

The Egyptian Hallel

Narrative and Liturgy, and the Formation of the Hebrew Psalter

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Erich Zenger's edited volume, *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, is arguably his most seminal publication.¹ It includes some forty-four contributors from at least fourteen different nationalities, and it extends to 826 pages. This was the result of the conference *Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense 57* which Zenger hosted, as President, in 2008. It offers literary, liturgical and theological articles on the Psalter as whole, on collections of psalms, and on individual psalms within the different collections. This was the last large publication Zenger produced: one has to ask where Psalms Studies would be today if he were still alive, celebrating his eightieth birthday. As Marco Pavan has noted, the importance of Zenger's work, alongside that of his constant co-author, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, can hardly be underestimated.²

The Composition of the Book of Psalms is personally significant because that conference and that publication were my first real encounter with Zenger. I had written a paper in 2005 on the Zion tradition in the editing process of the Psalter, and in 2006 Zenger invited me to develop that theme in a paper at the conference.³ So his invitation gave me the opportunity to reflect further on whether the Levitical singers might have been the *tradents* for the Zion tradition, and hence in some way responsible for the shaping of the Psalter. The published paper in *The Composition* was the outcome.⁴ At a conference in Bonn called *Trägerkreise in den Psalmen*, in 2012, Hossfeld challenged me to expand and develop this further, as *Die levitischen Tempelsänger als Endredaktoren des Psalters*; it was published in the last work to be co-edited by Hossfeld in 2017.⁵

Issues about the shape and shaping of the Psalter still preoccupy us, although, as Pavan has observed, the questions in some quarters are now slightly different and the issue of whether or not there were Levitical singers has been somewhat side-lined. This volume rather seeks to understand both the unity

¹ See ZENGER, *Composition* 2010.

² See PAVAN in this volume.

³ Cf. GILLINGHAM, *Tradition*, 308–341.

⁴ Cf. GILLINGHAM, *Singers* 2010, 91–123.

⁵ Cf. GILLINGHAM, *Singers* 2017, 35–59.

and diversity of the Psalter in the light of the evidence especially from the Septuagint and other versions, as well as from psalms scrolls from Qumran. Of course, this is not a new question: much has already been written on the Septuagint Psalter⁶ and even more has been written about the evidence from Qumran.⁷

My own approach in this article has been stimulated by the following observation, made several times, by Gerald Wilson in his considerations of the structure of the Book of Psalms. For example, in Clinton McCann's *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, Wilson writes:

It has become popular in many circles to refer to the Psalter as a “hymnbook” – a collection of individual compositions created for performance in the worship of ancient Israel. While there is a certain appropriateness to such a claim, it remains, in my opinion, an unhappy characterization for several reasons. First, the hymnbook analogy ignores the fact that, in the final analysis, the canonical Psalter has become a book to be read and meditated on (Psalm 1), rather than music to be sung.⁸

The similar caution about liturgical influence in the formation of the Psalter is evident, implicitly, in this very volume. Pavan writes about the importance of Zenger's and Hossfeld's analysis of the psalms from “the poetic, historical, sociological, literary, redactional and theological point of view”.⁹ If both scholars were alive today, I wonder if each would plead that in a book like the Psalter, we need to analyse it also from a *liturgical* point of view.

I am still concerned that insufficient attention has been given to the liturgical influence in the making of the Psalter, and I would argue that Wilson's thesis has had a good deal to do with this. My main objection – and perhaps I have become too engrossed with the Levitical Singers – is that is this not a question of either/or but both/and. This was an issue I frequently discussed with both Zenger and Hossfeld. It is obvious that the Psalter is part of a *literary* process of editing, with its overall structure and its smaller structures and interconnecting psalms; but the overwhelming use of psalmody and singing, as found both in the text itself and in its reception history, suggests that *liturgical* interests had a significant part to play as well. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that there is no other book in the Hebrew Bible where this liturgical and musical influence is as pervasively evident. So, this means that when we consider the formation of the Hebrew Psalter, we have to consider its formation in two modes, as it were, over the centuries up to the present day.¹⁰

⁶ See for example PIETERSMA, *Psalms*; AEJMELAEUS, A./U. QUAST, *Septuaginta-Psalter*; cf. BONS, *Septuaginta Psalter*, 450–470; BONS, *Psalmoi*, 1479–1885.

⁷ See for example FLINT, *Psalms Scrolls*; and most recently before his untimely death, cf. FLINT, *Contribution*, 209–230; YARCHIN, *Psalms*, 775–789.

⁸ WILSON, *Psalter*, 72.

⁹ See PAVAN in this volume, ##.

¹⁰ Cf. GILLINGHAM, *Psalms 2008*, 40–42 (on the early Christian liturgical adaptation of the psalms) and 43–46 (on the early Jewish liturgical adaptation). Throughout this volume,

In my view, one feature which conjoins these two approaches is the importance of “story” within and behind the poetry. Narrative and poetry have a complicated interrelationship, as is seen in early poems such as Exod 15, Judg 5 and 2 Sam 1. Many single psalms tell their own story – of betrayal and reconciliation, hope and fear. But collections of psalms, books of psalms and even the Psalter as a whole also have their “narrative structures” (to coin a phrase frequently used by Wilson). So in this article I shall seek to assess how an interest in “story” – whether for reading in private or public, or performing with music and song – might illustrate the close relationship between the literary and the liturgical shape, and the shaping of the book of Psalms.

