

Fromme und Frevler

Studien zu Psalmen und Weisheit

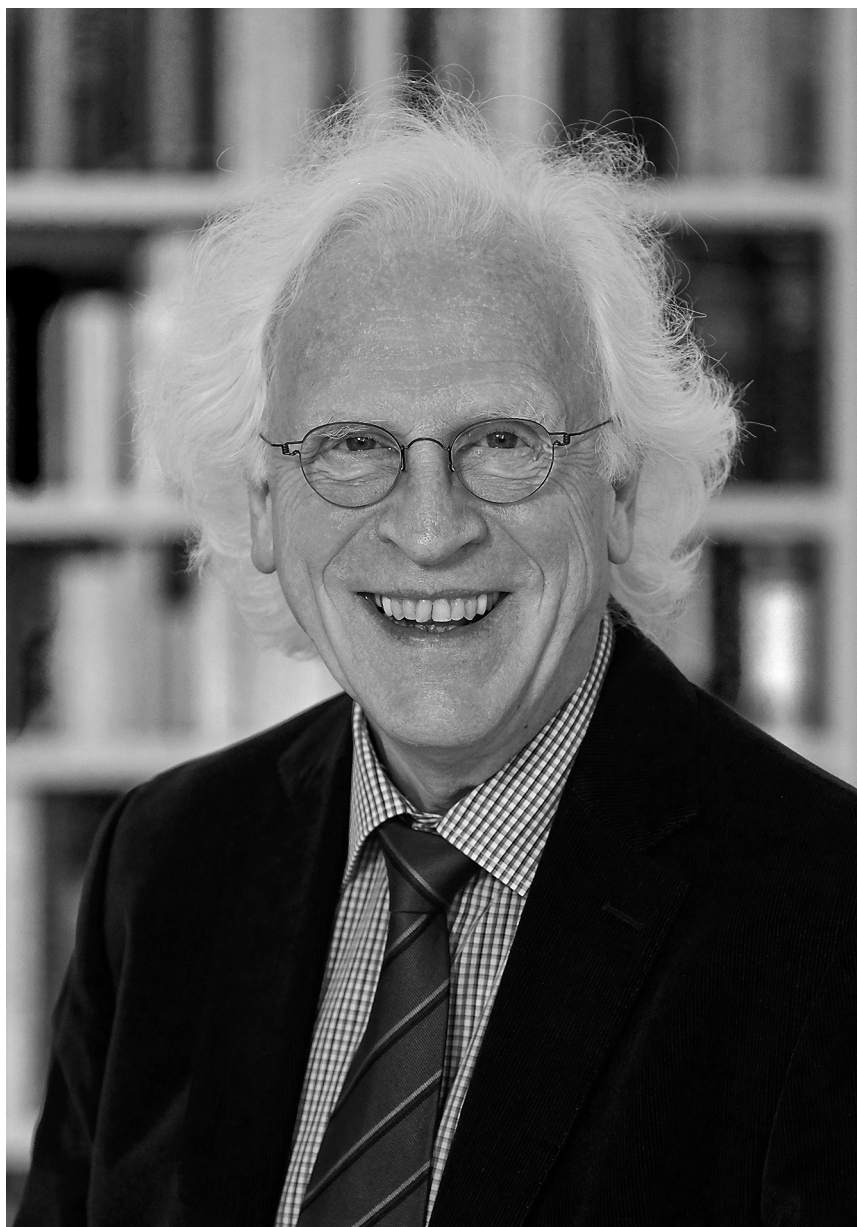
*Festschrift für Hermann Spieckermann
zum 70. Geburtstag*

Herausgegeben von
CORINNA KÖRTING und
REINHARD GREGOR KRATZ

Mohr Siebeck

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Herman Spierdijk

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Vorwort

Diese Festschrift möchte Hermann Spieckermann zu seinem 70. Geburtstag ehren. Fachkolleginnen und Fachkollegen, Freundinnen und Freunde aus Deutschland, aus Europa und den USA bekunden ihre Verbundenheit und ihren Dank. Und sie zollen Respekt, der Person Hermann Spieckermann wie auch dem Erforscher des Alten Testaments. Die wissenschaftliche Leistung Hermann Spieckermanns, wie auch seine Fähigkeit, darüber ins Gespräch einzuladen, sind uns Anlass, den Faden aufzunehmen und das Gespräch in Form einer Festgabe fortzuführen.

Hermann Spieckermann wurde am 28. Oktober 1950 geboren. Aufgewachsen in seiner Geburtsstadt Dortmund, studierte er Evangelische Theologie und Alt-orientalistik in Münster und Göttingen. Nach dem Ablegen des Exams wurde er 1982 in Göttingen mit einer Arbeit promoviert, die von seinem doppelten Interesse zeugt: Juda unter Assur in der Sargonidenzeit (erschienen 1982). Die Arbeit wurde von seinen akademischen Lehrern, dem Assyriologen Rykle Borger und den Alttestamentler Lothar Perlitt, begleitet. Von dem einen ließ er sich in die philologischen Geheimnisse der neuassyrischen Quellen einführen und von dem anderen auf alttestamentlichem Gebiet inspirieren.

Die zweite große und vielleicht wichtigste Arbeit Hermann Spieckermanns ist den Psalmen gewidmet. 1989 erschien seine Habilitationsschrift *Heilsgegenwart: Eine Theologie der Psalmen*. Die darin erstmals konsequent angewendete Kombination von Literar- und Religionsgeschichte bedeutete einen Durchbruch in der Psalmenforschung, der bis heute nachwirkt und uns mit Spannung auf den Kommentar in der Reihe „Altes Testament Deutsch“ (ATD) warten läßt, an dem Hermann Spieckermann seit langem und gegenwärtig intensiv arbeitet.

Auch wenn Hermann Spieckermann auf den vielen Stationen seines akademischen Wirkens (Zürich, Hamburg, Göttingen) und in seinen vielfältigen Forschungsaktivitäten stets die ganze Breite des Alten Testaments im Blick hatte, standen die Psalmen und die Weisheit – oder, um es mit dem Titel eines Bandes seiner gesammelten Studien auszudrücken, „Lebenskunst und Gotteslob“ –, stets im Zentrum seiner Arbeit und Publikationen. Aus diesem Grund haben wir diese beiden Bereiche als Foci dieses Bandes gewählt. Innerhalb der beiden Sektionen sind die Beiträge sachlich und, soweit es ging, von der Einzeltext-Diskussion bis hin zur Rezeption geordnet. Das Tableau der Beitragenden und die Bandbreite der Themen spiegeln etwas von den besonders ausgeprägten internationalen Verbindungen und den weiten Interessen wider, die Hermann

Spieckermanns Werk prägen, nämlich von seiner genauen philologisch-historischen Textexegese bis hin zur Wirkungs- und Forschungsgeschichte.

Dazu gehört auch das besonders ausgeprägte Interesse Hermann Spieckermanns an der Theologie des Alten Testaments und der christlichen Bibel, das sich bereits im Untertitel sowie der Disposition seiner Habilitationsschrift anmeldet, in einem Band seiner gesammelten Studien (*Gottes Liebe zu Israel*) wiederfindet und sich zuletzt in den beiden theologischen Entwürfen niedergeschlagen hat, die er zusammen mit seinem neutestamentlichen Kollegen Reinhard Feldmeier publiziert hat (*Der Gott der Lebendigen: Eine biblische Gotteslehre; Menschwerdung*). Auf diese Seite in Spieckermanns Werk wollen wir mit dem Obertitel dieses Bandes „Fromme und Frevler“ hinweisen, der zwei konträre theologische Positionen und Lebensweisen bezeichnet, in deren Spannungsfeld sich – jedenfalls auf einer späten literarischen Ebene – die beiden Literaturbereiche von Psalmen und Weisheit bewegen.

Die Herausgeber danken den vielen guten Geistern von Herzen, die zur Herstellung dieses Bandes beigetragen haben: Mathias Kreitzscheck und Moritz Prechtel (Göttingen), Dr. Marcel Krusche, Hartwig Frese und Henrieke Körner (Hamburg). Unser Dank geht auch an den Verlag Mohr Siebeck, für den Hermann Spieckermann lange Jahre als Herausgeber tätig war und der den Band in bewährter Weise betreut hat.

Hamburg und Göttingen, im Mai 2020

Corinna Körting
Reinhard G. Kratz

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I. Psalmen

An Acrostic Prayer to Nabû

Martti Nissinen*

Hermann Spieckermann is known as one of the foremost students of biblical psalms, their theology and their ancient Near Eastern context.¹ In his many publications, he has argued for the unique characteristics of biblical and early Jewish theology, but also for its firm belonging to the ancient Near Eastern religio-historical framework: “Eine Religionsgeschichte Israels und des Judentums muss mit kritischer Sympathie diese Religion im Ensemble der Religionen des Alten Orients und der Antike zur Darstellung bringen.”² I would like to express my whole-hearted agreement with Hermann’s statement and congratulate my long-term colleague and friend by publishing a new edition of a prayer to Nabû written in the Neo-Assyrian times (in the early 7th century BCE at the latest).

The Acrostic Prayer to Nabû is written on a tablet coming from the Neo-Assyrian archives of Nineveh and belonging to the Kuyunjik collection of the British Museum. The text (K 8204) has been previously published by Arthur Strong in 1895³ and translated by Benjamin Foster in his large anthology of Akkadian literature.⁴ This remarkable poem has not attracted the attention it deserves,⁵ and it is my hope that this short contribution in Hermann Spieckermann’s honour will make it better known.

* Warm thanks are due to Simo Parpola for his invaluable help in reading the tablet and for an enjoyable discussion on the content of the text on March 1, 2019.

¹ See, e. g., H. Spieckermann, *Heilsgegenwart: Eine Theologie der Psalmen* (FRLANT 148; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989); R. Feldmeier and idem, *Der Gott der Lebendigen: Eine biblische Gotteslehre* (Topoi Biblischer Theologie 1; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); idem, *Lebenskunst und Gotteslob in Israel: Anregungen aus Psalmen und Weisheit für die Theologie* (FAT 91; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

² Spieckermann, *Lebenskunst und Gotteslob*, 341. Cf. the brief outline of the history of the God of Israel in idem, *Heilsgegenwart*, 284: “Er ist einerseits von Stammesgott zu Volksgott geworden: Jahwe, der Gott Israels – Israel, das Volk Jahwes. Und andererseits hat er sich vom Gott ohne festen Wohnsitz zum königlichen Kerubenthroner in den kanaanäischen Tempeln des Kulturlandes gewandelt, um sich schließlich nach eingehender kanaanäischen Lehrzeit im eigenen Jerusalemer Tempel als Tempelgott zu etablieren, wo zadokidische Priester beim Jahwedienst von dem ihnen wohlvertrauten kanaanäische Erbe reichen Gebrauch machten: Jahwe, der König der Ehren – Jahwe, mein König und mein Gott.”

³ S. A. Strong, “On Some Babylonian and Assyrian Alliterative Texts: I.” *PSBA* 17 (1895): 131–51. A photo of the tablet is available at cdli.ucla.edu (no. P397535) without transliteration or translation.

⁴ B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (3rd ed.; Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2005), 701.

⁵ I have not found references to this text since A. Haldar, *Associations of Cult Prophets*

1. An Acrostic Prayer to Nabû (K 8204 = PSBA 17 137–39)

Beginning (at least 30 lines) destroyed

^{1'} x [x x x x x x x x x x x x x]

^{2'} ú-^rdu[?] [x x x x x x x x x x x x]

^{3'} ú-^{ha}-^rak[?]-kám ep-^{šet} ^rUN.MEŠ[?] [x x x x x x x]

^{4'} ú-ta-^{šal} ra-ma-ni šá-bi ú-^{ša}-^raš-^ra[?]-^{ha} [x x x x]

^{5'} ú-na-^{ha}-as šur-ri šir-^{hi}-iš šu-um-ú-^rdu[?] [x x x]

^{6'} šá la ka-a-ta ina DINGIR.MEŠ ul in-na-^{ši} r[e-e-šá]

^{7'} šá en-^{ši} u dun-na-mi-i tu-kan iš-[da-šá]

^{8'} ^ršá[?] šah-^{ha}-a u mi-iq-ti ès-^{hu} u-qa-a-ú ka-a-[šá]

^{9'} ^ršá[?]-ar-ka DÜG.GA li-zi-qam-ma nap-^{ši}-ra ia-a-^ršá[?]

^{10'} al-si-ka ^dAG mu-gúr-an-ni al-lá-[al]

^{11'} al-ta-pil ina ÉRIM.MEŠ aq-ta-qūr na-a-a-al

^{12'} al-la-pit ki-ma maḥ-^{he}-e šá la i-du-ú ú-ba-al

^{13'} al-ta-na-si DINGIR.MEŠ-ma ka-liš qa-a-a-al.

^{14'} du-un-na-mu-ú šá tak-lu-ka i-šeb-bi tuḥ-du

^{15'} du-ru-uš ki-i-ni tu-dan-na-an-ma tu-kan iš-du

^{16'} du-un-qí ta-šár-rak tuš-na-as-si ḥi-^{tu}

^{17'} ^rdu-ur[?] ab-ni áš-^{tu} tu-tar ^{ti}-i[?]-^rtù[?]

Edge uninscribed

^{r,1} du-un-nu ^re[?]-^{né}^r-nu [x x x x x x x x x]

² du-up-pu-nu l[a x x x x x x x x x]

³ du-ú-ra ^rki[?]-[x x x x x x x x x]

⁴ du-muq ab-^ra-a-ti[?] [x x x x x x x x x]

⁵ ma-aq-^ršar[?] [Ø] ^ra[?]-bi [x x x x x x x x x]

⁶ ma-^{ši}-iš ^rbe[?]-lí [x x x x x x x x x]

⁷ ma-a-^rda[?] ^rx x x x[?] [x x x x x x x x x]

⁸ ma-nit-ka ^rta[?]-a[?]-bu[?]-u-[m]a[?] [x x x x x x x]

⁹ ru-bu-ú ^rna[?]-a[?]-^rdu[?] [x x x x x x x x x]

¹⁰ ru-x-[x x x x x x x x x x]

¹¹ ru-uš-^{ši} [x x x x x x x x x x]

¹² ru-uš-šú[?] x-šal-li [x x x x x x x x]

¹³ uš-^rte[?]-ri[?]-[x] ma-^ra[?]-x [x x x x x x x]

¹⁴ uš-^rta[?]-[x x]-^rma[?]-a-na x [x x x x x x x]

among the Semites (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1945), 25, save the very brief remarks in R. F. G. Sweet, "A Pair of Double Acrostics in Akkadian," *Or* 38 (1969): 459–60, and W. M. Soll, "Babylonian and Biblical Acrostics," *Bib* 69 (1988): 305–23, esp. p. 310. I have quoted this text in association with prophetic ecstasy in M. Nissinen, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 175, 336, and it is included in idem, with contributions by C. L. Seow, R. K. Ritner, and H. Craig Melchert, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (2nd ed.; SBLWAW 41; Atlanta: SBL, 2019), no. 118b.

¹⁵ *uš-ta-niš e-^rte²-me⁷* [x x x x x x x]

¹⁶ *uš-^rx x¹-iḫ* [x x x x x x x x x x x]

¹⁷ *tu-kul-ti ul i-m*[a- x x x x x x x x x]

(rest destroyed)

(Beginning destroyed)

^{2'} [.....]	[.....]
^{3'} <i>uḫakkam epšēt nīši</i> [.....]	I understand the deeds of the people [.....]
^{4'} <i>ūtaṣṣal ramānī libbī ušaṣraḫa</i> [.....]	I have become paralyzed, I make my heart lament [.....].
^{5'} <i>unaḫḫas ṣurri širḫiš šum'u</i> [dū ...]	My interior laments like a funeral song, [.....] have become abundant.
^{6'} <i>ša lā kâta ina ilāni ul innašši</i> [rēša]	Without you among the gods, no [head] is raised. ⁶
^{7'} <i>ša enši u dunnamî tukân iš</i> [dāša]	You consolidate the foun[datation of] the weak and helpless.
^{8'} <i>ša šaḫḫâ u miqtu ešḫû uqa^u kâša</i>	Those struck with sickness and dressed in rags ⁸ wait for you.
^{9'} <i>šārka ṭābu lizīqamma napšira yāša</i>	May your gentle wind blow toward me, be reconciled with me!
^{10'} <i>alsika Nabû muguranni allāl</i>	I invoked you, Nabû – accept me, o mighty one!
^{11'} <i>altapil ina šābi aqtaqur naiāl</i>	I have become humiliated among men, I have turned to ground, ⁹ lying down.
^{12'} <i>allapit kīma maḫḫê ša lā idû ubbal</i>	I have become struck like a prophet: what I do not know I bring forth.
^{13'} <i>altanassi ilānīma kališ qaiāl</i>	I have kept invoking God, ¹⁰ but he keeps silent.

⁶ Cf. Foster, *Before the Muses*, 701: “No [head] can be raised (proudly) among the gods without your approval.” The line must end with the sign -šá in spite of the fact that the form *rēša* makes no grammatical sense here since the word should be the subject of the N-stem verb *innašši*. Rather than a downright mistake, it should perhaps be interpreted as prosodic or stylistic variation of the grammatically correct *rēšu*. Cf. Foster, *ibid.*: “The tight restriction of form and meter make for artificiality of expression.”

