Oral improvisation is the essence of prophecy… The prophetic books in their present form are compilations according to an oral tradition, just as the Gospels are. The various, individual, mostly very short oracles first circulated in oral tradition for a long time and then gradually became recorded and collected and ascribes to the various prophets whose names had held fast in the memory of posterity.\footnote{Mowinckel, Statsholderen Nehemiah, 116-17. English translation from Knight, “Scandinavian Interpretation,” 26.}
\end{quote}

Mowinckel believed that the Nehemiah tradition consisted of various fragments that were put together piece by piece over a long period of time.\footnote{Erhard S. Gerstenberger, ”Albert Eichhorn and Hermann Gunkel: The Emergence of History of Religion School” in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation, vol. 3/1, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013), 469.}

In order to come to a deeper understanding of the Nehemiah source, Mowinckel sought “(1) to describe, characterize, and decide the Nehemiah source’s literary form and style; (2) to explore this literature’s origin and historical connection.”\footnote{Mowinckel, Statsholderen Nehemiah, 89.} In this endeavour he challenged the view that the Nehemiah source was stylistically related to the “I” passages in the prophetic books. Through a closer assessment of the differences, Mowinckel stressed that the prophetic books had the “I” passages in the background, whereas it was very much in the foreground of the
Nehemiah source. Furthermore, the Nehemiah source was far more egocentric than all the prophets.\textsuperscript{105} Mowinckel believed that the source tried to present Nehemiah as “the ideal Jewish person.”\textsuperscript{106} However, the egocentric presentation of a biblical character was unique to the Hebrew Bible according to Mowinckel, and in his search to find the origin of the Nehemiah source he compared the style and form to royal inscriptions in the ancient Near East. This became one of the most characteristic trademarks of Mowinckel’s approach to the Hebrew Bible and followed him throughout his career. Based on the parallels that Mowinckel compared with the Nehemiah source, he concluded it had the same style and form as the ancient Near Eastern royal inscriptions.\textsuperscript{107} Mowinckel’s interpretation of the “I” sections in the Babylonian-Assyrian royal inscriptions was one of the few examples where he took advantage of his studies of Assyriology under Jensen.\textsuperscript{108}

In addition to assessing the sources for the Nehemiah story, Mowinckel also looked closer at the historical context of the book. Mowinckel was of the opinion that Ezra and Nehemiah did not live in Jerusalem at the same time, but that Ezra was active later.\textsuperscript{109} Prior to the exile in Babylonia the Israelites had a “national cult-religion,” which Mowinckel referred to as the Palestinian direction of the Israelites’ faith.\textsuperscript{110} However, during their captivity a new direction of their religion was formed. In other words, Judaism was formed during the exile.\textsuperscript{111} The first direction was based on the cult in the Temple with nomadic elements in their faith.\textsuperscript{112} The exile direction

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 122.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 113.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 155.
\textsuperscript{108} Hjelde, Sigmund Mowinckel und sein Zeit, 57.
\textsuperscript{109} Mowinckel, Statholderen Nehemiah, 164.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 164.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 171.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 165-171.
emphasized their nationality, and a Jewish person was “only those who are of the
sheer holy seed.” The religion was naturally not centered on the Temple; rather, it
was centered around being holy and following the law. Therefore, when the exiled
people returned there was a clash between people who based their faith on the cult
and those who based their faith on the law. The new form of Judaism became
especially prominent in Jerusalem, and with it the Samaritans were excluded from
the new form of religion. Nehemiah stood forth as a reformist who tried to
reinforce the laws that the Jewish people had always known. Nehemiah did not bring
anything new and should only be viewed as a reformist.

Interestingly, Mowinckel never followed up his research on Nehemiah in later
works, but many of the themes that he discussed influenced his future works. One of
these themes was the comparison between biblical narrative with ancient Near Eastern
parallels, which was especially central to his research on the Psalms and will be
addressed in the next section.

1.3.2 The Psalms

1.3.2.1 Kongesalmerne i det Gamle Testamente (1916) (“The Royal Psalms in the
Old Testament”)

As an aspiring scholar, Mowinckel had entered the academic realm through his
research on the two historical books of Nehemiah and Ezra. Yet, it was through the
research on the Psalms that Sigmund Mowinckel would receive the most recognition.

According to one of Mowinckel’s students, the professor’s “greatest love, however,

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113 Ibid., 173.
114 Ibid., 180.
115 Ibid., 190.
116 Ibid., 196.
117 Ibid., 206.
above all other poetry, was the psalms of the Old Testament. To him these psalms tied together the past and the present.”

It is arguable that most scholars and students would recognize Mowinckel for his hypothetical New Year Festival, which many were introduced to through Psalmenstudien II: Das Thronbesteigungsfeist Jahwäs und der Ursprung der Eschatologie (1922). However the hypothesis was first brought up six year earlier in Kongesalmerne i Det Gamle Testamentet (1916):

And then comes the New Year festival, on the first of Tishri, on the day of the sanctioning of the first Temple, and YHWH procession to his residence…

But an important role at this festival was played out by his son and earthly deputy, the Israelite King.

Thus, this book was of great importance as it laid the foundation for his famous six-volume Psalmenstudien. Furthermore, the book is also of great interest as it offers an early example of how Mowinckel approached the Hebrew Bible, and how he later developed this approach in Offersang og sangoffer.

In Kongesalmerne i Det Gamle Testamentet, Mowinckel revealed two scholars who had the most profound influence on him by dedicating the book to Hermann Gunkel and Wilhelm Grønbech. According to Mowinckel’s introduction to the book, he had come to his understanding of the role of royal psalms through his conversations with the German scholar and Gunkel’s publication of the article “Die Königspsalmen” in Preussisch Jahrbücher in 1914. Moreover, it was Grønbech’s

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119 Sigmund Mowinckel, Kongesalmerne i det Gamle Testamente (Kristiania: Aschehoug, 1916), 75-76.
lecture series in Voss, Norway in the summer of 1916 that convinced Mowinckel that
the national-religious festivals were the source to the right understanding of the cultic
life among the Israelites.\textsuperscript{121} Thus, Mowinckel combined Gronbech’s understanding of
the ancient cult with Gunkel’s analysis of the different forms of psalms and the
importance of reading them in their \textit{Sitz im Leben}.\textsuperscript{122} In \textit{Kongesalmerne} Mowinckel
builds on the writings of Gunkel and extends the method that his mentor had put
forth. According to Mowinckel, the royal psalms could be interpreted through form-
criticism, as Gunkel “found the correct interpretation of them, an interpretation, which
scholars – precisely because it is so obvious and evident – have not managed to
realize.”\textsuperscript{123} That did not imply that Mowinckel thought that all psalm research until
that point had been incorrect. As a matter of fact, Mowinckel’s extraordinary
occupation with the cultic context of the psalms did not represent something totally
new, but the essence of his ideas was without precursor. However, Mowinckel was
clear that it would not be possible to conduct scientific psalm research without
applying form-criticism.\textsuperscript{124} Therefore, psalms had to be compared to each other in
order to point out their similarities and differences so that they can be arranged
according to their respective groups. Based on this, Mowinckel defined the royal
psalms as Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132.\textsuperscript{125}

By using concrete examples from the royal psalms Mowinckel argued that the
royal figure(s) in the psalms were Israelite and often Judean kings who ruled from
Zion and saw David as their ancestor.\textsuperscript{126} Therefore, he denied the notion that the royal