This article will focus especially on the importance of what we might term “liturgical narrative” in one group of psalms (whilst recognising that other collections merit similar attention as well). The most likely candidates would be Pss 15–24; 42–49; 73–83; 95–100; 113–118; 120–134; 135–136 and 145–150, for each of these have strong elements of liturgical narrative. Of these, in my view, the so-called Egyptian Hallel (Pss 113–118) offers the most interesting model, primarily because of its capacity to tell a story.¹¹ But it is also in part because of its reception at Qumran and in the Septuagint translation (which is a key concern of this publication), and in part because its later association with the Levitical singers, which is one of my concerns, and partly because of its significant afterlife, especially in Jewish liturgy. A key question will be whether any “narrative shape” in Pss 113–118 is due, in the first instance, to their use in liturgy, or the consequence, in the first instance, of a non-liturgical literary process. I am acutely aware that it is exceedingly difficult to determine which is the “chicken” and which is the “egg”. One relevant illustration of this difficulty is Exod 12–15, where the story and the ritual performance of that story are inextricably bound together. We read of (at least) two very different festivals, Unleavened bread and Passover, seen through two different accounts of the ritual accompaniment to the story of the escape from Egypt. One account is probably early (Exod 12:21–28; 13:17–22; 14:5–14.19–25) and the other probably late (Exod 12:1–20.29–39.40–41.42–51; 13:1–16; 14:1–4.15–18.26–31). Few scholars deny that layers of liturgical history have affected the narration of this event.

I use this illustration from Exod 12–14 because it shows how the Exodus story was as deeply embedded in liturgical performance as it was in literature; and of course that story is especially relevant to Pss 113–118. My discussion will progress through the following six stages.

the liturgical and musical modes of reception cover a large proportion of each of the six (chronological) stages.

¹¹ This is evident not least in the tradition of the *Haggadah* – there-telling of the Exodus story at the Seder meal, at which these psalms are said or sung. For one of the best known illuminated *Haggadoth*, see <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/golden-haggadah>.

Firstly, I shall look at the placing of Pss 113–118 in Book V of the Psalter, partly in order to ascertain if the Hallel really does emerge as a unified collection, and partly to suggest that we have here a liturgical collection (Pss 113–118) within a literary whole (Book V). Secondly, I shall offer some observations about the separating and conjoining of different psalms, especially in the Septuagint and Hebrew manuscripts in the Middle Ages. I will then assess what little evidence we have of the Hallel in the DSS in the light of this. It should become clear that the splitting and remaking of psalms actually has no effect on the continuous narrative of the whole. I shall look, thirdly, at different ways in which a “story” has been seen in Pss 113–118, both in Jewish reception and from a contemporary perspective, noting the extent to which “stories” have so often been influenced by liturgical considerations. Fourthly, in order to illustrate further the links between story and liturgy, I shall demonstrate the early *liturgical* use of the “Hallel”, suggesting that the narrative contributed in no small way to the use of the Hallel at Passover. Fifthly, I will contrast this with the adaptation of these psalms in Christian liturgical reception history, where a new “story” is created, using psalms both within and outside this collection. I shall refer especially to the recitation of Pss 113–118 during Vespers, especially in the monastic tradition, and I will illustrate how they were re-used by eighteenth century composers for particular liturgical occasions. Finally – to return to the beginning – I shall assess what this later Christian use of psalmody might inform us about the formation of the Psalter, and I shall return to my thesis that there is a close and continuous relationship between story and liturgy in the ongoing shape and shaping of the Psalms.

1. The Placing of Pss 113–118 in Book V as a Whole

Amongst recent suggestions concerning the literary shaping of Book V those by Reinhard Kratz and by Hossfeld and Zenger are the most germane.¹² Kratz sees three collections: Pss 107–117 form one, brought together under the theme of “Ingathering”; Pss 118–135 form another, under the theme of “Pilgrimage”; and Pss 136–150 suggest the final group, on the theme of “Universal Worship”.¹³ Kratz notes that the psalms which begin these three collections all have a similar introduction, in their calls to “give thanks” to the Lord (Pss 107; 118 and 136) and the psalms which close the collections also have similar conclusions, ending with “Alleluia” (Pss 117; 135 and 145, which is slightly different). The problem here is the divisions proposed actually cut into already established collections: for example, the traditional Hallel included Ps 118

¹² Cf. ZENGER, *Composition* 1998, 77–102. Here Zenger also discusses the older views of KOCH and WILSON, ###, 62–85.

¹³ Cf. KRATZ, *Tora*, 1–34.

which, liturgically, is the climax of the Hallel when it is said at Passover (every day), Weeks, Tabernacles, Hanukkah, Rosh Hodesh, *Yom Atsmaut* (Independence Day) and *Yom Yerushalayim*.¹⁴

Hossfeld and Zenger have a different approach. Their starting point are the three apparently independent collections as the base of Book V. These are Pss 113–118, all starting, in the Greek, with “Alleluia”; Pss 120–134, all headed “A Song of Ascent”; and Pss 138–145, all with Davidic headings. They see that smaller collections and individual psalms emerged around these three main groups. So Ps 107 stands on its own, linking back to Ps 106 but announcing some of the key themes in the rest of Book V; Pss 108–110 form a small Davidic Collection; Pss 111 and 112 create a pair of acrostic psalms and their use of “Hallelujah” links them with the Hallel; and after Pss 113–118 the compilers placed another independent acrostic psalm, Ps 119, which stands between the Hallel Psalms (Pss 113–118) and the Ascent Psalms (Pss 120–134). In this way Pss 113–118 are “bookended” by Pss 112:1 and 119:1 which by contrast are both didactic psalms, each beginning with a macarism (“happy is...”). Psalms 135 and 136 form another pair, like Pss 111 and 112, although they are closer to the Ascents in their pilgrimage concerns. Together Pss 135 and 136 link back to Ps 118 (Ps 135:19–21 is like Ps 118:2–4; and Ps 136:1.26 are like Ps 118:1.29). Psalm 137 is another “connecting” psalm, also with a concern for Jerusalem and anticipating some of the themes about suffering and divine justice in Pss 138–145. Psalms 146–150 create a doxological conclusion, framing the entire Psalter along with Pss 1–2.¹⁵

There are of course other views about the composition of Book V; whichever model we adopt it seems clear that the Hallel was compiled together as a liturgical collection, and its eventual incorporation into Book V as a whole was most likely part of the literary process similar to that described above.