⁷ Even here, the poetical pattern presupposes that the last broken cuneiform sign is šá, even though the suffix of 3. fem. is grammatically incorrect as referring to the masculine nouns *enši* and *dunnamû*.

⁸ The word *miqtu* (< *maqātu* “to fall”) refers to a “falling disease” or epilepsy. For *šaḫḫû* as the garb of a sick person, see CAD Š/1: 96 (sub *šaḫḫû* A b). CAD Š/3: 240 reads *šul-ḫa-a*, interpreting the word as *šulḫû* “a type of witchcraft or affliction” (sub *šulḫû* A).

⁹ I follow the suggestion of Strong (“On Some Babylonian and Assyrian Alliterative Texts,” 140), who quite sensibly derives the verbal form *aq-ta-qûr* from the noun *qaqquru* “ground.” This interpretation has not found its way to dictionaries. CAD Q: 75 reads *altapil ina šābi aq-ta-<<GAM>>-na-a-a-al* “I humbled myself among people, I always held my peace,” omitting the sign *GAM* (*qûr*) and reading here a Gtn form of *qālu*.

¹⁰ The text has the plural DINGIR.MEŠ which could be translated as “gods”; however, the

14' <i>dunnamû ša taklûka išebbi tuḥdu</i>	The helpless man who trusts you is sated with abundance.
15' <i>duruš kini tudannanma tukân išdu</i>	You strengthen the base of the righteous, you consolidate the foundation.
16' <i>dunqī tašarrak tušnassi ḥītu</i>	You grant me favors, you drive away sin. ¹¹
17' <i>dūr abni aštu tutār tiṭtu</i>	The hard wall of stone you turn into clay.

(rest fragmentary)

The tablet K. 8204 is 10 cm wide and 2–2,5 cm thick; the preserved part is ca. 7 cm high. The beginning of the obverse and the end of the reverse are broken away, and text on the reverse is obliterated for the most part. The text is divided with rulings into acrostic four-line stanzas, each line beginning and ending with the same cuneiform sign. The broken end of the tablet is clearly thicker than the preserved end and the original curvature is broken away. This suggests an original ratio of 1:2 and the loss of at least the first 30 lines.

The preserved text contains at least fragments of nine four-line stanzas, the acrostic of which reads the words *ú-šá-al-du-du* and *ma-ru-uš-tu*. These words form a part of an original sentence, which can no longer be reconstructed. It is typical of the acrostic poems that the key syllables of each poetical unit form a name or a sentence expressing a theological statement or an expression of praise.¹² The loss of most of the acrostic makes it difficult to translate the preserved part of it. The two preserved words could form the sentence *ušaldudu/ū māruštu*, whereby the word *māruštu* means “distress” or “hardship,” but the verb *šadādu* “draw, tow”¹³ can be translated in different ways. The two-word compound could mean either “he makes/they make the hardship draw away,” or “he makes/they make (one) endure the hardship.” Either way, the combination

singular verb *qaiāl* suggests that only one god is being implored. I correct here my earlier translation in *Ancient Prophecy*, 175.

¹¹ Strong’s erroneous reading *du-un-ki ta-ti-rak-ku na-as-si ḥi-du* connects the sign 𒌷 with the preceding word in spite of the long empty space preceding it (“On Some Babylonian and Assyrian Alliterative Texts,” 139). The correct reading is *du-un-qī ta-šar-rak tuš(𒌷)-na-as-si ḥi-tu*; cf. CAD N/2: 189.

¹² See Soll, “Babylonian and Biblical Acrostics,”; cf. e.g., Assurbanipal’s Acrostic Hymn to Marduk and Zarpanitu (SAA 3 2; A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea* [(SAA 3; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), 6–10; cf. Foster, *Before the Muses*, 826–27; Marie-Joseph Seux, *Hymnes et prières aux dieux de Babylonie et d’Assyrie* [LAPO 8; Paris: Cerf, 1976], 115–21); the Acrostic Prayers of Nabû-ušēbši (Sweet, “A Pair of Double Acrostics in Akkadian,”; cf. Foster, *Before the Muses*, 704–05; Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 264–66); the Acrostic Hymn to Nabû (S. A. Strong, “A Hymn to Nebuchadnezzar,” *PSBA* 20 [1898]: 154–62; cf. Foster, *ibid.*, 849–51; Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 124–28).

¹³ The first word is a Š-stem form of the verb *šadādu* with the Babylonian assimilation [šd] > [ld]. Interestingly, this assimilation does not happen in the second word *māruštu* “evil, distress, hardship.” The verb is either a subjunctive form of masc. 3. p. sing. (*ušaldudu*) or masc. 3. p. pl. (*ušaldudū*).

of these two words sound like a promise of divine assistance for the distressed person who laments his misery to Nabû.

The prayer is written in the Babylonian dialect best recognizable in the (almost) consistent change of the [š] into [l] in certain phonetic environments. The poetic design of the prayer has even other characteristics than the acrostic structure. The sign-based acrostic design alone produces alliteration and rhyme throughout the poem. The lines do not follow a strictly parallelistic or chiasmic structure, but elements of parallelism and chiasm can be recognized, such as the parallelism in lines 4'–5':

libbī ušaṣraḥa // unahḥas šurri širḥiš

I make my heart lament // My interior laments like a funeral song;

or the chiasmic arrangement in lines 10 and 13, the first and the last lines of the stanza forming a parallelism:

alsika Nabû – altanassi ilānīma

I invoked you, Nabû – I have kept invoking God.

It is noteworthy that the length of the fully preserved lines remains consistently between 9 and 15 syllables, a feature typical for the Ugaritic, and even for the ancient Hebrew, poetry.¹⁴

Commentary

Lines 2'–5'

The first readable lines are presented as the discourse of an individual person describing his condition in psycho-physical terms. The interior of the paralyzed body is represented by the parallelism of *libbu* and *šurru*. Both words could be translated as “heart, mind,” referring to the sites of emotions and reasoning.¹⁵ The discourse of the praying person is presented expressly as lamenting, again using the etymological parallelism of *šarāḥu* “to wail” and *širḥiš* “like a funeral song.”

Lines 6'–9'

While the previous stanza of the poem, at least for the preserved part, is focused on the condition of one who is praying, from now on the prayer is addressed to Nabû. He is presented as the only one among deities who is capable or willing to “raise the head” of anyone.¹⁶ The expression *rēšu našû* has many meanings,¹⁷ but

¹⁴ See O. Loretz and I. Kottsieper, *Colometry in Ugaritic and Biblical Poetry: Introduction, Illustrations and Topical Bibliography* (UBL 5; Altenberge: CIS, 1987), 39–40.

¹⁵ For similar Hebrew terminology, see R. Lauha, *Psychophysischer Sprachgebrauch im Alten Testament: Eine strukturalsemantische Analyse von לב, נפש und רוח* (AASF 2/35; Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1983).

¹⁶ Again, the poetical pattern presupposes that the last broken cuneiform sign is *ša* (suffix of 3. fem.), even though it refers to the masculine nouns *enšu* and *dunnamû*.

¹⁷ See CAD N/2: 107–08. Cf. the use of Heb. *nāšû' rōš* in Gen 40:13, 20; 2 Kgs 25:27; Jer 52:31; Zech 2:4; Job 10:15; 11:15; Sir 11:1, 13.

in this context it clearly indicates the recognition of a person, paying attention to the human being's distress and taking care of the one who identifies with the weak and helpless. A person whose head is raised and whose foundation is consolidated is standing straight, the opposite figure being the sick man wrapped into his rags. This is the position of the supplicant who is waiting to be released from such a miserable condition, and more: who longs for reconciliation, as is suggested by the N-stem verb *napšuru*.¹⁸ Thus, the praying person is not just sick but in need of forgiveness.

Lines 10'–13'

The third stanza continues the self-description of the moaner, beginning and ending with the assurance of his relentless invoking (*šasû*) the god. This is the only time Nabû is mentioned by name in the preserved part of the text. The verb *magāru* can be used for answering a prayer or granting a request, but here the direct object of the verb is the speaker, which gives the verb the nuance of a personal acceptance, thus resonating with the reconciliation mentioned in the previous unit. However, pleading to Nabû has been without avail and the god remains silent. The supplicant is utterly humiliated, lying ashamed on the ground (cf. Lam 3:28–30). His state of mind is described by a comparison to what is believed to happen to a prophet (*maḥḥû*) who is “struck” (literally “touched” or “affected,” *lapātu*) in a way that makes him bring forth something he does not know or comprehend.

The praying person is hardly compared to a prophet as an intermediary of divine messages. Rather, the complete loss of agency is compared to prophetic ecstasy: the person is no longer the subject of his actions. What is imagined to come out of his mouth is probably the prayer itself. Because of the silence of the god, the invocation no longer makes sense to the supplicant, but he keeps reciting the words of prayer as if they were divine speech.¹⁹ The comparison to a prophet indicates praying in a liminal state of mind, which in this case could be similar to incubation. This is without doubt the set-up in the Dialogue between Assurbanipal and Nabû (SAA 3 13) – a text that is in many ways reminiscent of a prophetic oracle,²⁰ but the divine voice is pronounced to the royal supplicant by a “dream-god” (*zaqīqu*). Assurbanipal's distress and humble posture are well comparable to those of the supplicant of the Acrostic Prayer.²¹

¹⁸ See CAD P: 243–44.

¹⁹ According to Alan Lenzi, many ritual-prayers could “be considered divine speech because the gods had delivered them to the institutional experts, who in turn performed them for and with the supplicant – adapting them as necessary” (A. Lenzi, ed., *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns: An Introduction* [ANEM 3; Atlanta: SBL, 2011], 22).

²⁰ See J. Atkinson, “Prophecy in K1285? Re-evaluating the Divine Speech,” in “*Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela*”: *Prophecy in Israel, Assyria, and Egypt in the Neo-Assyrian Period* (ed. R. P. Gordon and H. M. Barstad; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 59–89.

²¹ Cf. SAA 3 13: 19–22: “Assurbanipal, on his knees, keeps praying to Nabû, his lord: Please,

Lines 14'–17'

This unit marks a *Stimmungsumschwung* typical of biblical psalms of lament.²² The perspective turns from the supplicant to the god with a flashback to line 7. The praying person identifies himself again as “helpless” (*dunnamû*), repeating and even doubling the metaphor of foundation (*duruššu* // *išdu*) to which the “hard wall of stone” forms a contrast. When the foundation under him becomes solid, the walls around him erode away like clay. Unlike the previous stanza, the general tone of this unit is full of trust, and the distress of the lamenter turns into hope. Nabû will take care of him, bestow him abundant favors and, perhaps most significantly, drive away his “sin.” The word *ḥītu* can be translated in many ways, but in the context of this prayer, it seems to indicate more than just error or failure. The pleas of reconciliation and acceptance in the previous units rather point towards a quality in the person himself that needs to be forgiven.

Too little remains of the rest of the prayer to enable any substantial comments on its contents. Judged from the preserved words, the supplicant continues his lament using expressions such as “knocked-down” (*duppunu*, line r. 2), “good of mankind” (*dumuq abrāti*, line r. 4), “strength of the enemy” (*mağšar ayyābi*, line r. 5), “enough, my lord!” (*mašiš²³ bēlī*, line r. 6), “your gentle breeze” (*mānitka ṭābu*, line r. 8), and “sublime prince” (*rubû na'du*, line r. 9). These expressions probably refer both to the agony of the supplicant and to the favor of Nabû.

2. The Acrostic Prayer to Nabû among Akkadian Prayers

The Acrostic Prayer to Nabû has a lot of thematic affinities with other Mesopotamian lamentations and penitential prayers.²⁴ Especially the prayers to appease an angry god, such as the eršahunga-, dingiršadabba-, and šuilla-prayers employ similar language and theological thoughts. In these prayers, the suffering

Nabû, do not abandon me! My life is written before you, my soul is entrusted in the lap of Mullissu. Please, powerful Nabû! Do not abandon me among my ill-wishers!”

²² For the *Stimmungsumschwung*, see A. E. Zernecke, *Gott und Mensch in Klagegebeten aus Israel und Mesopotamien: Die Handerhebungsgebete Ištar 10 und Ištar 2 und die Klagepsalmen Ps 38 und Ps 22 im Vergleich* (AOAT 387; Münster: Ugarit, 2011), 322–29; O. Loretz, *Götter – Ahnen – Könige als gerechte Richter: Der “Rechtsfall” des Menschen vor Gott nach altorientalischen und biblischen Texten* (AOAT 290; Münster: Ugarit, 2003), 155–76.

²³ A hapax formation of *maši* “as much as” (Simo Parpola, private communication).

²⁴ For a general introduction to Mesopotamian prayers, see Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Hymns and Prayers*; cf. K. L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2005), 84–104. For in-depth studies on the prayers, see e. g., E. S. Gerstenberger, *Theologie des Lobens in sumerischen Hymnen: Zur Ideengeschichte der Eulogie* (ORA 28; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018); C. G. Frechette, *Mesopotamian Ritual-Prayers of “Hand-lifting” (Akkadian šuillas): An Investigation of Function in Light of the Idiomatic Meaning of the Rubric* (AOAT; 379; Münster: Ugarit, 2012); Zernecke, *Gott und*

of the supplicant is described – often in bodily terms – as the result of his/her offense against a deity, and they contain both confessions of sin and requests for forgiveness and reconciliation. The prayer to Nabû shares its intimate tone with the dingiršadabba-prayers, which are directed to a personal god (*ilī*, “my god”),²⁵ and its expressions find many counterparts even in eršahunga-prayers, which are not addressed exclusively to a single god.²⁶ Especially the petitions of forgiveness and reconciliation can be found in both types of prayers; to take just two examples corresponding to lines 9 and 16:

Dingiršadabba:

ilī silim ištārī napširi

My god, be at peace, my goddess, be reconciled!²⁷

Eršahunga:

hiṭṭi aḥtū ana damiqti tēr

The sin that I committed turn into good!²⁸

Structurally, the Acrostic Prayer to Nabû is neither similar with the eršahunga-prayers, which exhibit a rather fixed design, beginning with an introductory litany and continuing with a lament, followed by a petition, an intercessory litany, and a concluding formula, nor with the šuilla-prayers, which consist of an invocation, supplication, and benediction.²⁹ Unlike the eršahunga-, dingiršadabba-, and šuilla-prayers, the Acrostic Prayer of Nabû (at least for its preserved part) has no reference to a ritual context. In spite of many common features, therefore, the Acrostic Prayer to Nabû cannot be seen as a representative of any of the main genres of prayer in cuneiform literature, even though it clearly belongs to the Babylonian tradition of prayer both linguistically and theologically.

The Acrostic Prayer can also be compared to other first-millennium BCE prayers addressed to Nabû. The Nabû poetry does not form a unified genre,

Mensch in Klagegebeten; T. Oshima, *Babylonian Prayers to Marduk* (ORA 7; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); A. Zgoll, *Die Kunst des Betens: Form und Funktion, Theologie und Psychagogik in babylonisch-assyrischen Handerhebungsgebeten an Ištar* (AOAT 308; Münster: Ugarit, 2003); O. Loretz and W. R. Mayer, *Šu-ila-Gebete: Supplement zu L. W. King, Babylonian Magic and Sorcery* (AOAT 34; Kevelaer: Burzon & Bercker, 1978); W. Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonischen “Gebetsbeschwörungen”* (Studia Pohl, Series Maior 5; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1976).

²⁵ For dingiršadabba-prayers, see M. Jaques, *Mon dieu qu’ai-je fait? Les diġir-ša-dab(5)-ba et la piété privée en Mésopotamie* (OBO 273; Fribourg: University Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); A. Lenzi in Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, 40–43; W. G. Lambert, “DINGIR. ŠA.DIB.BA Incantations,” *JNES* 33 (1974): 267–322.

²⁶ For eršahunga-prayers, see A. Lenzi in Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, 43–46; S. Maul, “Herzberuhigungsklagen”: *Die sumerisch-akkadischen Erschahunga-Gebete* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988).

²⁷ A. Lenzi in Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, 437, line 13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 459, line 56.

²⁹ For šuilla-prayers, see C. Frechette in Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, 24–35; Frechette, *Mesopotamian Ritual-Prayers*; Zgoll, *Die Kunst des Betens*.

since many types of prayers are addressed to him. Some prayers to Nabû do not share the tone and expressions of the Acrostic Poem.³⁰ There is, however, an acrostic prayer to Nabû that follows another acrostic prayer to Marduk on the same tablet, the acrostics spelling twice the name of the scribe, Nabû-ušēbši the exorcist, calling him “the servant who proclaims your lordship” and “the suppliant servant who reveres you.”³¹ This poem extols both deities (the father and the son) with epithets that bear resemblance to our Acrostic Prayer:

ulāla u dunnamû upaqqu kâša
Afflicted and lowly are attentive to you (Marduk).

*šīmat dumqi tašāmu Nabium remnû*³²
You ordain a favorable destiny, merciful Nabû.