\textsuperscript{121} Mowinckel, \textit{Kongesalmerne}, v.
\textsuperscript{122} Smend, ”Mowinckel und Deutschland,” 85.
\textsuperscript{123} Mowinckel, \textit{Kongesalmerne}, 1.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 19.
psalms could be interpreted as eschatological-messianic.\textsuperscript{127} In opposition to the notion that these psalms were referring to foreign rulers and kings, the Davidic connection, Jerusalem and the Temple were elements far too strong to support such a claim.\textsuperscript{128} Thus, this leads to one of the most recognizable features of Mowinckel’s approach to the study of the Psalms, namely his emphasis on ancient Near Eastern parallels and patterns. Mowinckel contended that the proper understanding of the royal psalms was through understanding the royal image in the ancient Near Eastern civilizations. Great foreign rulers surrounded the Israelites, and the Israelites adopted their understanding of the royal image. The Egyptian and Babylonian royal images had the most impact on the Israelites, which came partly through their neighbouring Canaanites.\textsuperscript{129} A key to understanding the ancient Near Eastern royal image was through their understanding of the king as divine.\textsuperscript{130} According to Mowinckel, this divine element was central in the Israeliite understanding. He argued that, “[i]n the royal person God and people meet in a mystical way; he is a representation of them both, he is them both.”\textsuperscript{131} Furthermore, the idea of referring to the king as the “son” of God, that the king had eternal life, and that God chose the king himself were all central parts to the royal image in the surrounding cultures.\textsuperscript{132} Mowinckel saw such close connections in the royal psalms to parallel royal hymns in the ancient Near East that the “similarities in style, language, and way of thinking is so great that there can be no doubt that there is a historical connection, whether liberate or not.”\textsuperscript{133} Thus, Mowinckel approached the royal psalms from his research on ancient Near Eastern parallels and then looked

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 12.
  \item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 14-16.
  \item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 22.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 25.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 27.
  \item \textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 28-35.
  \item \textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 137.
\end{itemize}
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for concrete examples of how that played out in the royal psalms. Therefore, much of his work on the Psalms relied on the works of scholars outside of his field of specialization, just as his mentor Gunkel had done extensively. Mowinckel built on hypotheses proposed by great scholars while also criticizing them for their lack of understanding of the origin of the biblical narratives. The Norwegian scholar was adamant that the critical-school based on the studies of Julius Wellhausen had denied the evidence that pointed towards the pre-exilic origins of the psalms. Moreover, Mowinckel was resolute that Gunkel’s non-cultic understanding of the origin of the psalms needed to be refined, and criticised his mentor for lack of conviction in the usage of his own method. Yet Mowinckel acknowledged that the Psalter as a collection was post-exilic, but that the different forms of Psalms should be studied independently in order to determine the different forms “history, their origin, their original place in the real life.”

The religious significance of the Israelite kings became extremely interesting to Mowinckel, who argued that the king became one of the most central people in the Israelite religion as “he becomes the one who performs the religion on the behalf of the people.” The king was therefore seen as the foundation of the religion. This was partially because the ancient Israelites understood the covenant of God to be carried on the shoulders of the king, and it was therefore important that the royals followed the path of God. Thus, Mowinckel was of the opinion that “[t]he king becomes the guaranty for Yahweh’s goodness and grace.” Furthermore, the Israelites believed that “God through the king is close to his people and through him gives his blessing,

134 Ibid., 19.
137 Ibid., 36.
138 Ibid., 36-37.
his fortune, yes, his own divine power; himself.” According to Mowinckel, this happened because, as the religion of the Israelites developed, the tension between God’s immanent and transcendent nature collided and God grew too big to be comprehended. Therefore, the royal psalms testify to the way in which the royal figure stepped in as the person between God and his people. Mowinckel also approached the Psalter as a testimony of how “God developed” in the religion of the Israelites.

Mowinckel extended this work beyond showing how the royal images in the ancient Near Eastern civilizations were displayed in specific psalms; he also placed the royal psalms in their *Sitz im Leben* at the national-religious festivals. According to Mowinckel,

> [the festivals were] mystic-sacramental dramatic re-enactment and reliving of the ‘salvation acts’, the divine interventions… At the festival the events where God for the first time revealed himself and his power to his power are re-enacted. In these events and dramatic-mystic re-enactment, they are repeated and become real again; all over again, like the first time, the power of God comes pouring, or God himself, into the tribe or people and gives life and fortune… At these festivals the king became the “midpoint” of all the events.

Mowinckel launched the hypothesis of the enthronement festival on the basis of this understanding of the ancient festivals, as seen above. The royal psalms were sung at these festivals for celebrating a victory, a wedding or simply celebrating the enthronement of Yahweh. In addition to specifying psalms 2, 15, 24, 72, 101, 110, and 132 as likely to have been sung at the enthronement festival, Mowinckel also placed all the other royal psalms in festivals he believed to be their rightful *Sitz im Leben*.

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139 Ibid., 139-140.
140 Ibid., 140-141.
141 Ibid., 140.
142 Ibid., 64.
143 Ibid., 65.
Therefore the key to understanding the royal psalms was to understand that they all belonged to the pre-exilic festivals.\footnote{144}{Ibid., 116.}

The next section will look at how Mowinckel approached the Psalter at a later stage of his career, and how he developed his hypotheses.

1.3.2.2 *Offersang og sangoffer: Salmedikting i Bibelen (1951)* ("The Psalms in Israel's Worship")

The previous section looked closely at Mowinckel’s approach to the Psalter while he was a graduate student at the University of Christiania, but the Norwegian scholar would not leave the Psalter alone. After receiving international fame for his six-volume *Psalmenstudien*, he published his research on the psalms in his mother tongue, this time titled *Offersang og sangoffer*. The Norwegian title can be translated as “Song of Sacrifice and Sacrifice of Song,” or more literally, “Offering Song and Song Offering.” In the English edition, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (1961), Mowinckel revealed the purpose of the title was to “suggest one of the avenues through the history of psalm poetry in the Old Testament.”\footnote{145}{Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, xliii.}

In *Kongesalmerne i det gamle testament*, Mowinckel suggested it was plausible that most of the psalms originated after the fall of the Monarchy.\footnote{146}{Mowinckel, *Kongesalmerne*, 13.} In subsequent research on the topic, Mowinckel acknowledged that a few psalms in the Psalter were not cultic, and likely stemmed from early Judaism.\footnote{147}{Sigmund Mowinckel, *Offersang og sangoffer: Salmediktningen i Bibelen* (Oslo: Aschheoug, 1951), 374-378.} Nevertheless, in *Kongesalmerne*, Mowinckel dedicated the majority of the content to arguing that most of the psalms in the Psalter originated in the pre-exilic cult. On this basis, Mowinckel...
deemed it necessary to articulate his definition of a cult: “Cult or ritual may be defined as the socially established and regulated holy acts and words in which the encounter and communion of the Deity with the congregation is established, developed, and brought to its ultimate goal.”¹⁴⁸ Or as he summarized it later, “[t]he cult is, as mentioned above, the visible and audible expression of the relation between the congregation and the deity.”¹⁴⁹ Therefore, the Israelite cult was a place where the acts and words were made into “holy rituals.”¹⁵⁰ Mowinckel’s criticism of Gunkel and other religio-historical scholars was most evident here, as Mowinckel believed they had “failed to take appropriate consequences of their new methodological approach. In particular, they stressed too heavily – as the older criticism – the religious conceptions and ideas, instead of – like Mowinckel now focused it – the different forms of religious life as it was exercised and experienced by the people in the cult.”¹⁵¹

Mowinckel believed the psalms should be divided into groups based on the “division’ in the cult itself, its different occasions, situations and acts.”¹⁵² As many other scholars noted, many of the psalms could be divided based on whether they were speaking in the we-form or I-form, but here Mowinckel broke with his mentor Gunkel’s understanding of I-form psalms as referring to individual psalms and we-form psalms as proper congregational psalms. According to the Norwegian scholar the “apparent I-psalm… may be really a congregational psalm, because the ‘I’ is the national and cultic representative of the congregation.”¹⁵³ Based on this observation,
Mowinckel divided the psalms into “five main types of psalms in the Psalter” which included “the praises and thanksgivings of the congregation, private (that is, individual) thanksgivings, and besides them both congregational and individual lamentation and prayer psalms.”