2. The Unity of Pss 113–118 in the Septuagint, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and medieval manuscripts

It might seem at first sight that this attempt to read the collection as a unified whole is undermined by the Septuagint, because of the way the translation both splits and unites different psalms. The placing of “Alleluia” at the beginning of each psalm, sometimes borrowing it from the endings of other psalms (for example, Pss 113 and 117) actually creates a unifying feature in each psalm (and indeed links the collection with Pss 111 and 112). It is well known that the Septuagint unites Pss 114 and 115 (so that the “Alleluia” now at the

¹⁴ Cf., for example, b. Talmud Pesachim 118a.

¹⁵ Cf. ZENGER, *Composition* 1998, 77–102; HOSSFELD/ZENGER, *Psalms*, 2–7; see also MEYNET, *Psautier*.

beginning of Ps 114 counts for the whole new psalm) and splits Ps 116, placing another “Alleuia” at the start of the second “new” psalm (Ps 116:10–19, EV).¹⁶ These textual decisions are discussed in the Talmud. Medieval masoretic manuscripts typically present the end Hallelujahs ambiguously: as the final word of the psalm according to the cantillation marks, but as titles of the following psalms according to the stichography. Psalms 114 and 115 are presented as one psalm by many masoretic manuscripts (notably the codices of Aleppo and “Leningrad”) but as two by many others. The point is that in all these variations Pss 113–118 can thus be read as an intact whole, and although the breaks occur in awkward places, the narrative is still continuous.

Turning to Qumran, five scrolls are of some relevance.¹⁷ The first is 4Q96, which consists of two fragments. Frag. 1 consists of two words and two partial words from Ps 114:7f. and three words and three partial words from Ps 115:1–3. Frag. 2 is of five words and five partial words from Ps 116:3–10. It looks as if, either following or anticipating the tradition of the Septuagint, Pss 114–115 have been joined together. The variations from the MT are insignificant – just one additional vowel letter and the addition of an “and” in Ps 114.

The second example is 4Q84, where frags. 25iv–32ii contain parts of the Hallel. Frag. 25iv is of Ps 113:1; frags. 26f., of Ps 115:2f.; frag. 28i is of Ps 116:17–19; frag. 28ii–30i+31, of Ps 118:1–12; whilst frag. 30ii+32i+33+34 is of Ps 118:18–26 and frag. 32ii of Ps 118:29. It is possible to piece together frags. 28–34 as coming from a scroll containing Ps 116:17–19, then Ps 118:1–12.18–26.29. The missing two verses of Ps 117 may have originally been between Ps 116:19 and Ps 118:1. So here we have Pss 116–118 in their proto MT Hallel order. The fragments of Ps 113 and Ps 115 are also in the proto MT order; like Ps 117, Ps 114 could also have been included, given the fragmentary nature of the scroll. Other than some letter changes there is great consistency with the MT.¹⁸

The third example is 11Q5, the Great Psalms Scroll. However, this contains only two parts of Ps 118: frag. E is of Ps 118:25–29, which here come before Ps 104:1–5, and Column 16 is of Ps 118:1–29, which follows Ps 136:26 and precedes Ps 145:1–7. Psalms 118 and 136 have been brought together on account of the same refrain (“O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever”) in Ps 118:1.29 and Ps 136:1.26. No other part

¹⁶ It is interesting that Augustine, and before him Origen, split Pss 114/115 in yet another way, so that Pss 114+115:1–3 is Ps 113 (using the Greek and Latin numbering) whilst Ps 115:4–18 is Ps 114, and Ps 116 is not divided.

¹⁷ I am grateful to Danny Crowther for what follows. When working as my research assistant he produced some interesting and original work on the psalms in early Jewish tradition upon which these observations are dependant.

¹⁸ Cf. PRINSLOO, *Delimitation*, 241; FLINT, *Psalms Scrolls*, 34f., also includes 4Q87, mid-first century CE, prose format, Pss 115:15–116:3 without a break and last words of Ps 118:21 followed by Ps 104 (similar to 11Q5 below).

of the Hallel is found in the Great Psalms Scroll, so here we learn only about the independent nature of Ps 118; we learn nothing about whether the Hallel as an entire collection was displaced.

The fourth example, 11Q6, again shows that Ps 118 could be used independently, as vv. 1 and 15f. occur in frag. 3. This may again have been joined to Ps 136, but this is unclear on account of the fragmentary nature of scroll.

The fifth example, 11Q8, consists of seventeen small fragments, of which frag. 15 uses Ps 115:16–18 and Ps 116:1f., although this is only of one full word and two partial words. Although the evidence is small, it at least confirms that here again the order is again the same as in the MT.

Much of this evidence is fragmentary, but none of it contradicts the supposition that the Hallel existed as a liturgical entity by the time of the Herodian period, which is when portions of scrolls from Cave 4 might be dated.¹⁹ This is significant, given the way the DSS rearrange other (non-Hallel) psalms within Book V. This agrees with the evidence of the Septuagint. In the LXX, as we have seen, superscripts and subscripts to psalms are changed, and different psalms are often conjoined, but *the actual order* is that of the MT. There are many views on the dating of the LXX: much depends upon whether most of the approximately 120 citations of the psalms in the NT cite the LXX or not. If so, a Herodian date for an established text of the LXX is quite possible, suggesting that the Hallel as a collection was known from before the time of Christ.

Matthias Millard has shown that many medieval Hebrew manuscripts of the Hallel have very different delineations of each psalm.²⁰ He has found 74 manuscripts that combine Pss 114–115; three that combine Pss 115–116; 26 that combine Pss 116–117; 30 that combine Pss 117–118; and three that combine Pss 116–118. William Yarchin develops this further: setting aside the sequential arrangement, he too focuses on the discrete composition boundaries as found in some four hundred medieval manuscripts.²¹ In 134 cases (including *Codex Aleppensis* and *Codex Leningradensis*), Pss 114–115 are conjoined, following the early practice at Qumran. But this does not disturb the narrative schema, in that *the order stays the same*. It does not even create a problem for the early Jewish tradition that Pss 113–114 were to be recited before the Passover meal, and Pss 115–118 after it, because this tradition was likely to have been based upon the knowledge of an early manuscript tradition which did not unite these Pss 114–115. Yarchin also focuses on the use of both, the Hallel and the “Half Hallel”, recited on the first of the month and on the last six days

¹⁹ Cf. FLINT *Psalms Scrolls*, 33 (for 4QPs^a). 11QPs^a is more likely to be dated around 30–50 CE (ibid., 38–40), although his proposal is that it was a copy of an earlier similar collection, brought into Qumran, dating from the Herodian period as well (ibid., 198–201).