Otherwise, the poem exhibits no features of lament or penitential prayer but is more related to hymnic prayers in which Nabû is assigned attributes that are often found ascribed to his divine father Marduk, speaking of him as the foremost of the gods, or as a deity without whom nothing comes true:

dannat [ina] kiššati qibītka šīrat Nabû atta[ma]
Strong and exalted is your command [in] the universe, for you are Nabû.³³

[ina balika] manāma ina ilī lā išakkan šīmātu
[Without you], no-one among the gods can determine destinies.³⁴

The last-quoted line belongs to a hymn that begins with a lengthy praise of Nabû’s superior majesty, followed by the description of his merciful attention to people. The language used here is in many ways reminiscent of the expressions of the Acrostic Prayer to Nabû:

rēmēnatamma Nabû asmat qibītka
ema išassūka tašamme qerbiš
ša ana kâša taklūka lā isû ḥiṭītu
ša naski ina edē tašabbat qāssu

³⁰ E.g., the incantation for protection against black magic; see Mayer, *Untersuchungen*, 473–75; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 695–96; or the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu (SAA 3 14); see M. Nissinen, “Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu: An Akkadian Song of Songs,” in “*Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf*”: Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient: Festschrift für Oswald Loretz zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres mit Beiträgen von Freunden, Schülern und Kollegen (ed. M. Dietrich and I. Kottsieper; AOAT 250; Münster: Ugarit, 1998), 585–634.

³¹ Lambert, “DINGIR.ŠA.DIB.BA Incantations,” 130–32; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 704–05.

³² See Sweet, “A Pair of Double Acrostics,” 460 n. 3.

³³ LKA 16, line 7; see E. Ebeling, “Ein Loblied auf Nabû aus neuassyrischer Zeit,” WO 1 (1952): 476–79; cf. Foster, *Before the Muses*, 702; Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 135.

³⁴ K 2540, line 3; see W. R. Mayer, “Ein Hymnus auf den Gott Nabû,” in *Mesopotamica – Ugaritica – Biblica: Festschrift für Kurt Bergerhof zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres am 7. Mai 1992* (ed. M. Dietrich and O. Loretz; AOAT 232; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1993), 177–80.

You, Nabû, are merciful, adequate is your command.
 Wherever anyone appeals to you, you hear (it) instantly.
 The one who trusts in you lives without sin.
 You grasp the hand of the one who is thrown into the deluge of water.³⁵

Closest counterparts to the Acrostic Prayer to Nabû are provided by the prayers in which an individual describes his misery and lowly position, and appeals to Nabû for mercy and reconciliation. In one of the prayers, a man of old age pleads with Nabû as an intercessor with his father Marduk and as the god whose “word is supreme among his peers” (*ina ilāni māšišu amatsu širat*).³⁶ Even this supplicant longs for reconciliation (*salāmu*, line 10), feeling himself abandoned by gods in spite of his incessant prayers:

šēbāku ana kali ilāni petâ upnāia [...]
ul āmur dumqa nēmelu lā arši

Now that I am old, my hands make petition to all the gods, [...]
 I have seen no favor, I have acquired no benefit.³⁷

The Righteous Sufferer’s Prayer to Nabû³⁸ is another poem in which the praying person speaks in an equally personal tone. The supplicant first asserts his close relationship to Nabû and his temple Ezida, and then gives a long description of his distress that has led him to renewed suicide attempts caused by the feeling of being forsaken by Nabû:

amar napšātūa Šiddukišarra aiēše lulliki
aktalda ana abul māti Nabû ammini tumaššaranni

My life is finished – Šiddukišarra, where can I go?
 I have reached the gate of death – Nabû, why have you forsaken me?³⁹

The Righteous Sufferer’s Prayer differs structurally from the Acrostic Prayer. It consists of tightly designed bicola, often following a parallelistic pattern. The description of the supplicant’s agony is much longer and more detailed than in the Acrostic Prayer, but it uses similar ideas and expressions when the praying person tells about his lowliness and his futile crying to gods:

aṣaḥḥir ana šihirūti i[na š]aplūti assiqli [...]
 I have become the smallest of the small, the lowest of the low [...].

parsāka ina ālīa nakrūt[ia] bēt abīa lamūni [...]
 I am cut off from my city, enemies of my family surround me [...].

³⁵ Ibid., 177, lines 15–r. 2.

³⁶ Mayer, *Untersuchungen*, 470, line 8; cf. Foster, *Before the Muses*, 697; Seux, *Hymnes et prières*, 302.

³⁷ Mayer, *Untersuchungen*, 470–71, lines 12, 16; cf. Foster, *Before the Muses*, lines 14, 18.

³⁸ SAA 3 12; Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, 30–32; Foster, *Before the Muses*, 698–700. For a new edition and thorough analysis, see A. Lenzi, “Narrating for Nabû: Power and Persuasion in an Assyrian Prayer to the Scribal God,” *SAAB* 25 (2019): 11–45.

³⁹ SAA 3 12 r. 9–10.

altanassi ilāni rūqūti nīš qāti ištārī ina šemê

I keep invoking distant gods, raising my hands in heed of my goddess.⁴⁰

Like the supplicant of the Acrostic Prayer, even this “righteous sufferer” longs for forgiveness and the blowing of Nabû’s gentle wind:

Nabû alê napšurka mar Bêl alê tērātūka

alê šārka ṭābu ša izzi[qa] illaka ina muḥḥi anšūtēka

Nabû, where is your forgiveness, son of Bel, where are your oracles?

Where is your gentle wind wafting and going over your weak ones?⁴¹

The Righteous Sufferer’s Prayer has affinities with the above-mentioned Dialogue between Assurbanipal and Nabû,⁴² especially the idea of an assembly of ill-wishers among whom the supplicant pleads not to be abandoned.⁴³ This together with some potential allusions to Assurbanipal’s life such as the references to family problems and to the tablet house⁴⁴ have given reason to identify the “righteous sufferer” as Assurbanipal.⁴⁵ Such an identification is, of course, not immediately evident in the case of the Acrostic Prayer to Nabû, the preserved part of which does not include such hints, let alone personal names. However, the many affinities with the Righteous Sufferer’s Prayer and the Dialogue between Assurbanipal and Nabû make it worth considering whether even the Acrostic Prayer belongs to the prayers commissioned by Assurbanipal for his personal use in situations such as the war against his brother Šamaš-šumu-ukin in 652–648 BCE.

In any case, it is noteworthy that the Neo-Assyrian prayers to Nabû employ similar language and imagery that can be either anonymous or highly personalized, as in the case of the Dialogue between Assurbanipal and Nabû and in that of the acrostics of Nabû-ušēbši.⁴⁶ It is evident that the language and theology of the prayers to Nabû belong to the Akkadian tradition of laments and penitential prayers. Some of them resemble structurally the šuilla-prayers, beginning with the word “incantation” (ÉN/šiptu) and carrying the title “ŠU.ÍL.LÁ” in their colophons.⁴⁷ These traditional prayers were essentially the repertoire of the pro-

⁴⁰ SAA 3 12: 15, 19, 21.

⁴¹ SAA 3 12 r. 4–5.

⁴² SAA 3 13; Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, 33–35; see also SBLWAW 12 118a.

⁴³ Cf. SAA 3 12 r. 11: *lā tumaššaranni bēlī ana puḥur ša ḥaddânūa mādu* “Do not abandon me, my lord, to the assembly of my many ill-wishers”; SAA 3 13 r. 4–5: *ina puḥur ḥaddânūtēia lā tumaššaranni Nabû ina puḥur bēl šāssia lā tumaššara napšatīa* “Do not abandon me, Nabû, in the assembly of my ill-wishers! Do not abandon my soul in the assembly of my adversaries!”

⁴⁴ SAA 3 12: 5, 8.

⁴⁵ Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, xxvi; Loretz, *Götter – Ahnen – Könige*, 204–05.

⁴⁶ Cf. also Assurbanipal’s Acrostic Hymn to Marduk and Zarpanitu (SAA 3 2) and his Hymn to the Ištars of Nineveh and Arbela (SAA 3 3).

⁴⁷ The sign ÉN (šiptu) introduces the same prayers that end with the colophon INIM.INIM ŠU.ÍL.LÁ DAG-KÁM “the words of šuilla to Nabû”; see Mayer, *Untersuchungen*, 469, line 1; 471, line 20; 473, line 1; and 475, line 30; 476, line 35; 477, line 27. The word šiptu is usually trans-

fessional chanters (*kalû*) or exorcists (*āšipu*), being composed for the purpose of a ritual performed by the professional on behalf of the patient and sharing some basic structural elements.⁴⁸ Some poems dedicated to Nabû, such as the Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu,⁴⁹ are likely to have belonged to ritual contexts. This is probable also when the original tablets have preserved ritual instructions.⁵⁰

On the other hand, the prayers to Nabû from the Neo-Assyrian period form a diverse group that does not exhibit a common structure and may not have had a common function either. Many Nabû-prayers seem to be largely detached from both the formal and the ritual framework of the established prayer genres. The scribes who were well acquainted with the traditional prayer language did not only imitate the style of Akkadian ritual prayers but also employed different poetic devices and even mixed them with other genres, thus innovating the traditional forms of prayer.⁵¹ The traditional prayers were understood as divine speech delivered by gods to the institutional experts, the *kalû* and the *āšipu*, who adapted and contextualized them while still clinging to the holy tradition.⁵² The prayers may also have been used for the purposes of teaching and meditation;⁵³ the fact that some manuscripts of the texts referred to above are written by apprentice scribes (*šamallû*) may point to this direction.⁵⁴ As argued above, the words of prayer can be understood as divine speech, as is suggested by the Acrostic Prayer: “what I do not know I bring forth” (*ša lā idû ubbal*).

In terms of Nabû theology, the Acrostic Prayer to Nabû and other prayers referred to in this essay portray the god in a highly distinct manner. In these prayers, Nabû does not feature very strongly in his best-known role as the divine

lated with “incantation” but might be better translated as “the words to be recited,” highlighting the importance of exact reciting; cf. Mayer, *Untersuchungen*, 22–23; Zgoll, *Die Kunst des Betens*, 272.

⁴⁸ See A. Lenzi in Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, 22.

⁴⁹ See M. Nissinen, “Akkadian Rituals and Poetry of Divine Love,” in *Mythology and Mythologies: Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influences* (ed. R. M. Whiting; Melammu Symposia 2; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), 93–136, esp. p. 97–99, 114–15; E. Matsushima, “Le rituel hiérogamique de Nabû,” *ASJ* 9 (1988): 95–128.

⁵⁰ See A. Lenzi in Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, 327.

⁵¹ For instance, the Dialogue of Assurbanipal and Nabû (SAA 3 13) is clearly influenced by the prophetic language and practice; see Atkinson, “Prophecy in K1285?”

⁵² See A. Lenzi in Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, 22, and cf. E. S. Gerstenberger, *Der bittende Mensch: Bitritual und Klagelied des Einzelnen im Alten Testament* (WMANT 51; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1980), 67–73.

⁵³ Oshima, *Babylonian Prayers to Marduk*, 33: “Many religious texts were repeatedly copied over a thousand years or even longer by the priests, scribes, and scribe-apprentices. In this way, the ‘old’ features of a deity kept being revealed among the ancient scribes. Thus, I may suggest that their conception of a particular deity was quite immutable, although the thinkers occasionally developed an innovative idea about the gods, often prompted by political agendas, by exploring different new possibilities in order to reveal secrets and the divine order.”

⁵⁴ The Hymn to Nabû (K 2540) is written by a *šamallû* (see Mayer, “Ein Hymnus auf den Gott Nabû,” 178), as are two manuscripts of the Old Man’s Prayer; see Lenzi in Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, 327.

scribe and bearer of the tablet of destinies.⁵⁵ Even though he bears this title in some of the prayers,⁵⁶ it is not his main function in these texts. Instead, Nabû appears as the *primus inter pares* among the gods, either as the son of Marduk⁵⁷ or just as himself. He carries titles such as “the lord” (*bēlu*),⁵⁸ “the hero among the gods” (*qarrād ilāni*),⁵⁹ and “monarch of the gods” (*ušumgallu ilāni*).⁶⁰ In the Acrostic Prayer and in several other prayers, the most important function of Nabû is forgiveness, reconciliation, and the restoration of the supplicant before men and gods. Such functions are not usually mentioned among Nabû’s principal characteristics,⁶¹ but they can regularly be found in prayers to Marduk, the principal god of redemption and punishment in Babylonian prayers.⁶² The transfer of Marduk’s attributes and functions to Nabû reflects his increasing prestige and appropriation in Assyria, and his religio-political emancipation from Marduk.⁶³

3. The Acrostic Prayer to Nabû and Biblical Psalms

The biblical psalms, especially the laments of an individual, have often been compared with the Akkadian prayers, the *šulla*-prayers in particular. In older literature, the comparison aims at demonstrating the formal and theological difference between the biblical and the Babylonian prayers, whereby the biblical prayers were typically found qualitatively superior in terms of expression of the divine-human relationship.⁶⁴ In the more recent scholarship, the emphasis has

⁵⁵ See F. Pomponio, *Nabû: Il culto e la figura di un dio del Pantheon babilonese e assiro* (Studi Semitici 51; Rome: Istituto di studi del Vicino Oriente, 1978), 177–88.

⁵⁶ Old Man’s Prayer, line 2 (Mayer, *Untersuchungen*, 469, line 2); Incantation against Black Magic (ibid., 473, line 3); The Names of Nabû (Ebeling, “Ein Loblied auf Nabû,” 478, line 12; Pomponio, *Nabû*, 171); cf. the reference to the tablet house in SAA 3 12: 8 (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, 30).

⁵⁷ Thus in the Righteous Sufferer’s Prayer, lines 4, r. 4, and in the Old Man’s Prayer, lines 1–10.

⁵⁸ SAA 3 12 r. 6, 15; *Bēl*, of course, is the other name of Marduk.

⁵⁹ SAA 3 13: 3 (Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, 33).

⁶⁰ The Names of Nabû, (Ebeling, “Ein Loblied auf Nabû,” 477), line 2.

⁶¹ According to Pomponio (*Nabû*, 189–205), the secondary aspects of Nabû include war, agriculture, light and darkness, and the astral aspect.

⁶² See Oshima, *Babylonian Prayers to Marduk*, 39–60; plenty of examples can be found in, e.g., Mayer, *Untersuchungen*, 466–69 (Marduk 28); A. Lenzi in Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, 291–311; K. Greenwood ibid., 313–24.

⁶³ See Pomponio, *Nabû*, 161–65, 240–43.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., J. Begrich, “Die Vertrauensäußerungen im israelitischen Klageliede des Einzelnen und in seinem babylonischen Gegenstück,” *ZAW* 5 (1928): 221–60; C. Westermann, *Lob und Klage in den Psalmen* (5th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977); H. Gunkel and J. Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (4th ed.;

shifted towards a more positive comparison, highlighting similarities as well as differences in order to understand the dynamics of the divine-human communication.⁶⁵ It has turned out that the way the anguished suppliant approaches the deity is similar in the šuilla-prayers and biblical laments of the individual when it comes to the dissonance between faith and experience, as well as to the trust in the divine mercy as the source of relief.⁶⁶ Moreover, the intimate character of the dingiršadabba-prayers directed to the personal deity has been found analogous to the personal tone of the biblical laments, whereas the hymnic elements of the šuilla-prayers find several formal and functional counterparts in the Psalms.⁶⁷

Even the Acrostic Prayer to Nabû shares many affinities with biblical laments of the individual. Psalm 38 in particular has a similar tone throughout, but many other biblical texts – not only the Psalms but also the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations – provide abundant parallels to the preserved lines of the Acrostic Prayer. The interior organs are often presented as the site of the symptoms of grief felt by the suppliant, whether the heart, the bones, the kidneys, or the “spirit” (*rûāḥ*), the “soul” (*nepeš*) or the “flesh” (*bāšār*), all bodily expressions.⁶⁸ The solid foundation for the weak and righteous is often presented as the rock and/or fortress in the Psalms: “He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.”⁶⁹ The person praying in the biblical laments is often humiliated, desolated, and despised by other people,⁷⁰ even laying on the ground, being swallowed by the abyss, or likened to a dead body.⁷¹ Waiting for the divine answer⁷² and imploring without an answer are recurrent topic in biblical laments,⁷³ as are the frequent expressions of trust and reconciliation.⁷⁴

Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985). For the use of Mesopotamian prayers in biblical scholarship, see A. E. Zernecke in Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, 61–68.

⁶⁵ See Gerstenberger, *Theologie des Lobens*; idem, *Der bittende Mensch* (p. 65: “[d]ie Alt-orientalisten und die Alttestamentler unter ihnen sitzen also in einem Boot”); cf. A. Lenzi, “Invoking the God: Interpreting Invocations in Mesopotamian Prayers and Biblical Laments of the Individual,” *JBL* 129 (2010): 303–15; Zernecke, *Gott und Mensch in Klagegebeten*; Frechette, *Mesopotamian Ritual-Prayers*; cf. Spieckermann, *Lebenskunst*, 324–42, and his more pessimistic view on the relevance of the history of religion for biblical theology: “Die religionsgeschichtliche Forschung bietet eine Fülle von Beispielen, die die theologische Evaluation der biblischen Befunde eher verdunkelt als erhellt hat” (ibid., 322).

⁶⁶ Zernecke, *Gott und Mensch in Klagegebeten*, 364–66, cf. Lenzi, “Narrating for Nabû,” 32–34.

⁶⁷ Lenzi, “Invoking the God,” 311–15; cf. idem in Lenzi, *Reading Akkadian Prayers and Hymns*, 442–43.

⁶⁸ Pss 6:3–4; 22:15; 25:17; 32:3; 34:19; 38:4–9; 42:11; 51:19; 55:5; 63:2; 73:12; 102:4–5; Jer 11:20; 20:9; 23:9; Lam 1:20; 2:11.