After establishing his cultic understanding of the psalms and how they are to be divided, Mowinckel returned to the topic of his 1916 book, namely, the royal psalms. However, this time much of the attention was given to the cultic significance of the collective usage of the I-form in psalms. This was because Mowinckel believed that the individuals in ancient times saw themselves more as a part of a community than as individuals. In this construal, the king was the representation of the community: “[h]e is the ´representation` because the ´soul´, the history, the honour, the vigour and the blessing of the whole are concentrated in him.” Therefore, it was “natural that the congregation through its cult-representation or representatives appears as a ´corporate personality´ speaking in the first person singular, ´I´.” In his chapter on the royal psalms, Mowinckel now included Psalms 28, 61, and 63 in addition to those he included in his first book on the royal psalms. In addition to highlighting many of the arguments from his 1916 book about the royal psalms, Mowinckel also extended this book, looking closer at other Gattung of psalms, in order to see how they reflected different sides of the cultic worship.

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154 Ibid., 45. Here it should also be noted that the English translation of the book refers to “four main types of psalms in the Psalter.” Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel’s Worship, 39.
155 Ibid., 51.
156 Ibid., 53.
157 Ibid., 54.
158 Ibid., 57.
159 Ibid., 91.
thanksgiving psalms, and the psalms of blessing and curse, all of which he look at based on their alleged origin in the cultic worship. Thus, Mowinckel’s works on the psalms testify to his ability to further develop his hypotheses. In 1916, Mowinckel published his book solely on the royal psalms, where he affirmed Gunkel’s idea that the royal psalms were pre-exilic. Additionally, in *Offersang og sangoffer* Mowinckel provided evidence that many of the laments, hymns, and thanksgiving psalms also had a plausible origin in the pre-exilic cult.

The hypothesis about the enthronement festival was another topic Mowinckel returned to, which he had first articulated in *Kongesalmerne i det gamle testament*. In his lengthy chapter on the New Year festival, Mowinckel was adamant that the correct translation of the Hebrew phrase *Yahweh mâlakh* should be interpreted “Yahweh has become King” instead of the classical “Yahweh is King.”

The phrase was central in the hypothesis that the Israelites celebrated an annual festival that was called “the day of the Lord” or “the day of the feast of Yahweh.” The festival was celebrated in the Fall, and was a festival that the Israelites borrowed from the Canaanites. A festival that celebrated the annual enthronement of a god was common in the ancient Near Eastern similar to the Babylonian annual celebration of the god Marduk. Despite its similarities to other ancient Near Eastern festivals, Mowinckel stressed that the Israeliite celebration of the enthronement of Yahweh still represented something different from the other cultures. As mentioned above, the various ancient festivals were re-enacting events from the past, and while other cultures celebrated the death and resurrection of their respective gods, the Israelites...

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160 Ibid., 119.
161 Ibid., 128.
162 Ibid., 129.
163 Ibid., 132.
164 Ibid., 136.
denied the notion that Yahweh could die. Building on that foundation, Mowinckel demonstrated how some of the enthronement psalms (Psalms 24, 46, 48, 75, 76, and 81) could have played a central part in the hypothetical enthronement festival, and how the king could have played a part in it.

The book showed evidence of how Mowinckel dug deeper into the specifics of ancient Israelite poetry by devoting chapters to psalmography and metrics. In the latter, Mowinckel was influenced by his friend Hölscher, claiming that the “Hebrew poetic rhythm is in principle iambic.” This serves as an example of how Mowinckel stood by hypotheses that were alternative to those held by most biblical scholars at the time, as the majority of scholars in the field were in favour of Eudard Sievers theory about the rhythm of Hebrew poetry.

Mowinckel also looked at the compilation of the Psalter as we know it today and the reasoning behind why the different psalms were compiled into one book. However, what was likely of more interest to the Norwegian scholar was his comparison between what was specific to Israelite psalmography and what was strongly connected to other ancient Near Eastern cultures. This ran like a common thread throughout his research on the Psalter and was a central aspect of how Mowinckel approached the Hebrew Bible.

Of interest to English scholarship, the Norwegian edition of Offersang og sangoffer offered an additional chapter to the subsequent English translation, which focused on the Christian Church’s use of the Psalter. The foreword of the English translation acknowledged the omission of a chapter as he described it as “strongly

165 Ibid., 139-142.
166 Ibid., 423.
167 Ibid., 423.
coloured by having been written during enemy occupation,” as Norway was occupied during the Second World War by German forces from 1940-1945. Here Mowinckel addressed the tension between the psalms that are hateful toward their enemies and the Christian notion of loving one’s enemies, as well as the importance of leaving judgment in the hands of God. This provided significant evidence to the way in which Mowinckel consistently approached the Hebrew Bible through the lens of a Christian reading of the text. This would also be a central element in *Det Gamle Testament som Guds Ord* where Mowinckel looked closer at how the “Word of God” in the Hebrew Bible should be interpreted.

### 1.3.3 *Det Gamle Testament som Guds Ord* (1938) ("The Old Testament as Word of God")

In 1937 to 1938 there was a public debate in the journals *Norsk kirkeblad* and *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke* about whether or not the Hebrew Bible should be understood as the Word of God. The primary participants in the debate were Ivar P. Seierstad, Carl Fredrik Wisløff, Hans Ording, and Sigmund Mowinckel, all of whom were highly esteemed scholars in Norway at the time. In this discussion, Seierstad was interested to hear how Mowinckel’s theological views had shifted on the basis of his involvement in the Oxford Group Movement. The English translation, which came out in 1959, picked up on the historical context for the publication of the book.

In the fall semester of 1937, Mowinckel gave an open lecture series where he dealt

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169 Mowinckel, *Offersang og sangoffer*, 476-481.
with the nature of revelation in the Hebrew Bible, which was subsequently published as the book titled *Det Gamle Testament som Guds Ord* (1938). The topic that Mowinckel approached in this book was not traditionally seen as part of the realm of a Hebrew Bible professor, as it leans more towards hermeneutical questions. Due to the nature of the topic, Mowinckel acknowledged that he applied it from “systematic thought,” but that it made no claim to be an “advanced systematic thinking.”