²⁰ Cf. MILLARD, *Komposition*, 30–32, cited in PRINSLOO 2003, 245f.

²¹ Cf. YARCHIN, *Psalms*, 779, especially n. 22.

of Passover – the latter omits Ps 115:1–11 and Ps 116:1–11. Both, Rashi and Saadia Gaon, cite this practice, noting the Hallel now comprises five psalms, not six (Pss 113; 114:1–8+115:12–18; 116:12–19; 117; 118).²² Yarchin argues that this reflects that the issue of “stabilisation” was “fluid” until 1525 when the reproduction of the Psalter was printed in Bomberg’s Second Rabbinic Bible.²³ What created Jewish fluidity, Yarchin opines, are the different liturgical practices of different Jewish communities over some 1500 years. If he is right, then what is evident in the variations of Qumran is not a case of alternative Psalters, as Wilson has argued, but a *variation of liturgical practices*, especially appropriate for a sectarian community separated from the Temple, and with a very different emphasis on priesthood and sacrifice. In brief, the variation is a liturgical one.²⁴ But even here, the Hallel comes out intact: the sequence remains the same.

3. The Narrative Structure of Pss 113–118

If Pss 113–118 are a coherent whole, how might we discern any narrative sequence throughout these psalms? I offer just four different accounts of the narrative sequence of these psalms.

First, early Jewish tradition understands the sequence becoming increasingly eschatological: the Palestinian Talmud, for example, writes of the sequence as pertaining to Israel’s beginnings (113–114), then Israel’s response to God (115), then the Messianic era (116–117), then the end of time (118).²⁵ A slightly different version of this is cited by Avrohm Feuer, following the Babylonian Talmud b Pesachim 118a, which offers the sequence as the Exodus (113), the Splitting of the Sea (114), the Revelation on Sinai (115), the Resurrection of the Dead (16) and the cataclysmic Advent of the Messiah (117–118).²⁶

Secondly, a very different approach is proposed by Michael Goulder.²⁷ He argues that the entire collection was brought together as different thanksgivings for the restoration of the people in Judah, and the liturgical occasion prompting the use of the Hallel was the Passover celebrations described in Ezra 6:9–11. Hence, the “barren woman” rejoicing in Ps 113 refers to Zion, giving birth to a renewed people after the exile (as in Isa 54:1–10); Ps 114 lies at the heart of the Passover celebrations, with the reference to Jordan apparently alluding to

²² Cf. YARCHIN Psalms, 783, noting that Ramban’s ‘Half Hallel’ also excluded Ps 117.

²³ Cf. *ibid.*, 787 with an important chart on 788.

²⁴ We will return to this issue in our conclusion, on p. xxx.

²⁵ *See y. Ber 2.44d*, referred to in PRINSLOO, *Delimitation*, 334.

²⁶ Cf. FEUER, *Translation*, 1363.

²⁷ Cf. GOULDER, *Psalms*, 159–198.

the early Passover tradition in Josh 5; Ps 115 witnesses to the part played by the Levitical singers at this ceremony in Ezra 3:10–11; Ps 116, with its reference to the “cup of libation” again alludes to a ritual emerging from this ceremony; Ps 117 again witnessed to the role of the Levitical singers in Ezra 3:11. Psalm 118 is a composition for the dedication of the Temple, where again the Levitical singers play a prominent role (v. 1.17–20) and where the “cornerstone” (v. 22) is a specific reference to the laying of the foundation of the Temple as in Zech 4:7. This is an ingenious suggestion, and this summary does grave injustice to the subtlety of Goulder’s observations.

Zenger, thirdly, proposes the narrative revolves around two key themes – monotheism (Pss 113–115) and Israel’s place among the nations (Pss 116–118). “It calls Israel and the whole earth to an exodus from service of idols and celebration of the royal rule of YHWH...”²⁸ These two themes are key parts of the Exodus tradition: Psalms 114 and 117, Zenger opines, were possibly composed to create the narrative continuity within this collection. The creation of this liturgical narrative was the work of one group within post-exilic Israel: “The obvious liturgical saturation of the composition suggests it was put together as a liturgical cantata by the Temple singers...”²⁹

Clearly my own view of the Hallel is close to Zenger’s. I offer my own expansion of his reading, psalm by psalm, assessing their contribution to the Exodus tradition within the whole unit, and looking at how each psalm integrates with its neighbours.

The theme of *Ps 113* is that God has special compassion on the poor and lowly, the vulnerable and the oppressed. The Exodus tradition, and the release of an enslaved people from Egypt, has precisely this theme at its heart. That it has been intentionally placed here is seen by its links with Ps 112, which is about the righteous being compassionate to the downtrodden. In Ps 113, the hymn is about God elevating the downtrodden and poor. Psalm 113 also has particular links with two other psalms. It has several associations with Ps 115, concerning the praise of “the name” of Yahweh (Pss 113:1–3.4 and 115:1); the phrase “heaven and earth” (Pss 113:4.6 and 115:3.15f.); the references to “praise and bless” (Pss 113:2f. and 115:17f.); and the phrase “from this time on and for evermore” (in Pss 113:2 and 115:18). In addition, the explicit critique of idols in Ps 115:2–8 is implicit in Ps 113:4–6. Psalm 113 also has associations with Ps 118, on God’s sovereignty over the nations (Pss 113:4 and 118:10–12) and the reversing of the fortunes of the lowly and rejected (Pss 113:7–9 and 118:22–24). These themes, typical of the Exodus, are found

²⁸ HOSSFELD/ZENGER, *Psalms*, 178f.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

only in these two Hallel psalms, thus stressing at the beginning and end of the collection that God is transcendent over the vicissitudes of the people.³⁰