⁶⁹ Ps 40:3; cf. Pss 18:3; 28:1; 31:3–4; 61:3–4; 62:7–8; 71:3; 73:26.

⁷⁰ Pss 31:10–14; 38:12–13; 41:8–9; 102:2–12; Jer 20:7–10; Lam 3:52–63.

⁷¹ Pss 22:7–8, 16; 38:3; 69:3, 15–16; 88:7; 143:3–4; Jer 38:22; Lam 3:16.

⁷² E.g., Pss 5:3; 33:20; 37:7; 38:15; 40:1; 42:5, 11; 43:5; 63:1; 69:3; 130:6.

⁷³ Pss 13:2–3; 22:2–3; 27:7; 42:10; 77:8–9; 88:15; 89:47.

⁷⁴ Pss 4:12–13; 7:11; 9:10–11; 17:7; 18:26; 25:3; 34:9–11, 20; 35:10; 37:3–4, 18–19; 40:18; 41:13; 63:5–6; Jer 20:11–13; Lam 3:22–27, 31–33.

Theologically, the Acrostic Prayer to Nabû finds its closest counterparts in prayers addressed to a personal god – not only in the Akkadian dingiršadabba-prayers, but also in biblical psalms. The relationship of the supplicant with Nabû is presented as highly personal and based on trust. God's silence leaves the supplicant on the mercy of people who humiliate him.⁷⁵ However, the poem communicates strongly the idea that, in spite of the misery of the supplicant and the silence of the god, reconciliation and the removal of sin are indeed *Heilsgewart*, the realization of hope.⁷⁶ The prayer itself can be understood as a way of coping with the dissonance between faith and experience in the same vein as the biblical laments of the individual.

Structurally, the Acrostic Prayer to Nabû shares with the biblical Psalms not only the acrostic design of some of them⁷⁷ but also the *Stimmungsumschwung*, that is, the abrupt change from lament to praise. In biblical scholarship, this turn has been interpreted either as reflecting the ritual during which the priest proclaims the divine response to the supplicant's prayer,⁷⁸ or in psychological terms as the expression of trust emerging from the lamenter's mind, already considered confident enough to make such a progress.⁷⁹ Similar theories could concern even the Acrostic Prayer to Nabû. The answer would depend at least partly on the "Sitz im Leben," that is, whether or not the text has had a performative function in a prayer ritual. This is quite as uncertain in the case of the Psalms, at least in their present context within the Psalter,⁸⁰ as in that of the Acrostic Prayer, unless the possible hints at incubation can be concretized and connected with Assurbanipal in the same way as in the case of the Dialogue between him and Nabû.

Finally, while the literary and material contexts of the Acrostic Prayer and the Psalms are very different, both demonstrate the flexible use of textual traditions. The Psalter, both from the literary and the material point of view, forms a secondary composition which, written on a single scroll, provides an interpretative framework for each individual prayer. The composition of the Psalter is the result of a long history of redaction and transmission that brought about countless changes in the form and content of both the individual psalms and the composition as a whole; for example, laments of the individual could

⁷⁵ Cf. Spieckermann, *Lebenskunst*, 234–35, on Psalm 28; Zgoll, *Die Kunst des Betens*, 86–88, on the šuilla-prayers.

⁷⁶ Cf. Zgoll, *Die Kunst des Betens*, 260–63.

⁷⁷ Pss 9–10; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; 145; cf. Prov 31:10–31; Lam 1–4; Nah 1:2–8.

⁷⁸ This theory was introduced by J. Begrich, "Das priesterliche Heilsorakel," ZAW 52 (1934): 81–92.

⁷⁹ See B. Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott: Eine Anthropologie der Psalmen* (2nd ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2006), 77–81.

⁸⁰ Zernecke, *Gott und Mensch in Klagebeten*, 302: "Auf den 'Sitz im Leben' der individuellen Klagspsalmen gibt es nur sehr wenige Hinweise." Cf. Gerstenberger's attempt to reconstruct the prayer ritual behind the biblical Psalms (*Der bittende Mensch*, 134–60).

be interpreted in a collective sense which, of course, changed their structure.⁸¹ The Acrostic Prayer to Nabû, again, is written on a single tablet and does not, therefore, belong to a fixed composition with any other text. This does not mean, however, that it did not have a context. It belongs together with a significant number of other tablets containing prayers, especially those associated with Asurbanipal, with which it shares not only the archival context in Nineveh but also the common tradition. However, while demonstrably rooted in the language and theology of the Akkadian prayers, the Acrostic Prayer does not have a clear structural or literary counterpart in any of the prayers known to us. It provides itself as a specimen of creative relecture of old prayer traditions, equated in the poem itself with prophetic activity.

Arthur Strong who first edited the Acrostic Prayer to Nabû 125 years ago, found this poem striking “one of the most familiar, as it is one of the deepest, chords in the Hebrew lyre [...]. Indeed it would seem as if the sweet singers of the ‘songs of the second temple’ may have learnt more than has hitherto been suspected *על־נהרות בבל*, ‘by the waters of Babylon.’”⁸² Undeniably, apart from the divine name, there is little in the preserved part of the Acrostic Prayer that could not be included in the biblical Psalms, whether we look at their language or theology. Evidently, the scribes and singers of biblical laments cannot have learned this particular poem “by the rivers of Babylon” (Ps 137:1), but the linguistic and theological affinities between biblical and Akkadian prayers nevertheless call for an explanation. A comparative study of biblical and Akkadian prayers does not need to be driven by the idea of contiguity, assuming that similarities indicate direct influence while differences point toward the opposite. Given the flexibility and adaptability of the prayer language and ritual performance, it is not difficult to see the biblical psalms as representing rivulets of the same stream of tradition as the Mesopotamian prayers. This article is too short to perform the comparative task properly, but it is written in order to pay attention to the need of deeper investigation into this worthwhile and fascinating topic.⁸³

⁸¹ Cf. M. Marttila, *Collective Reinterpretation in the Psalms* (FAT 2/13; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 85–144, on Ps 22; 69; and 102.

⁸² Strong, “On Some Babylonian and Assyrian Alliterative Texts,” 138.

⁸³ In addition to works consulted above (Zerneck, *Gott und Mensch in Klagegebeten*; Lenzi, “Invoking the God”; Frechette, *Mesopotamian Ritual-Prayers*; Gerstenberger, *Der bit-tende Mensch*), see R. Achenbach, “Zum Sitz im Leben mesopotamischer und altisraelitischer Klagegebete: Teil I: Zum rituellen Umgang mit Unheilsdrohungen in Mesopotamien,” *ZAW* 116 (2004): 364–78; “Zum Sitz im Leben mesopotamischer und altisraelitischer Klagegebete: Teil II: Klagegebete des Einzelnen im Psalter,” *ZAW* 116 (2004): 581–94.

The Path of Life – for the Wise Only?

On Psalm 16 and How to Avoid Sheol Below

Fredrik Lindström

In exegetical literature, Psalm 16 usually appears by one of its end-lines, “You show me the path of life,” *tôdî'ēnî 'ōrah ḥayyîm* (v. 11), and often as a possible reference for the idea of an after-life. For that purpose, the psalm appears primarily in conjunction with Psalm 49 and Psalm 73 in various exegetical positions. However, with regard to the tradition-historical question, scholarly agreement is remarkable: “The path of life” originates from the wisdom tradition because of its semantic parallels found in Proverbia, and principally Prov 15:24: “For the wise the path of life (*ōrah ḥayyîm*) leads upward, in order to avoid Sheol below.” In the light of Prov 2:19; 5:6; 6:23 as well, the path of life in Psalm 16 is understood as the moral course prescribed by YHWH and followed by those who are faithful to his declared will. That path is supposed to be a way of life that human beings can choose as long as they are open to teaching and correction. Therefore the path of life in Ps 16:11 is considered comparable to “the way of the righteous” in Ps 1:6. However, even though the specific Hebrew expression only appears in Prov 5:6 and Prov 15:24 besides Ps 16:11, the semantic fields for “the way/path of life” in the Hebrew Bible are extensive and dynamic, just like other metaphors of life. This fact is reflected both in the passages in Proverbia mentioned, *’orhôt ḥayyîm*, “the paths of life” (2:19), *derek ḥayyîm*, “the way of life” (6:23), and *’ōrah lēḥayyîm*, “the path to life” (10:17), and in the passages in the Psalms that include metaphors of paths and of life. But more important: unlike for example Psalm 49 and Psalm 73, which have both been designed within the wisdom tradition, the theological world of Psalm 16 is considerably different: here, the path of life passes through classical temple theological ground, the complex tradition described by Hermann Spieckermann with exceptional precision.¹ Since the way metaphor in this psalm theology is soteriologically profiled (e.g., Ps 56:14) it is neither a random phenomenon, nor an unstable project. Whether the pre-exilic Jerusalemite temple theology is reflected in Psalm 16 is no matter of debate but rather the starting-point for most exegetes. However, just as axiomatic as the

¹ This article is dedicated with gratitude to my personal and professional friend Hermann Spieckermann. His outstanding research, razor-sharp in the smallest details and resplendent in all its syntheses, is a unique source of inspiration to every student of the Biblical traditions.

assumption that the path of life in v. 11 has been formed by the wisdom tradition, is the hypothesis that this tradition has also left other imprints on this psalm, especially in vv. 7–8 and occasionally in v. 2b. Here I would like to problematise these assumptions by drawing up a reading, informed by temple theology, of the particular verse within its context. My ambition is not to show that the traditional position with regard to the tradition-historical background of the psalm is impossible, but only to point out some observations that make this hypothesis unnecessarily complicated.²

I

- 1b Protect me God, for in you I take refuge.
- 2a I say to YHWH: You are my Lord,
- 2b I have no good apart from you.

II

- 5a YHWH is my piece of land and my cup,
- 5b you make my lot stately.
- 6a The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places,
- 6b yes, the heritage is pleasing to me.

III

- 7a I praise YHWH, who gives me counsel,
- 7b yes, in the dark night my kidneys advise me.
- 8a I set YHWH continually before me,
- 8b because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
- 9a Therefore my heart is glad, my glory rejoices,
- 9b yes, my body dwells securely.

IV

- 10a For you do not abandon me to Sheol,
- 10b you do not let your faithful one see the Pit.

² E. Zenger, *Die Nacht wird leuchten wie der Tag: Psalmenauslegungen* (Akzente; Freiburg: Herder, 1997), 220: “‘Weg des Lebens’ ist ein Fachterminus der weisheitlichen ‘Lebenslehre’, der weisheitlichen Pädagogik. [...] Der Psalm gehört also in jene weisheitliche Strömung der nach-exilischen Epoche, welche die Lebensweisheit als Gottesgabe, als Belehrung durch JHWH – eben als Tora sucht und erbittet.” K. Seybold, “Der Weg des Lebens: Eine Studie zu Psalm 16,” *ThZ* 40 (1984): 121–29, on p. 124: “[...] einen Fachterminus der weisheitlichen ‘Lebenslehren’ [...],” who maintains that the psalm expects God’s help in crucial choices, “[...] Entscheidungen, die vielleicht alsbald, vielleicht in weiterer Zukunft getroffen werden müssen,” 125. Perhaps it is for this reason that B. Janowski, *Arguing with God: A Theological Anthropology of the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 302 n. 67, refers to Jer 21:8. For F. Hartenstein, *Das Angesicht JHWHs: Studien zu seinem höfischen und kultischen Bedeutungshintergrund* (FAT 55; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 110 n. 92 (cf. 107 n. 84), esp. Prov 3:16 reveals that Ps 16:11 has “eine deutliche Nähe zu weisheitlicher Tradition.” However, it seems more likely that the two passages share a common monarchical ideology. K. Liess, *Der Weg des Lebens: Psalm 16 und das Lebens- und Todesverständnis der Individualpsalmen* (FAT II/5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), esp. 108, 237–47, does not give any further support for the traditional position.

- 11a You show me the path of life:
 11b in your presence there is fullness of joy,
 11c in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.³

The affirmative and emphatic expressions characterise this psalm from a stylistic point of view. In four bicola the lines form synthetic parallelisms (6ab, 7ab, 8ab, 9ab), the reinforcing particles *ʾap*, and *kî*, “yes, indeed,” each appear three times and twice respectively (6b, 7b, 9b, 8b, 10a), the particle *lākēn*, “therefore,” appears once (9a) and the negations *loʾ*, and *bal*, “not,” each figure twice (10a, 10b, 2b, 8b). The five intense plurals (6a, 7b, 11abc) and the five nominal clauses (2b, 5a, 8b, 11bc) are also notable. Hermann Gunkel emphasised on good grounds that Psalm 16 is the psalm of confidence that is closest to the individual complaint psalms.⁴ The only petition in this psalm appears in the introduction, but the attitude of prayer is also discernible in the multiple expressions of trust. Only the absence of any I-complaint and enemy complaint distinguishes Psalm 16 from the individual complaint psalms. Even so, this psalm is marked by a strong enemy *presence*, explicit in 7b, 8b, 10ab and implicit in the motivation for refuge (1b, cf. Pss 7:2; 11:1; 31:2; 71:1) as well as in the confidence that the petitioner will dwell securely (9b). This motif also appears in the two most “trusting” psalms of confidence, i. e., in Psalm 23 (v. 6) and in Ps 27:1–6 (v. 4). The God-epithets “my piece of land” and “my cup” (Ps 16:5) have the character of confidence just like “my shepherd” (Ps 23:1) and “my light and my salvation” (Ps 27:1), and Psalm 16 shares its theological concepts of YHWH’s saving presence, including its preconditions and consequences, with these two psalms. And further: the overall structure in Psalm 16, with its three areas of focus, is similar to the structure found in Psalm 23: the temple environs, divine presence in the darkness, return to YHWH’s temple.

The petition for protection through YHWH and the request for refuge with him (1b) indicates a threat as serious as the acute danger of Death. The response

³ Vv. 3–4 do not belong to the original composition. The catchwords, synonyms, and equivalent expressions of vv. 1–2.5–11 are absent in vv. 3–4: 1b: *šāmērēnî, hāsītî*, 9b: *yīškōn lābeṭaḥ*; 2b: *tōbātî*, 5b: *tōmîk*, 6a: *bannēʾimîm*, 6b: *šāpērā*, 11a: *ḥayyîm*, 11b: *šōbaʾ*, 11c: *nēʾimôt*; 5a: *mēnāt-helqî*, 5b: *gōrālî*, 6b: *naḥālāt*; 5a: *kōsî*, 11b: *šōbaʾ*; 7a: *ʾabārēk*, 9a: *sāmaḥ*, *wayyāgel*; 7a: *yēʾāšānî*, 7b: *yissērūnî*, 11a: *tōdīʾenî*; 7b: *kilyōtāy*, 9a: *libbî, kēbōdî*, 9b: *bēšārî*, 8a: *lēnegdî*, 11b: *ʾet-pānēkā*; 8a: *tāmîd*, 11c: *nešaḥ*; 8b: *mîmînî*, 11c: *bîmînēkā*; 9a: *sāmaḥ*, 11b: *šemāhôt*; 10a: *šēʾōl*, 10b: *šaḥat*, 8b: *bal-ʾemmôt, ʾorah ḥayyîm*. The continuation of the confession in 2b is found in the God-epithets in 5a but is interrupted by the poet’s joining the right community (v. 3) and his denunciation of foreign cults (v. 4). Only 3b and 4c are opened by *wē*, “and.” The tricolon 4abc deviates from the poem’s bicola (except for the frame, 1b.2ab and 11abc). Vv. 3–4 have been inspired by Isa 57:6; Exod 20:3 and/or 34:14–15; similarly E. Zenger and F.-L. Hossfeld, *Die Psalmen* (3 vols.; NEechtB; Würzburg: Echter, 1993), 1:108.

⁴ H. Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels: Zu Ende geführt von J. Begrich* (4th ed.; HKAT 2, Erg.-Bd.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 255. C. Barth, *Die Errettung vom Tode in den individuellen Klage- und Dankliedern des Alten Testaments* (Zollikon: Evangelischer, 1947), 153; Liess, *Weg des Lebens*, 105–10.

to prayer implies freedom from the power of Death, not from a specific, “real,” situation of danger. The absence of any distinctly soteriological diction in the petition (cf. Ps 71:1–2) and of any complaint about the social aspects of the realm of Death (cf. Ps 140:5–6) is compensated by the robust metaphors of *Sheol’s/the Pit’s* hunger for power, which makes the threat both existential and complex. The background of this openness can be found in the prayer formulas used in many places in the ancient Near East. The psalms preserve the character of the agenda as a utility text formulated for numerous different life situations.⁵ In the psalms, the formalised events of this agenda are turned into events that are typical of existence in general. Since repeated tribulations, crises and various needs are placed within the range of threats from Death as well as within the liberation through YHWH, trust is no static starting-point for the user, but a confidence that must be continually achieved. The external nature of the threat (the symbol is *death*) in Psalm 16 characterises the theological dualism in classical temple theology, in which (the symbol of) *sin* is deliberately of little interest. For that reason, sin is not a significant theme in the anthology known as the Book of Psalms.⁶

The semantic density of this poem indicates both explicit and implicit conceptual links between its four compositional units.