The Norwegian professor introduced his book through drawing attention to how Christians should understand the nature of the Bible. Mowinckel approached this topic by asking the fundamental question of how the Hebrew Bible can be a divine revelation of the Israelite God at the same time as it is a book written by people, “characterized by human imperfection and infirmity.” According to the Christian orthodox teaching, the Hebrew Bible has been understood as the word of God, which also seemed to have been the impression of Jesus and his apostles. According to Mowinckel, the “sharpest formulation of the idea was given by the early Lutheran theologians in the ‘theory of verbal inspiration’.” They believed that God had dictated to the authors of the Bible, and “Scripture therefore, it was held, was ‘infallible’ even in the externals and down to the smallest details.” But as every new theology student soon discovers, that explanation cannot be deemed accurate. Through several examples Mowinckel provides evidence for how “the Old Testament is not a homogeneous entity, not something closed and completed, as we might instinctively expect the ‘Word of God’ to be. On the contrary, it bears the clear marks of a diverse

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171 Hjelde, *Sigmund Mowinckel*, 239.
173 Ibid., 16.
174 Ibid., 5.
175 Ibid., 8.
human history with many crosscurrent lines. Or in other words, the Old Testament appears to us as a very human book.”\textsuperscript{176} Despite these seemingly conflicting natures, Mowinckel argues that it is not possible to separate between the two natures there can only be one conclusion drawn: “All is God’s word and testimony concerning himself, and all is human testimony. The one in and through the other because it all is organically bound together and forms an organic history.”\textsuperscript{177} Thus, the Word of God was a testimony in a double sense both as a “God’s testimony about himself and as man’s inspired testimony about God.”\textsuperscript{178}

Mowinckel distinguished between the theological terms inspiration and revelation. He defined revelation as meaning, “God imparts himself to us and the content of that which he thus imparts or gives,” and inspiration as, “God puts a man into a position to receive and grasp that which he reveals and to pass it on; it is, then, also the condition of mind, the specific mental equipment and activity through which God imparts himself.”\textsuperscript{179} In other words, Mowinckel was of the opinion that the revelation of God is primarily about deeds, “it is God’s work of creating anew and of creating the future that is his revelation.”\textsuperscript{180} Thus, the revelation of theoretical truths about God was therefore only to be understood as secondary.\textsuperscript{181}

According to Mowinckel, the biblical phrase “the Word of the Lord came to…” should be understood as, “the Word of the Lord became active reality within.”\textsuperscript{182} Mowinckel believed this would portray a more accurate translation of the Hebrew verb as it implies that the prophets that have received the Word of the Lord as

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 174.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 34-35.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 74.
the Word simultaneously “becomes one with the whole personality of the prophets, so that they know the feelings of Yahweh, think his thoughts, have his reactions against the sin of men and their foolishness or faithfulness and obedience.” This was central to Mowinckel’s understanding of what the Word in the Hebrew Bible meant, as he later elaborated on the power and strength of the Word:

It expresses an activity, a personal will to effect that which lies in the being of God. It creates what it names. When God ‘sent a word against Jacob,’ then this means in the given situation a desolating change, a bomb that explodes (Isa. 55:10ff.). It expresses the being of God; it is, so to speak, the being of God in outgoing activity… It is understandable that the word sometimes in the Old Testament appears as an independent ‘person’ beside God (a ‘hypostasis’ - see Pss. 33:6; 107:20; 147:15; Isa. 55:11) and as one having divine characteristics (cf. Isa. 40:8; Ps. 33:4) – wherever this happens, what is implied by ‘the Word’ is the whole essence of God. 183

According to Mowinckel, the ancient Israelites understood God as revealing himself in their cultic life, where the sacraments made his divine presence felt. However, this was a misconception of God’s revelation, as God is and always has continued to reveal himself through history. 184 That is because God has revealed himself to actual historical people, and everything in history is “God’s ‘intervention’.” 185 It was through this that Mowinckel made clear his understanding of why God had revealed himself, because “God’s plan is ultimately his salvation plan; the purpose of the creation is the salvation, the complete realization of God’s purpose; ‘everything is created by and for Christ’.” 186 Therefore, Mowinckel stressed that God’s revelation in history was not to reveal himself as a transcendent God, but rather as a God who is in direct interaction with the world through history. 187 Through these

183 Ibid., 38-39.
184 Ibid., 31.
185 Ibid., 32.
186 Ibid., 36.
187 Ibid., 35.
statements, Mowinckel clearly highlighted his abolishment of the distinctions between the “general” and the “specific” revelation of God. The idea that there could be a separate history of people and nations that have stood outside the will of God went against Mowinckel’s understanding of the Hebrew Bible. Rather he argued against a distinction between \textit{revelatio specialis} and \textit{revelatio generalis}.\footnote{Ibid., 50.}

This emphasis on the general revelation of God in history was extended as Mowinckel explained his understanding of the role of other religions. According to Mowinckel, the Hebrew Bible has made it clear that God revealed himself to people and nations outside the biblical narrative. Therefore, it was natural for the ancient Church Fathers to build on the wisdom of philosophers like Socrates and Plato, because “through the Word it is really God that has been in contact with them and revealed something about himself for them.”\footnote{Ibid., 111.} Moreover, following the same train of thought Mowinckel argued, “if we first believe in a God, we must assume that a man like Mohammed has been in contact with this God, and that God has had a message for him, a task to give him.”\footnote{Ibid., 112.} Nevertheless, Mowinckel did not stop underlining that the ultimate purpose of God’s revelation was the supremacy of Christ.\footnote{Ibid., 113.}

Interestingly, in this book Mowinckel approached the Hebrew Bible from a different angle than most of his other works. While his first works were largely built on the scientific methods put forth by great historical critical scholars like Gunkel and Wellhausen, there is little doubt that Gunkel would have written a book like \textit{The Old Testament as the Word of God}.\footnote{Smend, ”Mowinckel und Deutschland,” 82.} The book portrays how the evangelical tradition had influenced Mowinckel later in his career, and thus highlights the shift that took

\footnote{Smend, ”Mowinckel und Deutschland,” 82.}
place from the young theology student who was primarily interested in understanding the Hebrew Bible in its ancient Near Eastern context to the professor who sees the Hebrew Bible leading to the Word of God – Jesus Christ. Furthermore, *The Old Testament as the Word of God* is also an example of how the Norwegian scholar combined his intellectual and scientific brilliance with his evangelical faith. Thus, the book exemplifies how Mowinckel approached the Hebrew Bible not only in a scientific way, but also as a Christian writing for other Christians.

This chapter has provided an overview of some of Sigmund Mowinckel’s life, scholarship, and approaches to the Hebrew Bible. The four works of Mowinckel that have been highlighted have enabled us to see how the Norwegian biblical scholar approached his field of expertise at different stages of his career. The next chapter will explore at how Mowinckel’s approach to the Hebrew Bible influenced contemporary scholarship by addressing some of the scholars that picked up on his ideas, and by looking at how Mowinckel’s ideas were received in the 20th century.
Chapter 2
Mowinckel’s Influence on the Field of Biblical Studies

Sigmund Mowinckel’s fame reached far beyond the narrow fjords of Norway. One of the proudest moments in the biblical scholar’s life was when he was introduced at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem with the words: “Here comes the man who knows our country better than we know it ourselves.”¹⁹³ The Norwegian scholar was one of the most influential within his field during the 20th century, through his distinctive character and unique approaches to the Hebrew Bible. However, Mowinckel was also heavily criticised for some of the contributions he made to the field and some of his hypotheses were questioned. This chapter will look closely at how Sigmund Mowinckel’s approaches to the Hebrew Bible influenced biblical scholarship during the 20th century, with a special attention paid to the four works that were addressed in the previous chapter. This chapter will also look at some of the “schools” where Mowinckel had the greatest impact. However, it will not offer an exhaustive examination of Mowinckel’s influence. Rather it will highlight some of the responses to and influences he had on biblical scholarship.