Psalm 114 is often termed a “Passover psalm”. Its specific Exodus theme, and its lack of Hallelujah in the Hebrew, suggest it was a latecomer to this sequence. The Septuagint and tenth century masoretic traditions unite it with Ps 115, as we have seen. Nevertheless, the contents of Pss 114 and 115 are very different. Psalm 114, the only Hallel psalm which has an explicit reference to the exodus tradition, makes particular what was generally expressed in Ps 113, that the God who is on the side of the poor and oppressed is the God who parted the waters of the Red Sea and so brought his oppressed people to the possibility of freedom. Verses 1f. are a summary of Israel’s origins, linking together the early Exodus tradition of Israel in Egypt with that of Judah as God’s sanctuary (i.e. Jerusalem). Verses 3f. link together the two traditions of the crossing of the sea (from Exod 14–15) and the crossing of the river Jordan upon the entry into the land (from Josh 3f.). The personification of the mountain and hills rejoicing is typical of hymns of praise, and especially after the exile: as seen in Pss 96:11f.; 98:7f., and in Isa 42:10–12; 43:20f.; 44:23; 51:3; 55:12f.. Verses 5f. repeat vv. 3f. in question form. Verses 7f. call on the earth to join in the dance of creation, using the same exilic motif. So, this is a compressed psalm.

Psalm 115 is concerned with lifelessness of idols and the God who gives life. As we have noted, the psalm’s closest linguistic links are not with Ps 114, but Ps 113. On each side of the antiphonal liturgy in Ps 115:9–11 are didactic sections contrasting the lifelessness of idols (vv. 4–8) with God who gives life (vv. 12–15). The God who delivers (Pss 113 and 114) is the one God, and any compromise by worshipping idols is thus forbidden: the first two commands of the Decalogue are reflected here.

Psalm 116 is concerned with the fate of the dead and the life-giving cup of salvation (v. 13). This is the first Hallel psalm with a more personal appeal. Its placing in the collection has not been accidental: there are clear links with Ps 115, for example in the references to “the name of the Lord” (Pss 115:1 and 116:4.13.17) and to death and the dead (Pss 115:17 and 116:3.8.15). The interest in death and life also link the psalm to the exodus, which is itself a transition from death in Egypt to life in the Promised Land.

The two verses of *Ps 117* move from the personal concerns of Ps 116 to the more universal concerns of Israel and the nations. Verse 1 calls upon nations and peoples to praise God.³¹ Verse 2 describes God’s “steadfast love” and

³⁰ As we shall see shortly, the final Hallel psalm, Ps 118 also incorporates a number of the themes from the other psalms. We shall propose a possible ordering of the collection on this account later.

³¹ The Hebrew reads ‘the’ peoples, with a masculine ending to this feminine noun; the NRSV translation, following the Greek and Latin, is ‘you’ nations and ‘you’ peoples: this implies they are not Jews.

“faithfulness” as a gift to the present congregation (“For great is his steadfast love toward *us* ...”), as a Jewish statement of faith using words from the short creed in Exod 34:6, in the context of God’s redemption from Egypt.³² This universalism is based on the belief that the God who can destroy the hosts of Pharaoh can also use other nations, not only for judgement but also for redemption.

Psalm 118 has many different voices, and it may well have been the last psalm to have been incorporated as a conclusion to the Hallel (even after Ps 114) because of its associations with all the previous psalms and yet its links with other psalms in Book V, such as Ps 107 and Ps 136. It gathers together themes found in the rest of this collection. The theme of God’s sovereignty over the nations and reversal of those who reject him is found in Pss 113:4–6.7–9 and 118:6f.10–12.22–24. The Exodus theme in Ps 114 is found only elsewhere, albeit more implicitly, in Ps 118, which borrows from Exod 15:2 in vv. 14 and 21, with v. 16 echoing Exod 15:6.11f. The theme of trust in God, not idols, as in Ps 115:1–11, is taken up in Ps 118:6–9 (trusting in God, not man); furthermore, the abbreviated name for God as “Yah” used in Ps 115:18 is also found in vv. 5.14.17.18f. The theme of deliverance from death in Ps 116:3–9 is found in Ps 118:17–18, with the specific reference to “salvations” ((יִשׁוּעוֹת) in Ps 116:13 being taken up in Ps 118:14.21. Finally, the call on all nations to praise the Lord in Ps 117 is implied in Ps 118:1.4.29. Psalms 117 and 118, in different ways, both offer a broad vision which includes the Gentiles and a narrow perspective constraining the focus of redemption to the Jewish people alone.

This is especially evident in Ps 118 because its internal liturgy is centred not only on Exodus but also on the role of a king (or at least a religious leader). Verses 5–18 appear to be a thanksgiving prayer of a leader who was nearly overcome by his enemies but was then granted victory by God, whose “right hand” is exalted (vv. 15f.). The figure then requests to be allowed passage through the gates to the Temple (v. 19) and is given an answer from within (v. 20). He then recalls his rejection by his people (vv. 21–23) and the congregation offer thanks at his having been reconciled with them (vv. 23–25). He is then admitted to the company who bless him (vv. 26f.); his own final thanksgiving (v. 28) is concluded with the same refrain at the start of the psalm (v. 29). Whether this is recalling some early rituals concerning the king is an open question: its purpose here seems to be to offer hope for a *coming* figure as well. So, in this final psalm, the Zion traditions, originating from David, are incorporated with those of the exodus out of Egypt, originating from Moses. Psalm 118 also ends this collection by taking us back to Ps 113: the oppressed figure in that psalm becomes the vindicated figure in Ps 118.

³² These were also used in another Hallel psalm, Ps 115:1f.

We might conclude therefore that the Hallel has both an internal unity and a progressive narrative of which the escape from Egypt (to be read also as return from Babylon) is a key theme. In brief, this is what created the need for the *Haggadah*, explaining the order of the Passover *Seder* in its entirety.

4. The Liturgical use of Pss 113–118 in early Jewish Reception History

One of the key reasons for assuming that Pss 113–118 was an early liturgical collection is its repeated calls to praise (“Hallelujah”), which have already been discussed with respect to their placing and expansion in the LXX. The different beginning and ending in Ps 118 (“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good”) marks this psalm out but also brings the entire collection together, as noted above.