Stanza I. – In the opening line the petitioner enters the temple theological room in which his or her thoughts will remain to the very end: “Protect me God (*šōmrēnî ʾēl*), for in you I take refuge (*kî-ḥāsîṭî bāk*)!” (1b). The spatially connoted motivation calls forth the metaphor of an audience with King YHWH in his palace and its consequences: rescue and participation in his sphere of life (11bc).⁷ There is a forward pointer towards this scene in “You are my Lord (*ʾădōnāy ʾattâ*)” (2a), which apostrophizes the royal features of YHWH (Pss 8:2; 97:5), whose face his *servant* is seeking (Pss 27:9; 31:17). The introductory *ʾāmartî*, “I say” (2a), is found in a comparable position in Ps 142:6:

I say, “You are my refuge,	<i>ʾāmartî ʾattâ maḥsî</i>
my portion in the land of the living.”	<i>ḥelqî beʾereṣ ḥaḥayyîm</i>

Here the motifs YHWH my refuge and my portion appear in the same sequence as in the first two stanzas in Psalm 16. Yes, from a temple theological perspective,

⁵ C. Körting, “Der Tempel – ein Ort der Krankenheilung?: ‘Antworten’ aus Mesopotamien und Israel,” *ZAW* 124 (2012): 477–91, on pp. 487–89; H. Spieckermann, *Lebenskunst und Gotteslob in Israel: Anregungen aus Psalter und Weisheit für die Theologie* (FAT 91; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 271–72; on the multi-causality of suffering, see F. Lindström, *Suffering and Sin: Interpretations of Illness in the Individual Complaint Psalms* (ConBOT 37; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1994), 24–51.

⁶ Lindström, *Suffering and Sin*; on the “Book” of Psalms as an anthology, see D. Willgren, *The Formation of the “Book” of Psalms: Reconsidering the Transmission and Canonization of Psalmody in Light of Material Culture and the Poetics of Anthologies* (FAT II/88; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

⁷ N. 34 below.

the land metaphor in the second stanza is no surprise: “the land of the living” is that area of life in which mortals “look upon” each other, and where they can also “see YHWH” (Isa 38:11). The roots of human existence are found in this land (Ps 52:7) and so too is the fullness of life that flourishes in the temple (Ps 52:10). Even the phrase “you are my *highest good* (*tôbātî bal-âlêkâ*)” (2b), points to the fullness of life and to the joys and pleasures in the palace of the King (11bc). In Ps 27:13 the goodness of YHWH refers to *das Heil der Gottesnähe*:

I shall see the goodness of YHWH *lir’ôt bêtûb-yhwh*
in the land of the living.⁸ *bě’ereṣ ḥayyim*

The dynamic in the goodness of the God of the temple is used by Ps 23:6: at the table fellowship with YHWH, the petitioner is equally intensively “surrounded by goodness and faithfulness (*tôb wāḥesed yirdēpûnî*)” as he was previously by the enemies in the darkest valley. The enemies are forced to come to a halt outside the royal hall of YHWH.⁹ In the world of temple theology, goodness only exists perfectly in YHWH’s protective presence: his goodness is the only goodness for me, since he grants me a share in his own life, 11abc.

Stanza II. – All goodness is linked to the land which, after YHWH, is ascribed the first as well as the last word, “(the portion of) my piece of land (*měnôt-ḥelqî*)” (5a), and “the heritage (*ap-naḥālāt*) is pleasing to me” (6b), respectively. In between, this territory appears in the form of “(in) pleasant places (*bannē’imim*)” (6a), and in the light of this, even in 5b in the form of “you make my lot stately (*gôrālî tômîk*).”¹⁰ Since this piece of land is identified with YHWH himself (5a) it has been assumed that there has been a shift of meaning to “destiny” (e.g., Isa 17:14) and/or that the allotment refers to “the promised land,” with or without Levites, who have no allotments. However, the *Sachhälfte* of this image is the plot of land that has been given to the individual or to his family by, for example, the village, and that is what constitutes sustained opportunities for life and protection from Death. The plot of land can therefore be related to the petitioner’s “portion in the land of the living” (Ps 142:6), and thus to the life-giving God of the temple (Pss 27:13; 56:14; 116:9), who has a role comparable to that fruitful piece of land: “pleasing, pleasures” (6a, 11c), satiation (*šōba’*, 11b, 5a: “cup”), “joy” (9a, 11b), secure dwelling place (9b), and “forevermore” (11c), i.e., to the fullness and continuity of the good life.

⁸ *Das Heil der Gottesnähe*; I. Höver-Johag, “*tôb*,” *ThWAT* 3 (1982): 315–39, on p. 336; esp. Pss 4:7; 21:4; 31:17, 20–22; 34:9; 63:3–6; 65:5; 84:11.

⁹ The theological frame for Ps 73:28 is different; two of the leading ideas in Psalm 73 are missing in Psalm 16: the communion with YHWH continues *post mortem*, and the non-functioning act-consequence-relationship; further F. Lindström, “Theodicy in The Psalms,” in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (ed. A. Laato and J. C. de Moor; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 299–300.

¹⁰ F. Delitzsch, *Die Psalmen* (4th ed.; BC IV/1; Leipzig: Dörffling und Franke, 1883), 163: “Du machst stattlich mein Los.” The conjuncture “(you) hold (on to) (*tômēk*) my lot” (cf. Pss 41:13; 63:9) changes the image into destiny.

This double exposure emerges already from the double genitive in 5a: *yhwh mēnôt-ḥelqî wēkôšî*, “YHWH is the portion of my piece of land and of my cup.” The cup at the King’s banquet shines like a reflection of the sun (11bc; Ps 23:5), seemingly an exception from the consequent land metaphors of this stanza, which has nothing to gain from any complementation with the unknown *Los-becher*.¹¹ As a metonymy for the banquet, the cup relates to the piece of land that produces sustenance for life. The transparency of the pleasant places is also tradition-historically motivated: the sanctuary on Zion is the microcosmos of the world, and therefore the divine dwelling and human dwellings overlap (Ps 65:5, 12; Jer 31:12–14.) As Hermann Spieckermann has shown, “the green pastures (*nēôt dešē*)” and “the calmed waters (*mē mēnūḥôt*)” in Ps 23:2 are open to a temple theological interpretation: they refer to YHWH’s dwelling place on Zion.¹² Hence, the piece of land in the second stanza is not the land promised to Israel, transformed into a reward to individuals for a good and righteous way of living (Psalms 25; 37), but the very gift of YHWH *himself* (5a) – YHWH is not the choice of the petitioner, but the petitioner is the choice of YHWH.¹³ And in 6ab it is the *land* that is allotted to the petitioner. These “pleasant places (*bannē’imîm*)” are located with the King himself (11c, Ps 27:4, text below). For this reason, their character of gift is stressed, “the boundary lines have fallen to me (*ḥābālîm nāpēlû-lî*),” and for the same reason, “the heritage is *pleasing to me* (*šāpērâ ‘ālāy*),” and not “my heritage.” In YHWH’s world, humans are at home. But they are not alone.

Stanza III. – The significance of the motif of joy is stressed already by the introduction to the first bicolon, “I praise (*‘ābārēk*) YHWH” (7a), as well as by the final bicolon (9a) which, introduced by the summarizing “therefore (*lākēn*),” doubles the joy, “my heart is glad (*šāmāḥ*),” “my glory rejoices (*wayyāgel*).” The ultimate reason for this joy is the gift of the previous stanza, YHWH’s land and the YHWH of the land. This emerges from the final words, “yes, my body dwells securely (*yīškōn lābeṭaḥ*)” (9b). Through the reinforcing “yes (*‘ap*)” the last line also relates to 7b, to the opposite of the joy: “in the dark(est) night (*lêlôt*, *pluralis intensitatis*),” i. e., to the temporal aspect of chaos. The spatial aspect of chaos, *bal-‘emmôṭ*, “I shall not be moved (to Sheol below)” (8b), complements this contrasting motif. The presence of chaos threatens neither the joy nor the presence of YHWH, but gives the presence of YHWH a different character compared to 11bc: it walks alongside the petitioner (8b). This dynamic, which seems to be caused by the precarious circumstances of the petitioner (7b, 8b) – and which

¹¹ Correct W. M. L. de Wette, *Commentar über die Psalmen, nebst beigelegter Uebersetzung* (4th ed.; Heidelberg: Mohr, 1836), 168; Liess, *Weg des Lebens*, 190–93; against Spieckermann, *Lebenskunst*, 294, n. 20.

¹² H. Spieckermann, *Heilsgegenwart: Eine Theologie der Psalmen* (FRLANT 148; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 268–69.

¹³ Zenger and Hossfeld, *Psalms*, 1:112.

also motivates YHWH's action in 7a, "who gives me counsel," – finds its parallel in the idea of Psalm 23 about the way in which the King of the temple purposefully leads the petitioner from the darkest valley (*gē' šalmāwet*) back to his own house (and table) where he reigns supreme.

Taking this theological dualism as my starting-point, I would like to consider the possibility that the two lines 7ab, like 8ab, have a chiasmic structure. The second clause of the first line is an indirect quotation, YHWH gives me counsel, which creates a parallel to the speaker's own situation, (therefore) I will praise him, yes, my kidneys advise me to do so. At the same time, a chiasm is created between my outward praise and my inward parts, which tell me to continue this praise (even) in the dark night.¹⁴ Here praise is heard in the dark, just as in Ps 42:9a, "at night his song is with me (*ballaylā širōh 'immī*)," where the song provides a temple theological echo. It is not a one-way communication, but also a song *from* YHWH.¹⁵ There, as well as here, the night does not bring any opportunity for quiet meditation, but rather marks the hour of the wolf, a reminder of chaos and death (Ps 6:6–7).¹⁶ However, regardless of such achievements, the night cannot prevent experiences of the help and protection of YHWH (Pss 3:6; 4:9; 91:1, 5; 143:8), nor the anticipation of the arrival of the dawn, which proclaims his victory: "I will sing [...] my glory (*kēbôdī*) will awake the dawn!" (Ps 57:8–9). Just as in 9ab, "my heart (*libbī*)," "my glory (*kēbôdī*)," and "my body (*bēšārī*)," the petitioner enters the foreground in 7ab, and just as in Prov 23:16, "my kidneys (*kēlāyôt*)" signify the *rejoicing* of the ego.¹⁷ The limitation of YHWH's words in Psalm 16 to a secondary clause is no surprise: in the psalms he is used to listening and he is not a particularly talkative God.¹⁸ What does YHWH say here? "He gives me counsel (*yě'āšānī*)" is a phrase unique to the Psalter. Exegetes often take recourse to the motif of divine counselling in the wisdom psalms, for example Ps 32:8 and 73:24, and let Psalm 16 change focus here from life as a gift to life as an assignment, from *Gabe* to *Auf-Gabe*.¹⁹ However, the petitioner does not need either assignments or corrections, since his circumstances are not self-inflicted. His perplexity, *Ratlosigkeit*, is caused by his helplessness. We might expect the divine word to be related to the movement in this stanza (7b: darkness, 9b: security) and

¹⁴ W. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und chaldäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (9th ed.; Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 1883), 341: "auch Nachts mahnen mich meine Nieren, nämlich zum Preise Gottes"; similarly E. S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1: with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 91, as an alternate interpretation.

¹⁵ On Ps 42:9b, see Spieckermann, *Lebenskunst*, 196.

¹⁶ Cf. Ps 77:3, 7; Job 17:12–14; on Ps 63:7–9 see Lindström, *Suffering and Sin*, 410.

¹⁷ "Conscience" does not fit this context, against H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1974), 65; D. Kellermann, "*kēlāyôt*," *ThWAT* 4 (1984), 188–92, on p. 189. Since the subject in 7b is the petitioner, the parallels from Jer 11:20; 12:2–3; 17:10; 20:12; Pss 7:10; 26:2 are not relevant.

¹⁸ Esp. Pss 35:3; 91:14–16; Lam 3:57.

¹⁹ Zenger and Hossfeld, *Psalms*, 1:108.

also in the last stanza (10ab: death, 11abc: life). A divine exhortation with such a purpose is reported in Ps 27:8: “To you belongs– my heart says – [the word]: ‘Seek my face.’”²⁰ Here, YHWH’s exhortation appears within a self-exhortation in a way that is reminiscent of Ps 16:7. It is also remarkable that the shared intention to meet in the temple in Ps 27:8 is followed by “YHWH, teach me your way, lead me on a level path because of my enemies!” (v. 11, text below) and “see the goodness of YHWH in the land of the living” (v. 13, text above), in a sequence that finds its counterpart in Psalm 16 (vv. 7, 11).²¹ The complaint psalms also throw light on the terminological question about YHWH’s giving me “counsel,” namely by the contrast motif of the petitioner’s *Ratlosigkeit*: “How long must I lay up plans (*’āšīt ’ēšôt*) in my life, have sorrow in my heart [...]” (Ps 13:3).²² In other words, the real parallel to *yē’āšānî* (7a, with divine subject) is not *yīsserrûnî* (7b, with human subject), but *tôdî’ēnî* (11a, with divine subject): YHWH gives me counsel (7a) // guidance (11a), with one and the same content.²³

What is heard (7ab) is complemented by what is seen: 8ab. A mental iconography anticipates the sensuous meeting with the King in his royal hall (11bc): “I set YHWH before me continually,” *šwītî yhw̄h negdî tāmîd* (8a). Even “at my right hand (*mîmînî*)” (8b) is a literary anticipation of the real presence, “in your presence (*’et-pānēkā*),” “in your right hand (*bîmînēkā*),” and “forevermore (*nešaḥ*)” (11bc). The verb for “set” is also used when YHWH in Ps 21:6 bestows his own “splendour and majesty” on the king, a passage launched by “his glory (*kēbôdô*) is great through your salvation.” It is therefore possible that the temple theological idea of the recipient’s return of the divine gifts echoes in Ps 16:8a, which is indicated by the petitioner’s description of himself in 9a as *kēbôdî*, “my glory,” i. e., as the human being who has been given glory by YHWH and who returns glory (Ps 30:13, LXX). Consequently, the petitioner “sets” YHWH before him or her with the purpose of giving back the gifts from the temple in the form of praise (cf. Pss 29:1–2; 63:3). This, the only possible reply to the Subject of the divine presence, is not unexpected, given that joy is the basic motif in the stanza. In 8b, the poet moves on in familiar temple theological terrain, not accompanied by a coaching wisdom teacher, but by the King himself at his

²⁰ I understand *lēkā ’amar libbî baqqēšû pānāy* as “My heart tells me that you have said: ‘Seek my face!’”

²¹ Ps 27:1–6 and Ps 27:7–14 are both representative for classical Jerusalemite temple theology, Lindström, *Suffering and Sin*, 152–71.

²² In Prov 27:9, *’ēšāh* has the sense of “worry, rumination,” or similar (cf. Sir 30:21). Several phrases in Psalm 16 are mirroring phrases in Psalm 13, e. g., “my heart is glad” (*šāmaḥ libbî*), Ps 16:9, “sorrow in my heart” (*yāgôn bilbābî*), Ps 13:3. A corrective, meaning of *yā’āš*, “advise,” in Ps 16:7 is not mandatory, nor for *yīssar*, “instruct,” e. g., Isa 28:26 (// *yôreh*, “teach”); on the other hand, together with *yôkaḥ*, “reprove,” *yīssar* often means “rebuke,” on Pss 6:2; 38:2; 39:12, see Lindström, *Suffering and Sin*, 137–43, 244–47, 262–65.

²³ H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen* (BKAT 15/1–2; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978), 266–67, is correct in this, but the counsel is not necessarily for only once in a lifetime, nor is it in the form of a *Heilsorakel*.

right hand (Ps 110:5), who “keeps (*šāmar*)” his “going out and coming in (from the sanctuary)” (Ps 121:5, 8). This conviction about the Presence beside him is formulated in view of the gaping abyss: “I shall not be moved (*bal-’emmôṭ*)” (esp. Pss 121:3; 116:8–9). According to Ps 93:1, the world (*tēbēl*) “shall not be moved (*bal-timmôṭ*),” even though it is constantly attacked by the powers of chaos below. The individual psalms (e. g., Pss 13:5; 30:7; 57:8–9) reflect, at the individual level, this threat against cosmos found in the hymns of temple theology. The unshakable base is the conviction that this threat against human life is in no way self-inflicted.²⁴

Three verbs constitute 9ab. The spontaneous cry of joy (*šāmaḥ*) is formulated in its most intense form before the King (11b, Pss 5:12; 97:1) as a counter-reaction to the malicious joy of Death (*gīl*, Pss 13:5–6; 30:2).²⁵ The dwelling in security (*yīškōn lābēṭaḥ*) does not refer to the Holy Land, but to Your holy dwelling, the enclave of liberation (Pss 4:9; 27:3–4; 91:1–2, etc.). As mentioned above, “my glory (*kēbôdī*)” reflects a leading idea in temple theology, i. e., my participation in the divine glory that gives to my life (Ps 57:8–9) and to the entire cosmos (Ps 93:2) its firm foundation (*nākōn*). The honouring person pre-supposes the honoured person (Pss 5:13; 8:6). The recipient is defined by the gift (I/my life = *my glory*, cf. Ps 7:6) since in this theology, the relationship to God is only and completely constituted by the existence-founding gift of the Presence (Pss 62:8; 91:15), which is rightly managed when it is returned (without any loss) as the song of praise.²⁶

Stanza IV. – The ideological counter-positions of this poem, death and life, are contrasted to one another in the last stanza. The first bicolon (10ab) stresses that the claim of the Enemy has been turned to nothing: “For you do *not* abandon (*lō-ta’āzōb*) my life to Sheol, you do *not* [...]” The reasons for the shifts between the spheres of power of the Archenemy and of YHWH usually remain unclear (Ps 22:2), but what is clear is that the absence of YHWH creates a life-endangering vacuum (Ps 71:11–12) and that Death loses its terrain immediately, as soon as YHWH turns his face to the supplicant (Ps 27:9).