2.1 Mowinckel’s Influence on Schools, Languages, and Scholars

2.1.1 Germany, the Literary Critical School and Form-Critical Method

Prior to the beginning of Mowinckel’s academic career, his field of expertise had seen radical changes mainly through the works of scholars like Julius Wellhausen and Hermann Gunkel. As seen in the previous chapter, Mowinckel stepped into these new

schools of theology. However, compared to many other scholars of his time, Mowinckel was not weighed down or troubled by the direction of the biblical scholarship in which he engaged. Rather the opposite, Mowinckel was striving to combine elements of the theological tradition in which he stood with other schools of thought in order to find what he believed were the right approaches to the Hebrew Bible. Despite this, Mowinckel never formed a school of thought similar to those of the other great biblical scholars by whom he was influenced. Yet that is not to say that Mowinckel did not have any influence on schools of thought during his lifetime. In fact, Mowinckel represented “decisive turning-points in Old Testament studies,” like Wellhausen and Gunkel had done before him.  

The Literary Critical School influenced Mowinckel, especially during the early stages of his career. Mowinckel was not afraid of criticising the greats like Wellhausen and Gunkel, and in so doing, he also criticised the Literary Critical School for “their extremely negative estimate of the Israelite cult.” This created some tension between Mowinckel and some of the other scholars who practiced the literary critical method. According to Sæbø, Mowinckel’s “main interest was not congruent with theirs.” At the same time Mowinckel never abandoned the Literary Critical School, and “saw himself as belonging within the continuity, or history, of his discipline.” Thus, Mowinckel challenged the scholars who applied a similar method as himself, and a great reason for this was the influence of Gunkel. According to the American biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann who highlighted the differences between Gunkel and Wellhausen in a clear fashion:

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194 Sæbø, ”Literary Critical School,” 83.
195 Ibid., 83.
197 Smend, From Astruc to Zimmerli, 158.
The parameters for questions of interpretation were largely set by Wellhausen and Gunkel. Wellhausen’s approach is scientific, Gunkel’s artistic. Wellhausen is consistently analytical, Gunkel synthetic. Wellhausen aims for precision, Gunkel for suggestive nuance. Wellhausen speaks of documents whereas Gunkel treats of tradition. Wellhausen values discipline, Gunkel stresses imagination.\(^{198}\)

This quote is of interest as it displays how Mowinckel’s mentor, Gunkel also challenged the leading method at his time. Furthermore, it illustrates how Mowinckel would have challenged the methods of Wellhausen through adapting the form-critical method of Gunkel. The key to Gunkel’s research had been to place the biblical narratives and psalms in their *Sitz im Leben*, and few scholars more successfully demonstrated how the psalms should be read based on their *setting in life* than Mowinckel. As a matter of fact, Erhard Gerstenberger believed that it was both Gunkel and Mowinckel together that should be credited as the “parents of form critical work.”\(^{199}\) With that in mind, it should not be difficult to draw the conclusion that Mowinckel has influenced most scholars who have applied the form-critical method to their work on the psalms, because the scholarship was based on the work provided by Mowinckel and Gunkel. Yet Gerstenberger noted, “…Mowinckel would not limit form critical work to stupefying vivisection of literary remains but include all possible avenues which might lead back towards a fuller understanding of the pertinent life situations.”\(^{200}\) Mowinckel was not limited to form-critical scholarship, and his influence would affect other schools of theology beyond the borders of Germany. Many of Mowinckel’s early works were first published in German, which meant that


\(^{200}\) Ibid., 196.
Mowinckel left his marks on German biblical research at an early stage of his career. However, some of Mowinckel’s greatest critics, such as Hans Joachim Kraus, were also German, which also had an impact on how some of Mowinckel’s theories did not get a foothold in Germany.

2.1.2 British Scholarship and Myth and Ritual School

Mowinckel would also leave an imprint on North American and British biblical scholarship, as he was well received in the English-speaking world, as James Barr’s praise of him exemplifies. The renowned Scottish biblical scholar Barr, who held professorships at established universities like Princeton and Oxford, revealed that he learned Norwegian for the sole purpose of reading Mowinckel’s book *Offersang og sangoffer*. The Norwegian edition was published in 1951, but it was not translated into English until 1962. The fact that a scholar was not willing to wait for a translation in his mother tongue testifies to the significant influence Mowinckel had in the English-speaking world at the time. Furthermore, Mowinckel had great influence on the *Myth and Ritual School*. The term *Myth and Ritual School* refers to two movements, or two branches of the same movement, which “sought to show how pervasive were the central ritual acts of ancient societies and how inseparable from these acts were the accompanying words.” One of the movements was connected to Samuel H. Hooke’s publication of a collection of articles in 1933 under the title *Myth*

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201 Knight, "Scandinavian Interpretation," 19.
Scandinavian movement of scholars that were dealing with the relationship between myth and ritual, but they were much less formally organized than their counterpart in Great Britain. Because “[t]he pattern of religious activity identified by the school was focused upon the celebration of New Year's Day and upon the place of the king in that celebration,” Mowinckel’s hypothesis was vital to the research of the school as it made the foundation of the understanding of the New Year festival among the Israelites. The school would later work out many of the festival’s details. While it is logical to highlight the crucial part that Mowinckel played in the British and Scandinavian movements, it would not be fair to say that he was the sole “father” of the Myth and Ritual school, as they also drew inspiration from other scholars like Gunkel, Grönbech, and Wilhelm Mannhardt.

2.1.3 Scandinavia and Uppsala School

Mowinckel was a great representative of Scandinavian scholarship during the 20th century, as it “often opposed the ruling methods and assumptions directly.” Despite this, Mowinckel would not play as great a role in the famous Scandinavian Uppsala school as he had in the Myth and Ritual school. There was somewhat of a tension between Mowinckel and the Uppsala-school; Magne Sæbø goes so far as to refer to it as “there was something like a ‘cold war.’” However, in Ivan Engnell’s *Studies in

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204 Harrelson, "Myth and Ritual School."
205 Ibid.
206 Ibid.
207 Knight, "Scandinavian Interpretation," 19.
Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East (1943), the Swede acknowledged that he had learnt a great deal from Mowinckel.\textsuperscript{209} Still, the two of them had some disagreements over the matter of “tradition history” where Mowinckel “points out that ‘oral tradition’ and ‘history of tradition’ are concepts that are not quite as new and revolutionary as Engnell contends.”\textsuperscript{210} However, even though the discussion between the two could at times become fierce it was mainly a discussion about details in their understanding of the same thing.\textsuperscript{211} As Douglas A. Knight states: “[t]his controversy between the two seems, at first blush, to fit the saying of ‘a distinction without a difference’.”\textsuperscript{212}

Even though Mowinckel did not necessarily form any new methods or schools within biblical studies, he continued to have great influence on scholars and the scholarship of his time. Long after Mowinckel’s death Johan B. Hygen wrote the following about Mowinckel: “Alive he was, and alive he still is – in his works and in the hearts of his many pupils and friends.”\textsuperscript{213} The next sections will look closer at how the specific books that were addressed in the previous chapter influenced biblical scholarship in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, and how Mowinckel’s approach to the Hebrew Bible impacted the approach of other scholars.