In addition, every single psalm offers several liturgical elements. *Psalm 113* is a well-structured hymn: vv. 1–3 calls to give praise to the name of the Lord, vv. 4–6 giving reasons for it (the nature of God) and vv. 7–9 offering further reasons (God’s deeds). *Psalm 114* appears to be a liturgical composition in four parts, as discussed above: its clear bicola give further evidence of its use in worship. Hymnic elements are also found in Ps 115:1–3.16–18, and in vv. 9–11 the thrice repeated imperative “trust in the Lord!” is suggestive of an antiphonal liturgy addressed to different parts of the congregation.³³ *Psalm 116*, despite its personal appeal, also refers to the congregation in vv. 1 and 17, and the Temple courts in v. 19. *Psalm 117* has a clear and simple hymnic form with its imperative exhortation to praise in v. 1, and the reasons for it in v. 2. As we argued above, *Psalm 118* has a large number of ritual and antiphonal elements.

One important issue related to this collection is whether its actual associations with Passover were a later liturgical addition or whether this might be an explanation for the collection as a whole. It is difficult to be as precise as Goulder who sees the Passover in Ezra 6 as the time when the Hallel was first celebrated. Nevertheless, the Passover is found in early and late cultic legislation, and although the interest in the unifying element of Passover in 2 Chr and in Ezra may be in part ideological, it is not impossible that this festival grew in importance during the Persian period. If so, the Exodus narrative within Pss 113–118 would make the Passover Festival a likely candidate. The roots of the Passover lay in its emergence as a paschal and apotropaic rite (e.g. Exod 23:14–19; 34:18–24). Its significance as a pilgrimage festival in the month of Abib – combined with the feast of unleavened bread (Deut 16:1–16)

³³ Later Jewish tradition argues that vv. 1–8 and 16–18 were sung by the Levites, and vv. 9–15 were sung antiphonally by a precentor: cf. COHEN 1945: 382.

– is also likely to be pre-exilic. It is interesting that in later priestly cultic legislation the main spring festival seems to be the longer feast of unleavened bread (Lev 23:4–8; Num 28:16–25), but the references to Passover in the Elephantine papyri suggest that by the fifth century the Passover was an important festival in the cultic calendar.³⁴ Its popularity as a family and pilgrimage festival by the Hellenistic period cannot be disputed, so Pss 113–118 could have been attached to this festival at some point during this time.

Jewish discussion concerning the use of the Hallel at Passover locates the practice to the first and second centuries CE. References are found, for example, in *Tosefta Pesachim* 10:9, where we read that the whole collection was used on Passover eve (14 Nisan) and on the first day of Passover (15 Nisan). The specific term “Egyptian Hallel” is found in *b.Ber* 56a, on account of Ps 114:1. Also in *Tosefta Pesachim* 10:6 we read how, in the school of Hillel, Pss 113–114 were recited together before the *seder* meal (and the school of Shammai only Ps 113); whilst Pss 115–118 (or Pss 114–118) were recited after it.³⁵ Since the first cup of wine accompanies the *Kiddush* and the after-meal Grace is said after the third cup, the first part of the Hallel (Pss 113–114) must be sung over the second cup, and the second part of the Hallel (Pss 115–118) over the fourth cup.³⁶ All these references assume a context before 70 CE, for they all presume that the Temple was still standing, and it was here that the Levitical singers are remembered to have sung the entire collection (*Tosefta Pesachim* 3:11).³⁷

The Hallel was particularly connected with Passover, but its liturgical importance was wider than this. So *Tosefta Sukkot* 3:2 refers to the Hallel also being used at Sukkot. *Mishnah Sukkah* 3:9 and 4:1 likewise refer to the role of the Levitical singers in Temple liturgy when the collection was sung every day during this eight-day festival. Other references claim that the Hallel was also sung on each of the eight days of Hanukkah.³⁸ In the Babylonian Talmud, *b.Arachin* 10a–10b refers to eighteen days in which the Hallel should be recited in full (the eight days of Sukkot, the eight days of Hanukkah plus the first festival day of Passover and the festival of Weeks [Shavuot]). *B.Pesachim* 115a–116b repeats this and provides an explanation of why it is not to be recited on Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur (where the theme is more of repentance than rejoicing) or Purim (in which the reading of the scroll of Esther replaces the Hallel).

³⁴ Cf. COWLEY, Papyri, Papyrus 6.

³⁵ Cf. PRINSLOO, *Delimitation*, 234.

³⁶ In contemporary Jewish tradition the Hallel is cited on Independence Day and Jerusalem Day, partly because of its associations with the birth of the Jewish people out of the waters of Egypt; yet again its links with the Exodus/Passover traditions have been preserved through the centuries.

³⁷ Cf. WILLEMS, *Psaumes*, 397–417, especially 406f.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 417.

Of course, some of these references may be nostalgic reminiscences without much connection to the actual practice; but much of this illustrates some association between the story of the Exodus as expressed in the Hallel and its performance at Passover in early Jewish tradition.

5. The Liturgical use of Pss 113–118 in later Christian Reception History

The references to the “singing of a psalm” at the Last Supper (likely to be a Passover meal, at least in Matt 26:30 and Mark 14:26) could indicate that the Hallel was also practised by Jesus and his disciples, and hence had an early connection with Christian practice in their re-enactment of the Last Supper. As late as the Reformation, in the 1542 *Genevan Psalter* John Calvin instructs that Pss 113; 116; 117 or 118 should be used in eucharistic liturgy. Nevertheless, it is clear that as early as the second century CE the Christian narrative of the psalms is very different from that in Judaism.³⁹ Several factors gave rise to this, including the evolving Christian commentary tradition on the book of Psalms, and the selective use of particular psalms in Christian liturgy. The combination of both these factors can be seen in the “prophetic” use of Pss 1; 2; 8; 22; 31; 45; 69; 72; 110 and 118, which were all read as prophecies about the coming of Christ: we see already how Ps 118 has been separated from the Hallel collection. Indeed, it was the “proof-texting” of particular verses in particular psalms which led to the growing collection of liturgical antiphons which became a way of summarising the Christian faith by means of selective psalmody. Hence the traditional Jewish narrative found in collections of psalms was overall discontinued and a new one, using not only individual psalms but individual verses from psalms, was created; and a new story was told from a new selection. It is intriguing therefore to find that, at least as early as 1545, the liturgical tradition of ‘The Watch’ at the start of the Triduum on Maundy Thursday, with its emphasis on the Last Supper, actually *does* use Pss 113–118; each psalm, however, is interspersed with a reading from John 13–17, thus creating a parallel Christian narrative which is also liturgical in context: this is, as it were, a Christian *Haggadah*, created quite clearly from the Jewish Hallel.