²⁴ On theological contributions to *disaster studies*, see N. H. Gregersen, “Theology and Disaster Studies: From Acts of God to Divine Presence,” in *Disaster Research: Multidisciplinary and International Perspectives* (ed. R. Dalberg, M. Thanning Vendelø, and O. Rubin; London: Routledge, 2015), 34–48. On Psalm 13 // Psalm 93, see F. Lindström, “Teologiska läsningar av Psaltaren,” in *Teologiske læsninger i Det Gamle Testaments bøger: Gammeltestamentlige teologier i det 21. århundrede* (ed. J. Dietrich and A. K. de Hemmer Gudme with assistance from Else K. Holt, Søren Holst and Søren C. L. Lorenzen [forthcoming]).

²⁵ D. Erbele-Küster, *Lesen als Akt des Betens: Eine Rezeptionsästhetik der Psalmen* (WMANT 87; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2001), 128–29; on Hab 1:15, see F. Lindström, “‘I am Rousing the Chaldeans’ – Regrettably? Habakkuk 1.5–11 and the End of the Prophetic Theology of History,” in *The Centre and the Periphery: A European Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (ed. J. Middlemas, D. J. A. Clines, and E. K. Holt; Sheffield: Phoenix, 2010), 49–51.

²⁶ On Ps 57:8–9, see Spieckermann, *Lebenskunst*, 215.

The last three lines (11abc) sum up the entire poem, everything is anticipated.²⁷ Line 11a marks the path *away from* the darkness of the divine absence (10ab: “see the Pit”) *towards* the shining face of YHWH in his royal palace (11bc). The *revealed* path, “You show me (*tôdîḥēnî*),” begins already with the counsel (*yěṣṣānî*) in the dark night (7ab), and the *walk* together with YHWH, who prevents any stumbling down into Sheol (8ab), towards the secure dwelling (9ab) has already begun. The line 11a is also a headline to the two following synonymous lines (11bc), with which this line forms a tricolon (A/B/B’): the life motif (*ḥayyîm*) of the path develops by the fact that 11bc stop at the goal, which has been pointed out already in the introductory tricolon of this poem (1b.2ab). Reaching the goal marks the highest form of life. Therefore, it is doubled and expressed in *pluralis intensitatis*, the fullness of joy (*šēmāḥôt*) and pleasures (*ne’imôt*) – its source is in the sanctuary with whatever visible and invisible realities belong to that. To this goal both “ways” and “paths” lead:

YHWH, teach me your way,	<i>hôrēnî yhw̄ darkekā</i>
lead me on a level path	<i>unēḥēnî bē’ōrah̄ mišôr</i>
because of my enemies!	<i>lēma’an šōrrāy</i>

(Ps 27:11).²⁸

Ps 27:8–13 provides a sharp outline of the theological landscape of this network of roads: the word and the face of God (v. 8), not abandon, servant (vv. 9–10), not give up to the forces of evil (v. 12), see the goodness of YHWH in the land of the living (v. 13). The phrase “Teach me (*hôrēnî*)” in Ps 27:11 has a soteriological meaning, “because of my enemies,” which also applies to *tôdîḥēnî*, “you show me,” both in Ps 16:11 and in other places (e. g., Ps 98:2: *hōdîa’ // gillāh*, “reveal”), even in the realm of Death (Ps 88:13). However, “You would teach me to act according to your will,” or whatever similar translation might be offered of 11a, is an alien thought, almost like a bird that has strayed into a strange landscape.²⁹ Just as in Ps 27:8–13, the threat in Psalm 16 originates externally, i. e., from the realm of Death, and through his temple YHWH shows a path out, away from this danger. It is this dialectic, typical of temple theology, that gives these metaphors of roads

²⁷ W. Quintens, “Le chemin de la vie dans le Psaume XVI,” *ETHL* 55 (1979): 233–42, on p. 240.

²⁸ *ōrah̄* is a poetic synonym for *derek* with a similar range of meanings and exhibits usages that correspond to those of *derek*, J. Aitkin, “*derek*,” in *Semantics of Ancient Hebrew* (ed. T. Muraoka; AbRNSup 6; Louvain: Peeters, 1998), 33; M. P. Zehnder, *Wegmetaphorik im Alten Testament: Eine semantische Untersuchung der alttestamentlichen Weg-Lexeme mit besonderer Berücksichtigung ihrer metaphorischen Verwendung* (BZAW 268; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 387–88; on the lexical/semantic field(s), see Ø. Lund, *Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40–55* (FAT II/28; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 55–61.

²⁹ On Ps 143:8, 10 and other passages where YHWH’s guidance prevents from sin, i. e., Pss 25:4–5, 8–9, 12; 32:8; 51:8; 73:24; 86:11; 119:33, 102; 139:24, see Lindström, *Suffering and Sin*, 125–26, on Ps 27:11, see 160–61.

and guidance their content.³⁰ The protective and liberating presence of YHWH that reaches far beyond the physical boundaries of the temple, carefully connects to the deep existential foundation of these metaphors: the ability to move is a basic condition of vitality (Ps 140:5–6). According to this view of life, living is not *Lebenskunst*, but an existence, a “walk before (*lēhithallēk lipne*) YHWH,” that is lifelong, “in the light of life (*bē’ôr hāḥayyîm*),” “in the lands of the living (*bē’aršôt haḥayyîm*).” This walk with YHWH is possible because he saves the petitioner from premature death, my feet from stumbling (Pss 56:14; 116:8–9). In this correct tradition-historical context, the path in 11a is itself qualified as life: the path will come to meet me when YHWH, “because of my enemies,” leads me “in his own paths of righteousness because of his name” (Ps 23:3), already in the darkest valley and all the way to his house, and when he sends out his light and his truth to lead and bring me to his holy hill, his dwelling (Ps 43:3–4).³¹ The goal of this road is of course significant – the direction is essential for the metaphor itself (Prov 15:24), but the translator’s choice between “the path of life” and “the path to life” in Ps 16:11 is not an issue of any vital importance.³²

In the last two lines (11bc), the sanctuary, the only orientation point for this poem from its very beginning, appears. Here its interior and its events provide a deeper interpretation of the *Heilsraum* of the petitioner: YHWH meets him “face to face,” with blessing and a welcome, which maximise the linguistic forms for joy (*šēmāḥôt*) and pleasure (*nē’îmôt*). This spatially connoted pleasure (cf. 6a: “pleasant places,” *bannē’îmîm*) takes on a deep dimension through the temporal infinity (*neṣaḥ*) of the last line: for a moment, the petitioner is granted participation in YHWH’s own *for ever*, the kind of time that never passes away and that therefore explodes all human temporal frameworks (Ps 68:17).³³ The language is consistently related to the scene of the audience with the King, which is familiar to us exegetes through iconography and through the psalms in which it appears in several constellations of motifs that variously overlap.³⁴ Even so, in the specific psalm this conceptual world is just as lucid as the essential function of the unique composition of this scene: YHWH gives the individual a part of

³⁰ Esp. Pss 5:8–9; 27:11; 31:4–5; 56:14; 61:3; on Ps 143:11, see Lindström, *Suffering and Sin*, 121, 160–61.

³¹ On Ps 23:3, esp. Pss 5:9; 24:5 and Spieckermann, *Heilsgegenwart*, 270. Possibly, Ps 43:3–4 refers to two court officials who lead the petitioner to YHWH’s throne room, Hartenstein, *Das Angesicht JHWHs*, 180–81.

³² In its context the path in Ps 16:11 leads to life as in Prov 10:17 (with *lē*), Zehnder, *Wegmetaphorik*, 394–95; R. Zimmermann, “Metapherntheorie und biblische Bildersprache: Ein methodologischer Versuch,” *ThZ* 56 (2000): 108–33, on p. 120.

³³ Cf. Ps 74:3 and *ōrek yāmîm*, “length of days,” in Pss 23:6; 21:5; 91:16; 93:5; on Prov 3:16: n. 2 above.

³⁴ Esp. Pss 4:7–9; 5:3, 8–9, 12; 13:4; 17:7–9, 15; 21:7; 23:5 (*rēwāyâ*, “overflow”); 27:1, 4–6, 7–13; 31:16–17, 20–22; 36:8–10; 42:3; 57:2, 4; 61:4–5; 63:3–6, 8; 65:5; 84:2–3; 91:1, 4, 11, 16; 140:14; for a possible systematisation, see Hartenstein, *Das Angesicht JHWHs*, 205–09, and 111–20.

his own sphere of life, in 11bc: “In your presence there is fullness of joy (*šōba’ šēmāḥôt et-pānēkā*),” “at your right hand are pleasures forevermore (*nēīmôt bīmīnēkā*).” The parallelism of the Presence and its gifts is an arrangement that is only possible in the indivisible starting-point, the radiance from *Deus praesens*: “to behold the beauty of YHWH (*laḥāzôt bēnō’am-yhwh*)” (Ps 27:4). From these overflowing and saturated metaphors for the intensity of life (11bc) in the presence of Death (10ab.11a) the outline of the King’s banquet emerges (announcements made already through the cup in 5a). From the principal idea of this enemy’s permanent exclusion from festivities like these to the expectation of its final annihilation the path is not long (Isa 25:6–8).

In Psalm 16, the momentary experience of the fullness of life in the sanctuary has become a continuous existential fact, an experience of YHWH’s presence even when life is threatened by Death. The way metaphor can be seen as a way to handle the lack of clarity with regard to the respective areas of competence of these two spheres, a problem that recurs in the psalms characterised by classic psalm theology, and which in terms of the handling has its closest parallel in Psalm 23. There, as well as here, the foundation for the trust is not the successful choice of the right path in the midst of other alluring alternatives. The *path of life* in Psalm 16 finds its starting-point and its goal by trust in YHWH, who chooses to open his own sphere of life – to grant himself as a gift and to grant participation in his own life – to the person who is threatened by Death.

Who Can Narrate El's Wonders?

The Reception of Psalm 19 in Ben Sira and the Qumran Hodayot

Scott C. Jones

1. Introduction

The theology of Psalm 19 is especially focused around the theme of words, and it raises various questions in relation to that theme: What is the nature of cosmic speech? How do the revealed words of God in תּוֹרָה relate to this cosmic speech? And how can human speech both fit within and narrate the divinely created order? The early redaction history of the psalm intensifies this focus on words with a comment on the nature of cosmic speech in v. 4 and an individual prayer about error, innocence, and human speech in vv. 12–15. As Spieckermann notes, these two portions of the psalm are likely later additions that stem from the same hand – the first in v. 4 attempting to connect the spoken word in Ps 19:1–3 explicitly with the divine word of God's תּוֹרָה and the second in vv. 12–15 refocusing the psalm more narrowly on individual human piety.¹

In this essay, I'd like to outline how Psalm 19 and its theology of speech both shape and are later shaped by two creation hymns from Qumran: the first is the Masada manuscript of Sir 42:15–43:33 (cols. V–VI) and the second is column IX of the Qumran Hodayot (1QH^a). In the creation hymn in Sirach 42, Ben Sira speaks as a prophet who offers an alternative narration of the “works of El” to that in Psalm 19. He draws upon the vocabulary and imagery of Psalm 19 in order to subordinate God's creative works (and their “speech”) to the primacy of God's word and authoritative instruction. He further underscores that Elyon

¹ * To my friend, Hermann Spieckermann, one of the last great biblical theologians. With sincere gratitude and affection.

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H. Spieckermann, *Heilsgegenwart: Eine Theologie der Psalmen* (FRLANT 148; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 64 n. 10 and 71.

is the only one capable of revealing secrets and knowing the past and the future. The creation hymn in 1QH^a is focused on cosmic predestination, and especially how sinful and ephemeral humans can narrate God's glory and wonders. Using the language of Psalm 19, it answers that humans can speak rightly because God has predestined human speech. Before outlining the hermeneutics employed in each of these Jewish creation hymns, it is necessary to recount some interpretive issues in Psalm 19 and its earliest text history.

2. Ps 19:1–5a: Cosmic Words, Voices, and Measuring Lines

The first eight poetic lines of Psalm 19 run as follows:

- ² The heavens narrate (תְּסַפְּרִים) the glory of El, and his handiwork the expanse proclaims (תְּגַדֵּי).
- ³ Day to day pours out utterance (אָמַר), and night to night declares (תְּהַדִּיר) knowledge.
- ⁴ There is no utterance (אָמַר), and there are no words (דְּבָרִים). Their voice (קוֹלָם) is not heard (בְּלִי שְׁמָעָם).
- ⁵ Into all the earth their measuring line (קָנָם) goes out, their words (מִלֵּיהֶם) to the edge of the world.²

The first two couplets of Ps 19:2–3 are dominated by a lexicon of speaking (סַפַּר, נָגַד, אָמַר, and חִוָּה). Yet the juxtaposition of v. 4 and vv. 2–3, 5a creates a paradox. Though in vv. 2–3, 5a the heavens, expanse, day and night pour out utterance (אָמַר, v. 3a) and words (מִלִּים, v. 5a), v. 4a declares that there is no utterance (אֵין אָמַר) and that there are no words (אֵין דְּבָרִים). Verse 4b then states flatly: “Their voice is not heard” (בְּלִי שְׁמָעָם קוֹלָם). The asyndeton between v. 4a and v. 4b makes the relationship between the lines ambiguous. As I translate the verse here, the second line could be read as conjuring an inaudible voice. Following this line of interpretation, William Brown states, “The celestial voices are perceived visually. Creation’s voice cannot be heard; it is beheld.”³

Other traditions, however, alleviate the paradox by translating v. 4 as an asyndetic relative clause. So the Septuagint of Ps 19:4 [LXX 18:4] reads: οὐκ εἰσὶν λαλιαὶ οὐδὲ λόγοι, ὧν οὐκ ἀκούονται αἱ φωναὶ αὐτῶν. As the “Septuaginta Deutsch” renders this verse: “Keine Reden und keine Worte gibt es, deren Stimmen nicht gehört werden.”⁴ The insertion of a relative particle reverses the sense completely. Instead of there being no words, words and voices are heard everywhere.

² All translations in this essay are mine, unless otherwise noted.

³ W. P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 83–84.

⁴ The Vulgate follows suit: “non sunt loquellae neque sermones quorum non audiantur voces eorum.”

At least since Justus Olshausen's "Emendationen zum Alten Testament" in 1826, commentators have suggested that v.4 is a prosaic gloss.⁵ Hans-Peter Mathys puts it simply, "V.4, der den guten Zusammenhang zwischen V.3 und 5 unterbricht, bildet vielleicht einen sekundären Einschub."⁶ Rather than creating or intensifying the paradox in the surrounding context, this expansion may be interpreted as a redactional attempt to resolve it. According to Spieckermann, v.4 critiques the theologically venturesome combination of vv.5–7 with vv.8–11. By contrast, v.4 connects the spoken word explicitly and solely with the divine word of God's law.⁷ As Anja Klein puts it, v.4 is a "later reworking that denies the cosmic elements comprehensible speech and makes them inferior to Torah."⁸

The unusual phrase **יָצָא קֶנֶם** in v.5a raises further interpretive issues. The Masoretic text as pointed reflects the noun **קֶנֶם**, meaning "line" or "measuring line."⁹ Bernhard Duhm opines, however, that **קֶנֶם** "giebt kaum einen Sinn," and others follow suit.¹⁰ In addition to the difficulty of the phrase **יָצָא קֶנֶם** in the context of **קוֹלִים** in v.4b and **מִלִּי־יָהּ** in v.5a, the Septuagint's rendering of **יָצָא קֶנֶם** with $\phi\theta\acute{o}\gamma\gamma\omicron\varsigma\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omega\acute{\nu}$ seems to suggest a Hebrew *Vorlage* at variance with MT. As early as 1650, Louis Cappel noted: "[...] sed LXX. videntur legisse **קוֹלֶם**, *vox eorum*, vel **קֶנֶם** [*sic*] [...]"¹¹ But as Spieckermann rightly points out, the Septuagint's $\phi\theta\acute{o}\gamma\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ (as well as the Vulgate's *sonus*) is probably a contextual translation and therefore does not reflect a different *Vorlage*. The Greek traditions are more than likely reading the consonantal text **קֶנֶם**. This is certainly true of Aquila, who translates **קֶנֶם** (or **קוֹלֶם**) with $\kappa\alpha\gamma\omega\acute{\nu}$ here and in three other OT texts (Job 38:5; Jer 31:39 [LXX 38:39]; Zech 1:16).¹² This term is often used of a squared piece of timber or a beam.¹³ In classical Greek, it is a straight rod or bar, including a ruler used by masons and carpenters.

⁵ J. Olshausen, *Emendationen zum Alten Testament, mit grammatischen und historischen Erörterungen* (Kiel: Universitätsbuchhandlung, J. F. C. von Maack, 1826), 11–12. This suggestion by Olshausen is cited already in the third edition of W. M. L. de Wette's commentary: *Die Psalmen* (3rd ed.; Heidelberg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1829), 213.

⁶ H.-P. Mathys, *Dichter und Beter: Theologen aus Spätalttestamentlicher Zeit* (OBO 132; Freiburg and Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Freiburg and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 302.