\textsuperscript{209} Ivan Engnell, Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1943), 2.
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{212} Knight, ”Scandinavian Interpretation,” 28.
\textsuperscript{213} Hygen, ”The Man and the Teacher,” 1.
2.2 Mowinckel’s Influences on the Study of The Book of Nehemiah

Sigmund Mowinckel’s dissertation in 1916 was only published in Norwegian. As a result, Mowinckel did not receive international recognition for this work in a way similar to the recognition that some of his later works would grant him. However, in 1964/65 he published a three-volume work on Ezra and Nehemiah in German, based mainly on his dissertation. Mowinckel had also published an article in 1923 entitled *Die vorderasiarischen*, where he brought up some of the arguments from the dissertation. Because of these additional publications in German, Mowinckel was able to spread his theories about the book of Nehemiah to the wider biblical scholarship, and influence its study.

2.2.1 Source-Critical Method and Historical Reconstruction

In our assessment of the selected works in the previous chapter, it became evident that Mowinckel’s work on Nehemiah was where Mowinckel followed most closely in the footsteps of Wellhausen. Mowinckel was primarily interested in the sources of the book of Nehemiah, which meant he “pursued source study according to all the rules of the philological craft.”

Mowinckel would later admit that the Hebrew Bible contained sources that were far more in number and far smaller in size than he had originally argued for. However, two of the students of Albrecht Alt, Gerhard von Rad and Martin Noth, accepted Mowinckel’s alternatives to source criticism and followed up on some of his arguments. Von Rad was especially interested in “the

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214 Smend, *From Astruc to Zimmerli*, 158.
process of tradition transmission in early Israel.” What would be more influential, however, was how Mowinckel believed the sources were put together. In his dissertation, Mowinckel was one of the first in Scandinavia to point out the importance of oral tradition in the forming of the biblical books. One of the biblical scholars to pick up on this was the Swedish biblical scholar Ivan Engnell. The Swede was very critical of the Wellhausen-school, and he was especially in stark opposition to the teaching of source criticism. The basis of the opposition was described in Engnell’s *Gamla Testamentet: En tradtitionshistorisk inledning* where the author stated, “[w]hat we have before us are living, oral traditions, committed indeed to writing, but firmly formed and fixed already in the oral stage so that even the written form signifies in itself nothing absolutely new and revolutionary.” As seen above, that did not mean that Mowinckel fully endorsed Engnell’s approach to the Hebrew Bible, nor that Engnell adapted all the elements of Mowinckel’s approach. The Norwegian scholar found many significant problems with Engnell’s theories and approaches to the Hebrew Bible.

At this stage of his career, it seems evident that Mowinckel aimed to be an exegete like Wellhausen had been before him, and through that approach, also to be a historian. This was partially because Mowinckel saw the source-critical method as an essential part of the historical reconstruction of Israel. Therefore, Mowinckel had hoped his findings in the work on Nehemiah would shed more light on the historical

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217 Knight, ”Scandinavian Interpretation,” 27.
219 Knight, ”Scandinavian Interpretation,” 27.
220 Sæbø, ”Literary Critical School,” 29.
reconstruction of ancient Israel. Biblical scholarship saw a tremendous rise in interest in the history of Israelite religion at the end of the 19th century and into the beginning of the 20th century. This became known as the History of Religions School, and even though Mowinckel was influenced by the questions that the members of that school were asking, it is not likely that his work on Nehemiah influenced the school in any way. Mowinckel’s work on Nehemiah was published in German too late to have had a substantial influence.

2.2.2 Extra-biblical Texts and Ancient Near East

Throughout his career, Mowinckel looked beyond biblical texts to prove his points. By comparing Nehemiah in the Masoretic text to how it was presented in Josephus, Mowinckel argued that it was highly probable that the Nehemiah memoir was built on an older source. The hypothesis of the “existence of this older source is widely accepted.” Mowinckel also aimed to prove that the Nehemiah memoir represented something stylistically different than the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, Mowinckel became the first scholar who based his research on extra-biblical texts in order to successfully prove that there were similarities between the Nehemiah memoir and parallel texts from the ancient Near East. Due to the fact that Mowinckel did not find any literary structures in the Hebrew Bible that could compare to the Nehemiah memoir, Mowinckel compared it to foreign royal inscriptions in the ancient Near East, which yielded positive results. This was followed up by several other scholars, and would become a key to how the Nehemiah memoir was to be understood by

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biblical scholars. Interestingly, this approach of comparing biblical narratives to foreign royal inscriptions would become a vital part of the arguments Mowinckel made about the royal ideology in the study of the royal psalms.

When assessing how the hypotheses developed by Mowinckel in his dissertation influenced some of the biblical scholarship, one must keep in mind that the dissertation’s influence was hindered by it only being published in Norwegian for many years. The next section will look at an area where Mowinckel had tremendous influence, namely, the study of the psalms.

2.3 Mowinckel’s Influences on the Study of the Psalter

Mowinckel’s career was ultimately defined by his great contributions to the study of the psalms in the Hebrew Bible. Many showed great enthusiasm for the Norwegian’s numerous contributions to the study of the longest book of the Hebrew Bible, while others were equally enthusiastic in their rejection of many of his approaches to the Psalter. Therefore, Jimmy J. B. Roberts was likely correct when he wrote: “What no one in Psalms study could do, however, was ignore Mowinckel. His work required a response.”

2.3.1 Enthronement Festival and Enthronement Psalms

The hypothesis of Mowinckel that yielded the most response was likely his hypothesis about the enthronement festival. In Kongesalmerne i det gamle testamente, Mowinckel launched his infamous theory about enthronement psalms, which drew

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parallels to the New Year festivals that were celebrated in the ancient Near East.\textsuperscript{224} Even though this would likely become the most famous hypothesis of Mowinckel’s career, and to a certain extent define his career, it was also one of the more challenging aspects of Mowinckel’s works on the Psalter for many scholars. Very few scholars, if any, accepted the New Year festival without modifications. One person who was generous in his praises of Mowinckel’s hypothesis was Hans Schmidt.\textsuperscript{225} Helmer Ringgren dealt with the hypothesis in several contexts, but never fully endorsed the theory.\textsuperscript{226} Mowinckel’s teacher and mentor Hermann Gunkel had to adjust some of his theories based on the work of his student, but reluctantly admitted that there had been an enthronement festival in pre-exilic Israel for Yahweh.\textsuperscript{227} However, Gunkel was of the opinion that all the enthronement psalms in the Psalter had been reworked and given an eschatological dimension, which meant that any pure enthronement psalms from the cult no longer exist.\textsuperscript{228} The German scholar Artur Weiser also acknowledged a pre-exilic celebration of Yahweh’s accession to the throne in Jerusalem, but Weiser was less certain that the celebration had relied so heavily on foreign models in the ancient Near East, and believed that it was far more genuinely Israelite.\textsuperscript{229} According to Johann J. Stamm, the scholars who accepted some form of Mowinckel’s enthronement festival hypothesis with smaller or greater adjustments in the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century included Johannes Pedersen, Aage

\textsuperscript{224} Even though it was mentioned in Mowinckel’s work of 1916, most of the scholars were introduced to the hypothesis in Mowinckel’s \textit{Psalmenstudien II}.

\textsuperscript{225} Roberts, “Mowinckel’s Theory,” 98.


\textsuperscript{227} Roberts, “Mowinckel’s Theory,” 99.

\textsuperscript{228} Körting, ”The Psalms,” 543.