Two other examples of this ‘recreation’ of a story through liturgy must suffice. Each has been influenced by the use of Pss 113–118 in the Benedictine Rule. The stipulations about the continuous recitation and singing of psalmody

³⁹ Cf. GILLINGHAM, *Psalms* 2008, 40–46, on the different adaptations in psalmody up to the fifth century CE. See also GILLINGHAM, *Psalms* 2019, [Pages](#), for an example of a very different reading by Christians of the ‘narrative’ in psalmody.

at Matins and Lauds and at Vespers, cannot be overestimated.⁴⁰ In brief, Pss 1–109 (MT) are to be used at Matins and Lauds, and Pss 148–150 only at Lauds. This leaves Pss 110–147 (MT) which are to be sung throughout the week at Vespers (except for Ps 118, sung at Lauds on Sunday, and Ps 119, sung at four of the Sunday and Monday offices, and Pss 120–128, sung daily at three of the offices, and Ps 133, sung daily at Compline).⁴¹ So the portion of psalms throughout the week for monastic vespers is, on Sundays, Pss 110–113; on Mondays, Pss 114–115; 116/117; 129; on Tuesdays, Pss 130–133; on Wednesdays, Pss 135–138; on Thursdays, Pss 139(x2) ; 140; 141; on Fridays, Pss 142; 144(x2) ; 145:1–9; and on Saturdays, Pss 145:10–21; 146–147. Here we see how, even in a continuous reading of psalmody throughout the week, the Hallel psalms have been split up, with Ps 113 being used on Sundays, and Pss 114–117 on Mondays, and Ps 118 being used for Lauds with Ps 129 being included instead.

The two examples are both found in well-known musical arrangements, each tied to particular liturgical occasions. The first is the Feast of Confessors and Martyrs, which uses Vespers psalms adapted loosely from the recitation above. This adapts most of the psalms for Sunday's Vespers and just one from Monday's service: Pss 110; 111; 112; 113 and 117 (MT). Mozart's *Vesperae de Dominica*, performed in Salzburg in 1779, is one example of this.⁴² His *Solemn Vespers for a Confessor*, performed in 1780 in Salzburg, is another. *Vespers of the Holy Innocents*, composed by Johann Michael Haydn (Franz Josef's younger brother), also performed in Salzburg, probably in 1782, similarly uses these five psalms. Although this attests to a local practice in the late eighteenth century, it is a good example of a selection of psalms creating a new "narrative" from an inherited liturgical collection, as well as from familiar antiphons associated with the theme of the Feast. So Pss 110–112 are taken as a unit, Ps 110 being a reflection on the example of Christ in the context of hostility and oppression; and Ps 111 and Ps 112 – each starting with a macarism – highlight in turn the righteousness of God and human righteousness – qualities of the saints whose martyrdom reckons them as "Happy". Psalm 113, joined to Pss 112–113 through the confident "Hallelujah" at the beginning of each psalm, also appropriate on account of its theme of God's raising up the oppressed. Finally, Ps 117, like Ps 113 beginning and ending with "Hallelujah", on its theme of God being praised by all peoples, makes an appropriately confident conclusion. In this new Christian selection, the relationship between liturgy and narrative is clear.

⁴⁰ Chapters XVII and XVIII in The Rule deal especially with this: see https://www.solesmes.com/sites/default/files/upload/pdf/rule_of_st_benedict.pdf, 12–13.

⁴¹ In this sequence Pss 139; 144 and 145 are divided into two, and Pss 115 and 116 (following the Vulgate, and behind this, the Septuagint) are united to form one.

⁴² See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPOHTkX8qzU>.

A second example is the Vespers of the Blessed Virgin Mary. By the seventeenth century, eight major festivals were attributed to the Virgin Mary, of which the Nativity, Annunciation and Assumption were amongst the most important. Five psalms were sung at the Marian Vespers on the day before the Feast: typically these were Pss 110; 113; 122; 127; 147:12–20 (all MT numbering), with the addition of antiphons and hymns and closing with the Magnificat.⁴³ Tomás Luis de Victoria's *Second Vespers of the Feast of the Annunciation*, performed first in Rome sometime between 1581 and 1585 and later at Descalzas Reales after 1585 is one example of this. This is what is used in Monteverdi's *Vespro della Beata Vergine*, composed in 1610 in Mantua.⁴⁴ Similarly Orlando di Lasso's *Marian Vespers*, performed in Munich in 1653, uses these five psalms. The same psalms are used in Handel's *Carmelite Vespers*, performed first in Rome in 1707 to celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Santa Maria del Monte Santo. This is not the place to ascertain why *these* five psalms: indeed there seems to be no convincing account about their selection. The important point for our concerns is that this illustrates a very different use of the Hallel compared with Jewish tradition, whereby just one psalm is used to create a very different narrative whose story starts with the birth of Jesus (Ps 110), and the call and elevation of Mary (Ps 113), Mary as a type of Zion (Ps 122), God's blessing on family life (Ps 127) and the place of the Gentiles in God's plan (Ps 147:12–20).

This may seem to be an unnecessary detour in a paper focused on the Hallel psalms. It is in fact an important illustration of the thesis about the importance of story and liturgy in the earlier process of the shape and shaping of the book of Psalms as a whole, as the conclusion below will explain.