⁷ Spieckermann, *Heilsgegenwart*, 64 n. 10.

⁸ A. Klein, "Half Way Between Psalm 119 and Ben Sira: Wisdom and Torah in Psalm 19," in *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of 'Torah' in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period* (ed. B. U. Schipper and D. A. Teeter; JSJSup 163; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 137–155, here 139.

⁹ See *Gesenius. Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (18th ed.; Berlin: Springer 2013), 1155 s. v. **קֶנֶם**.

¹⁰ B. Duhm, *Die Psalmen* (HKAT 14; Freiburg im Breisgau: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1899), 60.

¹¹ L. Cappelus, *Critica sacra sive de variis quae in sacris Veteris Testamenti libris occurrunt lectionibus libri sex* (3 vols.; Lutetiae Parisiorum: Cramoisy, 1650), 2:61.

¹² J. Reider, *An Index to Aquila* (compl. and rev. ed. N. Turner; VTSup 12; Leiden: Brill, 1966), 125 s. v.

¹³ T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Louvain: Peeters, 2009), 362 s. v.

Medieval commentators interpreted the Hebrew קִי in similar fashion. David Kimchi (ca. 1160–1235 C. E.) commented that this “line” refers to the perfection of the heavens and the precision of the cosmos, while Abraham ibn Ezra (1092/93–1167 C. E.) noted that this was a reference to heavenly writing.¹⁴ The phrase קִי אֵלֶּיךָ in v. 5a, therefore, evokes an architectural metaphor, and this exact expression – along with the notions of heavenly writing and cosmic precision – will play a critical role in the way that Psalm 19 shapes the creation hymn in column IX of the Qumran Hodayot.¹⁵

3. The Masada Manuscript of Sir 42:15–20: The Primacy of God’s Creative Word

The reception of Psalm 19 in Ben Sira and the Qumran Hodayot are more along the lines of allusion than citation, but the influence of the biblical poem is nonetheless evident. The grandfather’s allusions to Psalm 19 in his Hebrew work in ca. 180 B. C. E. are roughly contemporaneous with the production of the Old Greek Psalter in the early second century, probably in Egypt.¹⁶

There are several allusions to the “torah” section of Psalm 19, such as in Sir 1:12, echoing Ps 19:8–9, or Sir 24:20, echoing Ps 19:11. But the most extensive point of contact between Ben Sira and Psalm 19 is in the creation hymn in Sir 42:15–43:33.¹⁷ In this essay, the point of comparison between Psalm 19 and this hymn of praise from Ben Sira will be the Masada manuscript – not only because it was composed in Hebrew, as Psalm 19 was, but also because the B manuscript of Ben Sira evidences several revisions back toward biblical texts in this passage. Sir 42:15–20 from col. V of the Masada ms. reads:¹⁸

¹⁴ For Rabbi D. Kimchi’s interpretation, see Rabbi A. C. Feuer, *Tehillim: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources* (2 vols.; Artscroll Tanach Series; Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1986), 1:242. For Ibn Ezra’s commentary, see *Abraham Ibn Ezra’s commentary on the First Book of Psalms: Chapters 1–41* (trans. H. N. Strickman; Boston: Academic Studies, 2009), 145.

¹⁵ As Alexandra Grund and others have noted, the term קִי here may also have a cognate in Akkadian *qû* (Sumerian GU), which seems to be a technical term for a cord or string on which various constellations are aligned in Babylonian astrological literature, especially in text BM 78161. See discussion in A. Grund, “Die Himmel erzählen die Herrlichkeit Gottes”: *Psalm 19 im Kontext der nachexilischen Toraweisheit* (WMANT 103; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004), 168–173, and von Soden, *AHW* 2:924–925 s. v. *qû(m)* I.

¹⁶ On the date of the Old Greek Psalter, see T. F. Williams, “Towards a Date for the Old Greek Psalter,” in *The Old Greek Psalter: Studies in Honour of Albert Pietersma* (ed. R. J. V. Hiebert, C. E. Cox, and P. J. Gentry, JSOTSup 332; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 248–76. On its provenance, see A. Pietersma, “The Place of Origin of the Old Greek Psalter,” in *The World of the Arameans I: Biblical Studies in Honour of Paul-Eugène Dion* (ed. P. M. M. Daviau, J. W. Wevers, and M. Weigl; JSOTSup 324; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 252–274, here 273.

¹⁷ Cf. Klein, “Half Way,” 150.

¹⁸ My translation. The transcription follows that of Eric Reymond, though I omit the

אזכרה נא מעשי אל	V:1	42:15	I will call to mind the works of El,
וזה חזיתי ואשננה			and what I have seen, I will recite.
באמר אדני מעשיו	V:2		By the utterance of Adonay are his works,
ופעל רצונו לקחו			and the outworking of his will is his instruction.
שמש זחרת על כל נגלתו	V:3	42:16	The sun, shining over all, reveals itself []
כבוד אדני מלא מעשיו			(and) the [gl]ory of Adonay fills his works.
לא השפיקו קדשי אל	V:4	42:17	El's Holy Ones are not sufficient
לספר כל נפלאותיו			to narrate all his wonders.
אמץ אדני צבאו	V:5		Adonay has strengthened his host
להתחזק לפני כבודו			to take courage before his glory.
תהום ולב חקר	V:6	42:18	Abyss and heart he probes,
ובמערמיהם יתבונן			and their crafty ways he examines.
כי ידע עליון כל	V:7		For Elyon knows all []
מביט אתיוות עולם] and he gazes on what is eternally coming,
מחיה חליפות	V:8	42:19	declaring past things,
מגלה חקר סתודות] (and) revealing the depths of hidden things.
V:9 42:20			He is not lacking with respect to insight,
ולאן עברו כל דבר			and n[ot] thing pas[s]es him by.

This creation hymn is recited by Ben Sira, who speaks as a prophet who proclaims the “works of El,” which he has “seen.”¹⁹ The use of the verb *חזה* in the introduction is particularly telling, as the root is used elsewhere in the Masada manuscript and in MS^B to describe God’s ability to see visions (Sir 15:18) and the visions of various prophets (Sir 44:3; 46:15; 48:24). Thus this passage should be added to those which speak to Ben Sira’s role as a prophet,²⁰ and his inspired recitation of the “works of El” (*מעשי אל*) is likely a rival vision to the psalmist’s proclamation of the “glory of El” (*כבוד אל*) and “the works of [El’s] hands” (*מעשה*) in Psalm 19.

Ben Sira’s recitation of these “works of El” begins in the second poetic couplet, where the emphasis is on divine “utterance” (*אמר*) that produces these works. Remarkably, the divine name in this couplet is Adonay rather than El, and the interplay of divine names throughout the creation hymn is striking (Adonay, El, Elyon), including the mention of El’s “Holy Ones.” The reference to God’s creative works being effected by utterance (*אמר*) is often linked with

marginal notations as well as some of the diacritical markers. See Feb 4, 2019, <www.bensira.org/navigator.php?Manuscript=Masada&PageNum=5>.

¹⁹ Cf. H. Spieckermann, “Der betende Weise: Jesus Sirach,” in idem, *Lebenskunst und Gotteslob in Israel* (FAT 91; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 116–139, here 136: “Die Werke Gottes, die Jesus Sirach preisen will, sind die, die er geschaut hat.” Cf. Georg Sauer, who speaks of Ben Sira’s appeal to a “visionäre Schau,” and states further: “Nicht mehr das, was er durch die Offenbarung mitgeteilt bekam und erkannt hat, sondern das, was er von den Werken Gottes gesehen hat, ist Gegenstand seiner Ausführungen” (G. Sauer, *Jesus Sirach/Ben Sira* [ATDA 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000], 292).

²⁰ See P. C. Beentjes, “Prophets and Prophecy in the Book of Ben Sira,” in *Prophets, Prophecy, and Prophetic Texts in Second-Temple Judaism* (ed. M. H. Floyd and R. D. Haak; LHBOTS 427; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 135–150.

Gen 1,²¹ but Spieckermann rightly notes that this connection is not as cogent as often thought.²² In my opinion, Psalm 19 is much closer to this creation hymn, both in language and content. Beyond the obvious similarity that both texts combine the sun and God's authoritative instruction, the lexicon of Psalm 19 and Sir 42:15–43:3 overlap remarkably. Among the shared terms are *אֱמָר*, *מַעֲשֵׂה*, *רָצוֹן*, *שָׁמַשׁ*, *זֶהָר*, *כְּבוֹד*, *אֵל*, *סֵפֶר*, *חֹוֹה*, *נִסְתָּר*, *נִחְמָד*, *רָקִיעַ*, *שָׁמַיִם*, and *לִקְחָה*.

It seems that Ben Sira's primary concerns in this section are (1) to address the relationship between God's works of creation and his authoritative words and (2) God's sole supremacy in being able to narrate the glories of these creative works and to plumb secrets. Not only does the term *אֱמָר* occur in Sir 42:15 of Adonay's creative speech, but this "utterance" is parallel to the outworking of the divine will that is found in his *לִקְחָה* – his authoritative instruction. This reads almost like a theological correction to the declaration in Ps 19:4 that "There is no utterance (*אֱמָר*) and there are no words." But Ben Sira, it seems, is not satisfied with the utterance (*אֱמָר*) of day to day, either. For it is Adonay's utterance that is most important, and this utterance is the same as that found in his revealed instruction.²³ While Ben Sira may agree with the psalmist that God's works are filled with divine glory (Sir 42:16; Ps 19:2), he is less confident than the psalmist that the heavens are able to proclaim it. According to Ben Sira, even El's divine council (*קְדָשֵׁי אֵל*) is not up to the task of narrating such wonders, and Adonay must strengthen his starry army (*צִבְאָה*) to take courage in the face of the divine glory. While the sun is an integral part of this creation hymn in Sir 42:16 and 43:2–4, as it is in Psalm 19, the sun for Ben Sira is ultimately an "instrument" or "vessel" (*כֵּלִי*) created by Elyon (43:2) that attests to the greatness of the Adonay, who made it (43:5). The sun is "the [gl]ory of Adonay" (42:16).

In addition to the primacy of God's creative word, which may be a slight theological correction to Psalm 19 in light of a text like Ps 33:6, 9,²⁴ Ben Sira emphasizes that only Elyon is capable of "gaz[ing] upon what is eternally coming (*אֲתִיּוֹת עוֹלָם*)" and "declar[ing] past things (*הִלִּיפּוֹת*)" (Sir 42:18–19). The language here relates to the revelation of secrets (*נִסְתָּרוֹת*, Sir 42:19) and Elyon's unsurpassed wisdom (*שֹׁכֵל*, Sir 42:20). The verb *אֲתִי/אֲתִי* is only found here in the Hebrew text of Ben Sira, and it occurs in its participial form, much like Isaiah's polemic against idols in Isa 41:22–23: "... Tell us the former things (*הַדְּרָשְׁנוֹת*), what they are, so that we may consider them, and that we may know their outcome (*אֲתִירֵקֶן*); or declare to us the things to come (*הַבְּאוֹת*). Tell us what is to come hereafter (*אֲתִיּוֹת לְאַחֲרָיִךְ*), that we may know you are gods ..." (NRSV). Similarly

²¹ E. g., B. M. Zapff, *Jesus Sirach 25–51* (NEchtB 39; Würzburg: Echter, 2010), 301.

²² Cf. Spieckermann, "Der betende Weise," 136: "Der Sprache und der Sache nach lehnt sich diese Einleitung wie das Folgende nicht an Gen 1 an."

²³ Cf. Klein, "Half Way," 150–151: "Ben Sira speaks explicitly of a cosmic structure that is ascribed to the divine word. It is the divine word that brings about the works ..."

²⁴ See already Spieckermann, "Der betende Weise," 136.

Isa 44:7: “Who has announced from of old the things to come (אֲתִיּוֹת)? Let them tell us what is yet to be (אֲשֶׁר תִּבְאֶנָּה)” (NRSV). In Sir 42:18–19, the sage offers what sounds like an anti-eschatological message against those who claim to know the appointed times and destinies of all things. A position much like the one Ben Sira opposes is at the heart of the Creation Hymn in 1QH^a IX, where it may possibly have been influenced by an astrological exegesis of Psalm 19.

4. The Creation Hymn in 1QH^a, Column IX: The Divine Determination of Human Speech

Like the creation hymn in Ben Sira, the creation hymn in column IX of 1QH^a has significant verbal and metaphorical ties to Psalm 19, especially Ps 19:4–5.²⁵ Interestingly enough, however, it is vv. 12–15 of the biblical poem that seems to have occasioned the allusions to Psalm 19 by the author of this *hodayah*. The earliest redactions of Psalm 19 in vv. 4, 12–15 directly impact the theology of column IX of 1QH^a.

Ps 19:12–15 consist of a prayer by one who calls himself YHWH's “servant” (עֶבְדְּךָ). He is anxious before the penetrating light of תוֹרָה, for he knows that it will illuminate guilt which he himself cannot perceive.

¹² Also is your servant enlightened (נִזְהָר) by them,
and in keeping them is an abundance of reward.

¹³ Who can discern inadvertent sins (שְׁגִיאוֹת)?²⁶
Clear me from secret faults (נִסְתָּרוֹת).

What the psalmist wants more than anything is to be able to speak rightly. The poem closes in v. 15:

¹⁵ May the words of my mouth (אִמְרֵי־פִי)
and the utterances of my heart (הִגִּייוֹן לִבִּי)
be pleasing to you, YHWH, my Rock and my Redeemer.

²⁵ The transcription and translation used in this essay are from H. Stegemann, E. Schuller and C. Newsom, *1QHodayot^a, with Incorporation of 1QHodayot^b and 4QHodayot^{a-f}* (DJD XL; Oxford: Clarendon, 2009), 118–131.

²⁶ On the gloss “inadvertent sins,” see J. Milgrom, “The Cultic שְׁגָה and its Influence in Psalms and Job,” *JQR* 58 (1967): 120–121. David Flusser has argued that the single graph שְׁגִיָּה in this verse was interpreted in different ways by the Septuagint translators of Psalm 19 (LXX 18:13) and in Ben Sira's use of Psalm 19 in Sir 3:21^{A,C}. The Septuagint translators read שְׁגִיָּה as שְׁגָה, much like MT (“error”; see παραπτώματα in Ps 18:13 LXX), while Ben Sira read שְׁגִיָּה as שְׁגִיָּה (“wonderful thing”; see פְּלִאוֹת in Sir 3:21^{A,C}) (D. Flusser, “‘But Who Can Detect Their Errors?’ [Ps 19:13]: On Some Biblical Readings in the Second Temple Period,” in idem, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period* [trans. A. Yadin; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 2:162–171, here 162–164; trans. of *Yahadut Bayit Sheni: Hakhameiah ve-Sifrutah* [Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press and Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2002]).

The theological anthropology of the Qumran *Hodayot* meshes well with the description of the suppliant at the end of Psalm 19. In the creation hymn in column IX, the sage states that God has revealed “wondrous mysteries” (רזי פלא) (line 23) to him, but this only presses him to recount his unworthiness and even worthlessness. In lines 23–25, the sage describes himself as “a creature of clay and a thing kneaded with water; a foundation of shame and a well of impurity, a furnace of iniquity, and a structure of sin, a spirit of error, and a perverted being, without understanding ...” Because of this, as he says in line 25, he is “terrified by righteous judgments” (נבעתה בלמשפט צדק).

In lines 26–27, the sage mixes predestinarian theology with depiction of God as the sun who knows and reveals all. Everything has already been engraved (חקק) before God in an inscription of record (חרת זכרון), and this inscription includes “the everlasting seasons (קצי נצח) and the numbered cycles (תפוקות מספר) of the eternal years (שני עולם)” with all their appointed times (מועדיהם).” Directly on the heels of this comment, which sounds a great deal like an astrological interpretation of Ps 19:1–7 (and something which Ben Sira explicitly denies), is where the allusions to Psalm 19 begin in earnest. Lines 27–28 read:

- | | |
|--|---|
| IX. ²⁷ They are not hidden nor missing
from your presence. And how should
a person explain his sin, and how
should he defend his iniquities? | ולוא נסתרו ולא נעדרו
מלפניכה ומה
יספר אנוש חטאתו ומה
ומה יוכיח על עוונותיו |
| ²⁸ And how should an unjust person
reply to righteous judgments? | ומה ישיב על
על משפט הצדק |

This is the central problem of the passage in 1QH^a, and the phrasing is remarkably reminiscent of Psalm 19:7b, 13. The sage is deeply aware of his mortality and sinfulness and therefore of his inability to speak rightly. All the works of righteousness (כול מעשי הצדקה) belong to the “God of knowledge” (אל הדעות) (line 28), while “iniquitous service” (עבודת העוון) and “deceitful deeds” (מעשי הרמיה) are the lot of humans (line 29).