\textsuperscript{229} Roberts, “Mowinckel’s Theory,” 99.
Bentzen, Ivan Engnell, Geo Widengren, Aubrey R. Johnson, Franz M. Böhl, Paul Humbert, Elmer A. Leslie, and Gerhard von Rad.\textsuperscript{230} The hypothesis was also heavily criticised by many scholars. Some of the arguments used against Mowinckel’s hypothesis were that it lacked other biblical evidence to support his claim, it relied too heavily on other religions in the ancient Near East, and that Mowinckel tried to explain too many different psalms on the background of a single cultic festival. Stamm noted that the only ones to make a noteworthy argument against Mowinckel’s hypothesis were László I. Pap, Norman H. Snaith, Sverre Aalen, and Hans Joachim Kraus.\textsuperscript{231} Perhaps most interesting was Hans Joachim Kraus’ recognition of Mowinckel’s hypothesis about the \textit{Sitz im Leben} for the enthronement psalms. Kraus believed that an ancient cultic festival in the Fall had been the origin for the enthronement psalms, but did not believe it had anything to do with the enthronement of Yahweh. Instead, Kraus argued that the festival celebrated Yahweh’s choosing of David and Zion, and Kraus named the festival the royal Zion festival.\textsuperscript{232} Because of the status of some of the scholars like Kraus, Mowinckel’s theory would become increasingly ignored in Germany in later parts of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{233} Moreover, despite Mowinckel’s international recognition for his great contributions to the academic study of the Psalter, some scholars have also deemed parts of Mowinckel’s contributions as examples of pitfalls in the discipline. This was especially related to his Enthronement festival hypothesis. Longman III went so far as to claim, “[t]he connection between the psalms and this particular ancient Near Eastern background was much too tenuous, and thus scholars recognize that


\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 47.

\textsuperscript{232} Ibid., 108-109.

\textsuperscript{233} Ibid., 108-109.
Mowinckel’s ideas were an imposition of ancient Near Eastern religious ideas on the OT.”

Even though the hypothesis about the New Year festival has not necessarily been proved to be “true,” Mowinckel managed to challenge scholars to think in a new way through his hypothesis, and therefore, he must be said to have served a value for later scholarship. Moreover, it should be noted that Mowinckel’s theory about the “Day of Yahweh” is still one of the two or three theories that have been accepted, one of the other ones being Gerhard von Rad’s theory, which he introduced in Der heilige Krieg im alten Israel (1958).

2.3.2 The Pre-exilic and Cultic Origin

The approach of Mowinckel on the Psalter that arguably had the greatest influence on the biblical scholarship of the 20th century was his great emphasis on the cultic origin of various psalms. According to Tremper Longman III Sigmund Mowinckel “is the scholar who more than anyone else reminded readers of the cultic setting of the psalms.” Mowinckel succeeded in shifting many scholars’ opinion away from the “primarily Protestant view of classical liberalism that true piety was individual piety and thus tended to be dismissive of communal expressions of piety,” to Mowinckel’s openness “to the genuineness and importance of communal piety.” Most psalms scholars after Gunkel and Mowinckel have recognized that there was a connection

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236 Ibid., 52.
237 Longman III, ”Psalms 2,” 604.
238 Roberts, “Mowinckel’s Theory,” 97.
between the cult and psalms, however, there are many opinions on what that connection looked like.\textsuperscript{239} Gunkel acknowledged that Mowinckel was on to something when the Norwegian was claiming that most of the psalms in the Psalter were indeed cultic.\textsuperscript{240} However, Gunkel had argued in favour of seeing the psalms as “post-exilic expressions of individual piety based on earlier, no longer preserved, cult Psalms.”\textsuperscript{241} Other scholars like Erhard S. Gerstenberger would claim that the psalms were cultic, but that the individual lament psalms had originated in a cult outside of the official cult.\textsuperscript{242} The cult-historical approach to the psalms also had a great impact on the Anglo-American world, particularly on the \textit{Myth and Ritual School}. However, some of the scholars in the school were far more radical than Mowinckel and proposed that the Israelite kings were seen as semi-divine characters, as they stood in the place of God in the cult.\textsuperscript{243} Furthermore, Mowinckel also helped shift the understanding of the original date of some of psalms from the post-exilic to the pre-exilic era. At the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the dominant belief was that the psalms were post-exilic.

Perhaps not surprisingly Mowinckel had a great influence on the scientific approach to the Psalter in his motherland Norway, and especially on his student Harris Birkeland. In his \textit{Die Feinde des Individuums in der israelitischen Psalmenliteratur} (1933), which the student dedicated to Mowinckel, Birkeland discussed what he agreed and disagreed with in terms of the Psalter with Mowinckel.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{241} Roberts, ”Mowinckel´s Theory,” 97.
\bibitem{242} Körting, ”The Psalms,” 541.
\bibitem{243} Creach, ”Cult, Worship: Psalms,” 74.
\end{thebibliography}
Mowinckel’s student put a particularly large emphasis on the individual psalms and continued to argue that it was the king who spoke on behalf of the whole people. Birkeland also continued to use Mowinckel’s approach by using poetry outside the Psalter to build his arguments. Interestingly, Birkeland worked as a bridge between Mowinckel’s two works on the Psalter, because Birkeland’s work *Die Feinde des Individuums* criticised many of the arguments put forth by Mowinckel in his *Kongesalmerne i det gamle testament*. Mowinckel took his student’s criticism into consideration and made modifications to his theories in his *Offersang og sangoffer* on the basis of Birkeland’s arguments. In many ways, Birkeland can arguably be seen as the only scholar to fully follow up on Mowinckel’s work on the Psalter. There should be little doubt that Mowinckel also saw his research on the cult as his main achievement. The translator of *Offersang og sangoffer* into English, Dafydd Rhys ap-Thomas, agreed that Mowinckel himself had shown the field of biblical studies what the cultic life meant, when he stated: “We may say, therefore, that by his cultic view of these psalms Mowinckel has made Israel's religion live again for us in something of the vivid light that it did for the ancient Israelite who attended his festival not just to hear about Yahweh's deeds but to experience the thrill of them.”

Towards the end of the 20th century, the pendulum swung back to a more literary approach to the psalms, but scholars would argue in favour of remembering the contributions Mowinckel made to the research. One of them was the Danish biblical scholar Kirsten Nielsen who argued while scholarship has to look at different

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244 Laato, "Biblical Scholarship,” 348.
245 Ibid., 347-48.
approaches to the Psalter as it should not forget the contributions of the Norwegian scholar. In her own words, psalm study is: “Beyond – but not without Sigmund Mowinckel.” Corinna Körtig went even further and wrote, “[h]istory of religions research supported and inspired the “new” approaches of Gunkel and Mowinckel, and psalm research is still not intelligible without it, either in regards to poetical structures or in respect of explanatory iconography.”

2.3.3 Near Eastern Comparisons and Royal Ideology

One of Mowinckel’s most recognisable approaches to the Hebrew Bible especially when dealing with the Psalter, was his emphasis on ancient Near Eastern parallels and patterns. Even though some scholars continued to look for patterns in the psalms, Mowinckel’s approach tended not to play a major role in later approaches to the Psalter. Mowinckel’s comparisons between Nehemiah and extra-biblical texts have enjoyed success, and have been followed up by many other scholars. However, one of the ancient Near Eastern comparisons that had proved to be fruitful was Mowinckel’s presentation of the royal ideology in the Israelites’ surrounding cultures. One of the scholars to pick up on the Kingship of God in the Israelite faith was John Gray in his article, “The Kingship of God in the Prophets and the Psalms” (1961). In this article, Gray provided further research on how the Israelites understood the kingship of Yahweh, and how it was presented in the Psalter and the Prophets. This article built

249 Körtig, ”The Psalms,” 547.
250 Laato, ”Biblical Scholarship,” 349.
on much of Mowinckel’s work, even though Gray was not in agreement with all of Mowinckel’s contributions to the research on the Psalter.