6. The Changing Narratives of the Hallel Psalms in Liturgy and the Implications for Contemporary Views on the Formation of the Psalter

This article has focused on the ways in which liturgical collections – especially those in the Psalms – exhibit a particular interest in telling a part of the story of Jewish or Christian “salvation”. The Hallel psalms have been an important paradigm in this respect. This narrative impact of Pss 113–118 is clearly evident in Jewish tradition where the Hallel Psalms remain an unbroken collection, despite the separating and joining up of different psalms: the recounting the escape from Egypt, remains the same. A narrative element arising out of liturgical use is also found in Christian tradition, when Pss 113–118 are used

⁴³ Common of women saints also tended to use the same five psalms, with a different hymns and antiphons.

⁴⁴ See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3aX7e1b_OY.

on Maundy Thursday but by the addition of passages from John's Gospel create a different story of salvation.

Several implications follow from this. The first concerns the ways in which the Dead Sea Scrolls re-use collections of psalms in the so-called proto-Masoretic text. Here it would seem that (like Christian practice centuries later) a different narrative is required – one more relevant to a community separated from Jerusalem and its priesthood. Unlike the Christian model, it is unclear whether this new selection creating a different narrative was actually utilised in liturgy at Qumran, although it is clear that this community had a strong sense of the liturgical use of psalmody.⁴⁵ So we need not cite, in every case, a multiple number of versions, but rather a divergence from an otherwise accepted text for the purpose of re-telling a different story through a different selection of psalms. Just as stories create liturgy, liturgy also creates its own stories, whether in early Judaism, as may be the case at Qumran, or in eighteenth century Europe, as seen the Vespers psalms, or in present day practice, as seen in the Maundy Thursday Watch.⁴⁶

The second implication takes us back to Wilson, whose influence has been paramount in the publication of this volume. It might now be seen that his criticism of the Psalter functioning as a hymnbook was in fact right, but for different reasons than he intended. It is clear to me now that the Psalter is *not* like a hymn book, because in a hymn book the collection serves as an anthology rather than having any intentional narrative: no editor of an eighteenth, nineteenth or twentieth century hymnal, for example, would put hymns together to narrate some overall story. So, Wilson is right: the Book of Psalms does not work like a modern hymnbook. The Hallel, for example, is more like what Zenger once called a "liturgical cantata".⁴⁷ As well as being subject to literary editing, liturgical interests had a significant part to play as well in the formation and reception of the Hallel, creating what might be called a "liturgical story" – whether in the proto-Masoretic Psalter, or in the variations created by communities as different as first-century Qumran or eighteenth-century Salzburg, Mantua or Rome. Hence for different reasons, I would now agree with Wilson that the modern hymnbook analogy is inappropriate when it comes to looking at the formation of the Book of Psalms.

A third implication takes us back to Zenger's *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*. In his introductory chapter to that book Zenger sought to show just how different his approach to the psalms was from that of Hermann Gunkel.⁴⁸ This was not the first time Zenger had written about this: in his 1998 article he

⁴⁵ This is not to deny the equally strong prophetic sense, or the use of psalms for didactic purposes. But cf. ARNOLD, *Social Role*, esp. 221–224. Cf. also DAVILLA, *Works*, esp. 8–12.

⁴⁶ See the earlier observations on the use of the psalms at Qumran, on pp. xxx.

⁴⁷ Cf. also HOSSFELD/ZENGER, *Psalms*, 179.

⁴⁸ Cf. ZENGER, *Composition* 2010, 17–24.


noted that the key difference was that he was looking at the psalms from their *Sitz in der Literatur*, whilst Gunkel was interested in their *Sitz im Leben*.⁴⁹ Little was said there about his distancing from the other great psalms scholar of the twentieth century, Sigmund Mowinckel, who in many ways followed in the footsteps of Gunkel (who was his teacher during his time in Giessen), although his “cult-functional” approach took Gunkel’s views a good deal further.⁵⁰ This article has demonstrated that it is also important to view the liturgical and literary views of Mowinckel in a different light. Mowinckel’s key concern was with the cultic function of *individual* psalms, primarily in the *pre-exilic* enthronement festival. Near the end of his second volume of *Psalms in Israel’s Worship* Mowinckel’s account of the formation of the Psalter does indeed view it as a literary compilation, brought together by “wise scribes”: although they used liturgical collections earlier preserved by Temple singers, according to Mowinckel “the cultic point of view appeared to be of minor importance”.⁵¹ I am advocating, by contrast, the critical role of liturgy also in the formation of the Psalter, and I have little concern with the function of *individual* psalms in any *pre-exilic* enthronement festival. Rather like Zenger, I am more interested in the narrative arrangement of *groups* of psalms, often as liturgical collections: this approach to the formation of the Psalter might be termed *Sitz in der Liturgie*, and it implies something very different from Mowinckel’s understanding of *Liturgie*. This is not to say that every psalm served a liturgical purpose, but that smaller collections in each of the five books did so (for example Pss 15–24; 42–49; 73–83; 93–100; and in Book V, not only Pss 113–118 but also Pss 120–134 and Pss 145–150) so that the overall thrust of the Psalter as a whole is as much a liturgical process as it is a literary one. I suspect that Zenger would not chastise me for advocating this, even though I have sought to highlight it more than he would have done.


The fourth implication is straightforward. More work needs to be done on these other six collections outlined in the previous paragraph. Much has already been written about the *literary* and *theological* unity and diversity of these collections; the Psalms of Ascents perhaps is the best example of this approach. But we still need to reflect further on the impact of what might now be termed “liturgical narrative” each of these other collections, and from this, to determine what such observations might indicate about the possible liturgical formation of the Psalter as a whole.

⁴⁹ Cf. ZENGER, *Composition* 1998, 99f.

⁵⁰ Cf. MOWINCKEL, *Psalms Volume One*, 1–22, on the psalms and the cult, and 23–41, on the method of cultic interpretation.

⁵¹ Cf. MOWINCKEL, *Psalms Volume Two*, chapters 21 and 22; see especially 205.

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