The solution is found in the divine determination of human speech. Humans can speak rightly and can recount God’s wonders and proclaim his glory (line 32) because this human speech is a part of the divinely ordained calculus (חשבון, line 31). This *hodayah* draws upon the imagery of Ps 19:4–5 not to call to mind the “silent words” of the celestial spheres, but to build up a theology of human speech.²⁷ In doing so, the word קי is central. Lines 29–31 of col. IX run as follows:

- | | |
|---|---|
| IX. ²⁹ You yourself created ³⁰ breath
for the tongue. You know its words,
and you determine the fruit of the lips | אתה בראתה רוח
בלשון ותדע דבריה
ותכן פרי שפתים |
|---|---|

²⁷ See S. Holm-Nielsen, *Hodayot: Psalms from Qumran* (Aarhus: Universitetsforlaget I Aarhus, 1960), 29.

before they exist. You set the words	בטרם היוותם והשם דברים
according to the measuring line,	על קו
³¹ and the utterance of the breath of	ומבע רוח
the lips by measure.	שפתים במדה
And you bring forth the lines	והוצא קוים
according to their mysteries	לרזיהם
and the utterance of the breath	ומבעי רוחות
according to their calculus [...]	לחשבונם

This passage is filled with vocabulary measures and reckoning, and out of its seven occurrences in the Qumran texts,²⁸ קו here serves twice to indicate a string or measuring line on which or according to which human words (דברים, line 30) are set, much like the alignment of stars by setting them upon strings in Babylonian astrological texts.²⁹ Despite Duham's objection that the phrase יצא קוים in Ps 19:5 hardly makes any sense, it occurs in 1QH^a IX.31 (though in the causative stem) and is central to the text's theology of human speech. In this creation hymn from Qumran, the קו "becomes the pattern or archetype for language and speech."³⁰ It is only for this reason that any human can narrate God's wonders rightly.

5. Conclusion

Who can narrate the wonders of the Creator? The creation hymns in Psalm 19, Sirach 42, and 1QH^a offer different answers to this question. For the author of the oldest portions of Psalm 19, El's creative works themselves can declare his glory and his works – but without words. Dissatisfied with this narration of cosmic speech, the earliest redactions of the psalm in vv. 4, 12–15 connect the words in Ps 19:1–3 to God's law and simultaneously underscore that humans need divine power to speak rightly. In an alternate account of "El's works," Ben Sira emphasizes the primacy of God's creative utterance and his authoritative teaching. Not even El's קרשים are capable of recounting his wonders. Finally, the creation hymn in 1QH^a IX speaks of the determination of times and destinies and states that humans are incapable of speaking rightly about God's wonders. Yet it is precisely because of the predestination of human speech that they can praise his name and make known his glory before all humanity. In every one of these traditions, the sages are keenly aware that they are speaking of things that

²⁸ On קו in the Qumran texts, see A. Bakker, "קו, I qaw," *ThWQT* 3:500–502.

²⁹ See n. 15 above and D. Pingree and C. B. F. Walker, "A Babylonian Star-Catalogue: BM 78161," in *A Scientific Humanist: Studies in Memory of Abraham Sachs* (ed. E. Leichty, M. deJ. Ellis and P. Gerardi; Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund 9; Philadelphia: The University Museum, 1988), 313–322.

³⁰ W. M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins through the Rabbinic Period* (ABRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 175.

are too wonderful for them (cf. Job 42:3; Ps 131:1; Ps 139:6; Prov 30:18). They are concerned on the one hand that this narration of God's creative works is connected with God's utterance at creation and God's revealed, authoritative teaching. Yet on the other hand, there is a strong current in these traditions that emphasizes human inadequacy in narrating these wonders without divine inspiration, determination, and favor. They do not stop short of speaking, and yet they recognize that they are always subordinate to and beholden to the God who made all things and who knows all things.

“Like a bridegroom” and “like a strong man”

The Reception of Two Similes in Ps 19:5¹

Susan E. Gillingham

It is a great pleasure to contribute to this *Festschrift* for Professor Hermann Spieckermann, who has long been a most generous friend. We share two main academic interests: our love of the psalms, and our fascination with the study of the reception history of biblical texts. I brought these two interests together when, in May 2013, I gave a *Gastvortrag* for Hermann at the *Centrum Orbis Orientalis et Occidentalis* at Göttingen University, and spoke on the rich reception history of Psalm 137. So an obvious choice for this paper in honour of such a supportive colleague is to combine these concerns again, focussing on a “creation psalm” (noting that the theme of creation plays a key part in Hermann’s study of the theology of the psalms) and adding to it another of his interests – the contextualisation of the psalms within their ancient Near Eastern setting.²

This paper is admittedly something of an experiment in method. Knowing that Hermann has written most evocatively about Psalm 19, I intend to discuss two similes from Ps 19:5, namely the description of the sun “as a bridegroom” and “as a strong man.”³ I shall start with what might be termed the imagined world *behind* the text, and I shall examine not only the ancient Near Eastern *textual material* (which is what Hermann does) but also the *iconographical artefacts* which indirectly might have influenced the two similes in this verse. I shall then look briefly at what we might call the imagined world *within* the text: this entails viewing v. 5 in the context of vv. 4b–6 in order to determine how the psalmist might have shaped within his Hebrew text iconographical imagery taken from an ancient Near Eastern context. Finally I shall turn to the imagined word *beyond* the text, seeing how Ps 19:5 in turn has influenced – partly on account of the Greek and Latin translations – later iconography in illustrated Psalters in the Middle Ages. So I intend to create a dialogue between “image and

¹ This paper was given in an earlier format at the SBL Hebrew Poetry Section in Boston in November 2017.

² See for example H. Spieckermann, “Creation, God and World,” in *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Companion* (ed. J. Barton; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 271–92.

³ Verse enumeration is taken from the English version, here using the NRSV.

text” and “text and image,” and to raise questions about the very different use of imagery in the Christian tradition compared with the attitudes to iconography in very early Jewish tradition. To achieve this I shall emphasise not only the reception of Ps 19:5 in later cultural history, but also the influence of cultural history on the text itself – what might be termed “proto” reception history, given that the evolution of the text we read has also gone through a long period of reception history which has been influenced by both the ancient Near East and other biblical texts.

In part my method has been influenced by a recent commentary I wrote on Psalm 19, which sought to illustrate the impact and influence of the psalm throughout the centuries, not only in the more traditional commentary tradition, but also in liturgy and in artistic representation and musical arrangements, in each case both Jewish and Christian. So in what follows I intend to create a dialogue between image and text, and also between my commentary on Psalm 19, with specific reference to v. 5, and Hermann’s account of the same psalm.⁴

Firstly I shall outline Hermann’s own comments on Psalm 19 as a whole, interspersed with some introductory observations of my own. He notes that the first part of the psalm (vv. 1–4a) concerns the splendour of God throughout the heaven and earth; the bicola have affinities with a Canaanite theme of the “word” which speaks through the tree, the stones and the “heaven and earth.”⁵ In my view the “wordless speech” of the heavens giving glory to God is an important anthropomorphic theme, expressed throughout the Old Testament, whereby creation itself, or parts of creation, give praise to God as Creator. Turning to the second part of the psalm (vv. 4b–6, which can be read as two tricola) Hermann observes the emphasis on the life-giving power of the sun. These verses speak of “die ewige Wiederkehr des zyklischen Sonnenlaufes,” and suggest a Mesopotamian provenance where Shamash is similarly praised.⁶ Here I would add that an Egyptian influence might also be present. I would emphasize again the anthropomorphic imagery in vv. 4 and 5. Firstly God sets a tent (אֹהֶל) – literally, a nomadic dwelling place – for the sun.⁷ The two very different similes of the sun being “like a bridegroom” (כַּחֲתָן) and “like a strong man” or “like a warrior” (כַּנָּבִיר) add to the anthropomorphic quality of this section: it seems that the

⁴ So see H. Spieckermann, “Gottes Herrlichkeit in Kosmos und Gesetz: Ps 19,” in *Heilsgegenwart: Eine Theologie der Psalmen* (FRLANT 148; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 60–72; and S. E. Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries: A Reception History Commentary on Psalms 1–72*. (3 vols.; BBC; Oxford: Blackwell, 2018), 2:122–29.

⁵ See Spieckermann, “Gottes Herrlichkeit,” 65, footnote 12, citing CTU 1.3.III 22–25.

⁶ See Spieckermann, “Gottes Herrlichkeit,” 69. For the possible influence of Mesopotamia, see 66 footnote 19, citing KAT³ 367 ff.; also O. Keel, *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament, am Beispiel der Psalmen* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1984), 18 ff. (on the strong man); and K. L. Tallqvist, *Akkadische Götterepitheta: Mit einem Göttererzeichnis und einer Liste der prädikativen Elemente der sumerischen Götternamen* (StudOr 7; Helsingforsiae: Societas Orientalis Fennica, 1938), 245, 297 (on Aja as Bride of Shamash).

⁷ See pp. 49 as to how the Greek changes the impact of this image.

greater the attempt to explain the transcendent power of God, the greater the need for personalized poetic imagery.⁸

Hermann similarly divides the latter part of Psalm 19 into two, noting that vv. 7–10, again set in bicola, mirror vv. 1–4a, and are now concerned with the splendour of God throughout the Torah; meanwhile vv. 11–14 are about the life-giving quality of the law, mirroring the life-giving quality of the sun in vv. 4b–6.⁹ The latter part of the psalm does not directly concern us here, although I acknowledge, along with Hermann, the importance of first and second Temple liturgy as a context and influence for the psalm as a whole.¹⁰

Ps 19:4b–6 (NRSV) runs as follows:

- ⁴ [...] In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
- ⁵ which comes out *like a bridegroom* from his wedding canopy,
and *like a strong man* runs its course with joy.
- ⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hid from its heat [...].

1. The Imagined World behind the Psalm

So are these similes unique to the psalmist, or were they borrowed from elsewhere? A short answer is that they are not unique. We know that by the time of the middle and late Bronze Age, solar iconography was prolific in the New Kingdom in Egypt and in Mesopotamia, as well as more locally in Canaan, and such visual iconography might well have partly informed the imagined world behind Ps 19:5.¹¹ The influence of solar iconography is especially likely when we consider how much of this imagery has been found on seals, from which repeated copies can be made, and that many such seals have been found in Judah, dating from the eighth century onwards. Furthermore, we know that state solar symbolism was important in eighth century Judah, as testified in the books of Deuteronomistic history and the Prophets, as well as in the Psalms.¹² Some of the seals are Egyptian in origin and some are Assyrian, testifying to the influence of both cultures in the northern and southern kingdoms during the eighth century.¹³ Artefactual examples found in Judah include a two-sided engraved seal

⁸ This is particularly evident in second Isaiah, for example in chs. 40 and 41.

⁹ See Spieckermann, "Gottes Herrlichkeit," 69–71.

¹⁰ See Spieckermann, "Gottes Herrlichkeit," 70–72.

¹¹ See W. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: A Theology of Metaphor* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 91–92 (on Egypt), and 94–97 (Mesopotamia).

¹² See J. G. Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun: Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sun Worship in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup 111; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 107–83, with particular reference to King Hezekiah; 184–90, with reference to Isaiah 1–39; and 218–30, on Psalms 84, 19 and 104.

¹³ The following three examples have been taken from O. Keel and S. Schroer, *Creation:*

amulet with winged sun disks, dating from about 750 B. C. E., with the name *šbnyw*, possibly a minister of King Uzziah; a scarab representing the crowned rising sun, which apparently belonged to a certain *ʾsn*, perhaps a minister at the time of Ahaz, dating from about 730 B. C. E.; and the winged sun disks found as stamp seal impressions on the many *lmlk* storage jars from Lachish, dating from the time of Hezekiah in about 700 C. E.¹⁴

1.1 Egyptian Evidence

Although there is no explicit reference to the sun as a bridegroom – given the representation of Ra as a solar disk, such a description would be inappropriate – the imagery of the descent and ascent of the sun-disk is found in two well-known hymns in Egypt: the Hymn to Amun-Ra, “Lord of the Sky,” dating from about the eighteenth century B. C. E., and the fourteenth century B. C. E. Hymn to Aten.¹⁵ The Hymn to Aten praises the sun god as the deity who created the world and sustains it by moving across the sky from east to west, day by day:

When you set in the western horizon,
the land is in darkness, in the manner of death [...].
At daybreak, when you rise on the horizon,
when you shine as Aten by day, you drive away the darkness and give your rays
[...].¹⁶

This hymn was found at Tell el-ʿAmarna, and it is not surprising that various reliefs from this site show the solar disk as Aten whose penetrating rays of life bring “life” – literally, in the *ankh* signs at the tips of some of the rays – to King Akenhaten and to Nefartiti.¹⁷ So despite any specific reference to a bridegroom,

Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East (trans. P. D. Daniels; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015); trans. of *Schöpfung: Biblische Theologien im Kontext altorientalischer Religionen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002 [2nd edition 2008]); the references are found in the English edition 59, figures 54–56. See also Taylor, *Yahweh and the Sun*, 24–37, on the Tell Taʿanach cultic stand; 42–58, on the *lmlk* jar handles; and 58–66, on horse figurines with “sun disks,” all found in Israel and Judah.

¹⁴ A remarkable seal, preserved in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (243/li1104), is of jasper and is marked in paleo-Hebrew “belonging to Hannah.” It was found near Lachish and dates from 750–700 B. C. E. A winged sphinx and an ankh sign are set at the bottom, being indicative of syncretism in Judah throughout this period.

¹⁵ Translations of these hymns are found in Keel and Schroer, *Creation*, 203–06; J. B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 365–67 (Amun-Ra) and 369–71 (Aten); also W. W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 44–47.

¹⁶ This translation is taken from B. T. Arnold and B. E. Beyer, *Readings from the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 196.

¹⁷ This relief from Tell el-Amarna, is now preserved in the Cairo museum (TR 10. 11. 26.4). A reproduction of the image is at <https://www.usu.edu/markdamen/1320hist&Civ/slides/10akhen/akhenaten4worshipingaten.jpg>.

the anthropomorphic description of the descent and ascent of the sun is a shared theme with Psalm 19.

The comparison of the sun with a strong man running its course throughout the sky is more explicit in Egyptian hymnody. In the so-called "Universal Hymn to the Sun," dating from the fifteenth to fourteenth centuries B. C. E., the sun is addressed as "Runner! Racer! Courser!"¹⁸ This image is also represented in several artistic depictions of the strength and perpetual movement of the sun; a ceiling painting in the tomb of Ramses VI in the Valley of the Kings, dating from the twelfth century B. C. E., depicts the sun's sphere (born of the sky goddess, below), making its course along the sky, being pushed by the winged Scarab. At the bottom of the painting are the sun's two barks, one for day, one for night.

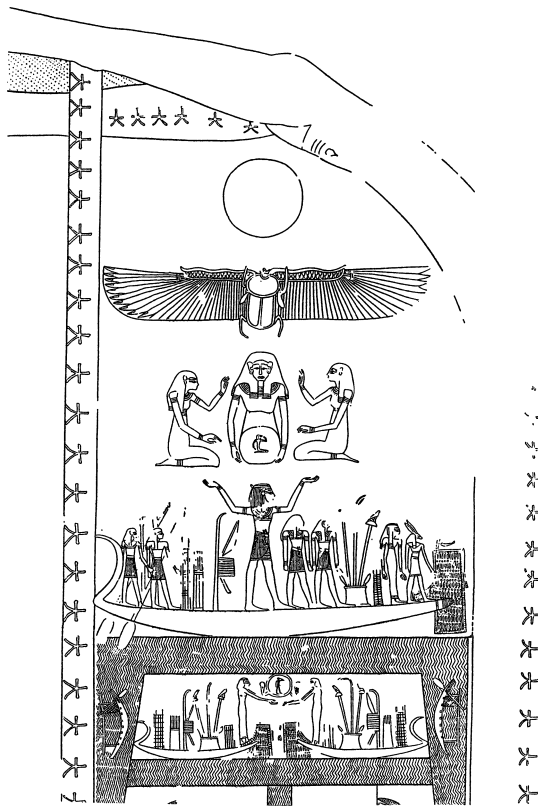


Fig. 1: Ceiling Painting from the Tomb of Ramses VI¹⁹.

¹⁸ See Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 368; also Hallo, *The Context of Scripture*, 44–45.

¹⁹ Taken from Keel and Schroer, *Creation*, 92, with permission from Othmar Keel.

1.2 Mesopotamian Evidence

Tomb paintings offer significant examples of iconographical representations of the sun, using similar imagery to Ps 19:5, but the depictions of the sun found on cylinder seals would have been a more immediate influence, given that the locality for many of them is Judah. Starting with the imagery of the sun as a mighty warrior, it is important to note that this great Solar deity, Shamash, is also God of Justice – a theme which fits well with the Psalm 19 in its entirety.²⁰ The second millennium Hymn to Shamash is very clear about Shamash's dual role: he is first praised as the great and mighty illuminator and then as the one whose light judges the affairs of men:

O illuminator [...] in the heavens,
 who makes the darkness bright [...]
 Above, you direct the affairs of all men [...]
 O Shamash, all the world longs for your light.
 If a man practices usury, you destroy his power,
 If a man acts maliciously, an end is made to him [...].²¹

A copy of an ancient Akkadian cylinder seal, where the mighty Shamash sits enthroned between the gates of heaven and metes out justice, was found in a tomb in Jerusalem and dates between the eighth and sixth centuries B.C. E.; given its locality and given it is a seal, the possibility of a psalmist borrowing from similar Akkadian iconography, setting the sun in a tent, is not out of the question.



Fig. 2: Cylinder Seal from Jerusalem²².

²⁰ See Spieckermann, "Gottes Herrlichkeit," 66; also Brown, *Seeing the Psalms*, 95–97.

²¹ This translation is taken from Arnold and Beyer, *Readings*, 198–99.

²² Taken from Keel and Schroer, *Creation*, 57, with permission from Othmar Keel.