As seen above, Mowinckel changed the way scholars approached the Psalter and became one of the most influential biblical scholars on this topic of his time. The next section will look closer at what influence Mowinckel’s *Det gamle testamentet som Guds Ord* had in the 20th century.

### 2.4 Mowinckel’s Influence on the Revelation of God

As seen in the previous chapter, Mowinckel approached the Hebrew Bible in a totally different fashion in *Det gamle testamentet som Guds Ord* than in his previous books addressed above. The book was written with the hope to bring some insights on the topic to lay people, at the same time as it had sprung from a theological discussion between some of Norway’s greatest theologians.

#### 2.4.1 The Theological Discussion over the Nature of God’s Revelation

The book was a result of the debate between some of the greatest Norwegian’s scholars at the time over the nature of “Word of God.” Ivar P. Seierstad disagreed with some of the arguments put forth by Mowinckel in his work, particularly with Mowinckel’s arguments around “general” and “specific” revelation. Mowinckel had argued that history is and has been where God has revealed himself, but Seierstad accused Mowinckel for completely abolishing the distinction between the “general” and “specific” revelation of God.\(^ {252}\) The debate over the nature of God’s revelation did not end with the work of Mowinckel, and was far from only being discussed in the

\(^ {252}\) Ivar P. Seierstad, ”*Det gamle testament som Guds ord*” in *Tidsskrift for teologi og kirke* 10 (1939): 95-116, 154-64.
narrow fjords of Norway. Quite the opposite; this would become one of the great theological discussions of the 20th century and some of the greatest theologians would offer their opinions on the matter. One of them was G. Ernest Wright in his book *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (1952). In his work, he aligned himself with Mowinckel and emphasised that “history is the chief medium of revelation.”253 The American professor would go on and argue, just as Mowinckel had done, that God has elected people throughout history in order to accomplish His purposes.254 Another scholar to make a similar claim was Gerhard von Rad, the author of the seminal *Old Testament Theology* (1963), who was famous for his quote “the Old Testament is a history book.”255 One of von Rad’s students, Rolf Rendtorff would participate in a lengthy discussion on the matter of revelation with Walther Zimmerli from 1953 to 1962. The discussion was about “history and/or word as the kinds of revelation in the Old Testament… Zimmerli emphasizes the word of Yahweh which gives rise to and illuminates history (particularly in the self-identification formula I am Yahweh), while for Rendtorff revelation is constituted by history, in which the word is grounded and through which the word is confirmed.”256 Of course, it would not be easy to trace how much of this discussion was influenced by the writing of Mowinckel, but Sæbø has argued that Mowinckel and Seierstad’s discussion in the 1930s was very similar in character to that of Rendtorff and Zimmerli.257

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254 Ibid., 54-56.
2.4.2 Mowinckel’s Influence on Lay People

The nature of God’s revelation was a hot topic within the theological academy during the 20th century, however Mowinckel made it clear that he wrote his lecture series with lay people in mind. For a scholar who had become famous through his theories about the pre-exilic cult in Jerusalem, Mowinckel had shown a different side of himself in *The Old Testament as Word of God*. Here he revealed that he believed the most important task of people who interpret the Hebrew Bible should be to seek “whatever furthers Christ.”\(^{258}\) Thus, it would be an impossible task to measure how statements like that one by Mowinckel influenced academic theological scholarship and lay people of the time. However, what can be certain is that this book sought to influence a different aspect of biblical scholarship than most of his other works, and can therefore be considered the work in his corpus that had greatest influence on lay people. At the time, Mowinckel was greatly influenced by the Oxford Group Movement, and he wrote a great deal about his personal change, a change that could be viewed as a conversion, after he had joined the movement. Since this would become such a transformational change for him, he would later admit that he regretted some of the fundamental views on the Hebrew Bible that he had expressed earlier in his career.\(^{259}\)

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\(^{259}\) Sigmund Mowinckel, “Fragmenter,” 234.
Conclusion

This thesis has looked closely at the significant contributions Sigmund Mowinckel has made to the study of the Hebrew Bible. Having looked at Mowinckel’s personal and academic development, it became evident that he built his biblical research not only on the shoulders of the academic giants like Gunkel, Wellhausen, Grønbech, but was also influenced by his father. In terms of addressing Mowinckel’s approach to the Hebrew Bible, particular emphasis was given to his four books Stadsholderen Nehemia: Studier til den jødiske menighets historie og litteratur, Kongesalmerne i det Gamle Testamentet, Offersang og sangoffer: Salmediktningen i Bibelen, and Det Gamle Testament som Guds Ord.

Mowinckel’s dissertation on Nehemiah mainly employed source-criticism by applying the literary-critical method and comparing the narrative to ancient Near Eastern parallels. Making ancient Near Eastern comparisons would become instrumental in Mowinckel’s work on the Psalter, together with applying the form-critical method of Gunkel. After having been heavily influenced by the Oxford Group Movement, Mowinckel also showed that he approached the Hebrew Bible in a more evangelical way, stressing the human and divine character of the “Word of God.” It is evident that Mowinckel combined a number of approaches to the Hebrew Bible and did not solely rest his scholarship on one approach. Mowinckel’s writings also testify to a maturing process in his approach to the Hebrew Bible where he built upon and extended his earlier research. Mowinckel’s work also highlights how his personal Christian faith rejuvenated his later academic research. Thus, Mowinckel was able to combine his scientific brilliance, understanding of foreign languages and culture, and
understanding of the importance of reading the Hebrew Bible in its context with his evangelical faith.

Mowinckel had a great influence on biblical scholarship in the 20th century, especially influential was his research on the Psalter. Here Mowinckel initiated a cultic interpretation of the psalms by emphasizing their *Sitz im Leben* in the pre-exilic Israelite cult in Jerusalem. Moreover, the Norwegian scholar was also one of the first to highlight the ancient Near Eastern connection to the Nehemiah memoir. In addition to deepening the understanding of some of the books in the Hebrew Bible, Mowinckel was also successful in educating the Christian lay movement with his book on the nature of the Word of God in the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, Mowinckel had a great impact on some of the schools of thought, including the Myth and Ritual, Literary Critical, and Form Critical Schools. It is therefore vital to see Sigmund Mowinckel as more than the representative of the hypothetical annual New Year festival. It would be easy to draw attention to the works of Sigmund Mowinckel that created the most attention and discussion, but Mowinckel was a child of his time and certainly brought a lot of continuity to ideas proposed in the Literary Critical School. However, not everyone has applauded Mowinckel’s contributions to the research of the Hebrew Bible, and his research has been seen by some as problematic for his emphasis on ancient Near Eastern parallels.

In conclusion, Sigmund Mowinckel approached the Hebrew Bible by building on older theories, extending them, and coming up with new hypotheses. Mowinckel applied the literary-critical and form-critical methods, but also combined this with scholarship outside the typical realm of a biblical scholar, and proved connections to other ancient Near Eastern cultures. Thus, Sigmund Mowinckel was able to combine the work of many great theologians, schools of thought, and scientific methods into
his approach to the Hebrew Bible. In so doing, Mowinckel has influenced biblical scholarship during the 20th century and beyond.
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