The Reception of the Exodus Tradition in the Psalter

Over twenty years ago I wrote a paper on the exodus tradition and Israelite psalmody.[1] This used the historical-critical method to assess the evidence for this tradition in four pairs of psalms; I still affirm much of what I wrote then. So this symposium has provided an ideal opportunity to re-visit that paper and to add to it some reflections, this time through two other methods which I now use more frequently when writing about the Psalter. The first is a literary-critical reading of the Psalter as a whole, looking at the overall shape created by each of its five books.[2] The second method takes up a reception history approach to individual psalms, showing how the afterlife of the psalm can throw light on its overall impact in Jewish and Christian tradition.[3]

So first I shall summarise in some detail my findings in that earlier paper. I shall then be able to make some observations about how a literary-critical reading of the exodus tradition within the Psalter as a whole adds a further dimension to those earlier conclusions. From this I shall be able to show how this 'psalmic exodus tradition' lives on through the centuries, especially through its reception in art and music.

1. A Historical-Critical Reading of the Exodus Tradition in the Psalter

That earlier paper was written because I was intrigued to see why the Moses/exodus tradition, which is about a wandering people deprived of land and status, protected by a deity who is always on the move with his people, could find its way into Psalter. For the Psalter, by contrast, is primarily about the traditions of David and Zion, concerned initially with an established nation and a royal state cult which ratifies its claims to land and status through a deity now 'housed' in a Temple. As I looked at the pre-exilic uses of the exodus tradition outside the Psalter—especially in Amos, Hosea and Deuteronomy—it became clear that the memory of the exodus served a refining purpose in addressing the over-comfortable aspirations of a nationalistic theology, reminding the people that election and privilege involved responsibility and obedience.[4] As I looked at the exilic and then the post-exilic uses of the exodus tradition, in texts such as Isaiah 40–55, and then in Haggai, Zechariah,

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[1] Susan E. Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition and Israelite Psalmody," *SJT* 52.1 (1999): 19–46.

[2] Relevant literature will be given at fn 14.

[3] For literature on this subject, see fn 16.

[4] See Amos 2:10–11; 3:1–2; 9:7; Hos. 2:15; 11:1; 12:9; also Deut. 6:20–24; 26:5–11.

Nehemiah, and Daniel, it became apparent the exodus tradition also served a refining purpose. In this case it was to remind the people of the relational aspect of their election, given that much of their institutional framework had been broken under Babylonian and then Assyrian domination and later under Persian rule.[5] It became clear that in all these texts, whatever their purported date, the shared concern was to encourage the people to remember that their election was dependent entirely upon the initiative of God in their history, which was greater than their own human endeavour. [6]

These observations about the exodus tradition outside the Psalter provided a framework for study of the Moses/exodus tradition in the psalms, for here too it seems to have been used to remind the people not only of their special election but also of their responsibility to God (and in places, of God's responsibility to them). In this way, the exodus tradition served to complement the David/Zion tradition, which was as much about the privilege as the responsibility of special election.

In that article I sought to create some specific criteria for assessing the evidence of the exodus tradition in psalmody. Although others might differ from my somewhat specific focus, I decided that the most important criteria were, firstly, references to the escape from Egypt, especially to the part played by Moses in this respect, and, secondly, allusions to the crossing of the Sea of Reeds.[7] In my view only eight psalms really met these criteria, and four of them occurred in pairs: Psalms 77 and 78; 80 and 81; 105 and 106; and 135 and 136. Another psalm, 114, which has some associations with the hymn in Exodus 15, comprised, in a different sense, another 'pair', and I shall refer to this later.[8]

[5] See Hag. 2:4–5; Zech. 10:10–11; Neh. 9:9–11; Dan. 9:15.

[6] See Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition.", 25-27.

[7] Reading יַם־סוּף as 'Sea of Reeds': סוּף in Exod. 2:3, 5 clearly means 'reeds'. This probably locates the Exodus at the Nile Delta.

[8] Three other scholars who have worked on the exodus tradition and psalmody have much in common with these proposals. See especially David Emanuel, *From Bards to Biblical Exegetes: A Close Reading and Intertextual Analysis of Selected Exodus Psalms* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012) (who proposes Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135 and 136, and also 66, 77, 95, 114 and possibly 23); also Georg Fischer, "Israels Auszug Aus Ägypten in Den Psalmen," in *"Canterò in Eterno Le Misericordie Del Signore" (Sal 89,2): Studi in Onore Del Prof. Gianni Barbiero in Occasione Del Suo Settantesimo Compleanno*, ed. Stefan M. Attardn and Marco Pavan (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2015), 221–33. who suggests Psalms 77, 78, 80, 81, but also 66; and finally Julien Harvey, "La Typologie de l'Exode Dans Les Psaumes.," *ScEccl* 15 (1963): 383–405., who has slightly different examples, arguing for Psalms 74, 83, 95, 105, 106, 114 for the best examples of Exodus typology.

I first examined Psalm 78. In my view this offers the most explicit combination of the Moses/Exodus and David/Zion traditions in the entire Psalter, so it is a significant psalm. The exodus tradition appears especially in verses 12–13 and 52–53:

> In the sight of their ancestors he worked marvels in the land of Egypt,
> in the fields of Zoan.
> He divided the sea and let them pass through it,
> and made the waters stand like a heap. (verses 12–13)
>
> Then he led out his people like sheep,
> and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.
> He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid;
> but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. (verses 52–53)

The phrase 'like a heap' (נֵד־מוֹ כְּ) is also used in Exod. 15:8. The verb 'guide' (from the root נָהַג) is a common word used for God's activity during the Exodus, found for example in Exod. 15:13. Similarly the expression 'like a flock' (כַּצֹּאן) also has exodus connotations, as in Pss. 77:20 and 80:1, which also use this tradition. The exodus tradition is used in Psalm 78 as negatively as it is used in the book of Amos, which in that book places the entire northern kingdom under the judgement of God. It seems that this situation is expressed in Psalm 78 as well. When we reach the end of the psalm we realise that its purpose is to denigrate Ephraim so that Judah, and with this, the David/Zion tradition, gains precedence, taking up these northern traditions for themselves:

> He rejected the tent of Joseph,
> he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim;
> but he chose the tribe of Judah,
> Mount Zion, which he loves…
> He chose his servant David, and took him from the sheepfolds…
> (verses 67, 68, 70).

The use of the exodus tradition in Psalm 78 acts as a type of charter-myth: the southern kingdom 'inherits' the exodus tradition which, from the evidence in Amos and Hosea, for example, and prior to the fall of the northern kingdom to Assyria in 721, had been the dominant tradition in the north.[9] So Psalm 78 is about the way that the northern kingdom failed to heed the voice of prophets such as Amos and Hosea; that God's judgement was the reason for its demise in 721; and that the southern kingdom now inherited this special tradition as part of their own election history—with the same sense of responsibility.

[9] See R. P. Carroll, "Psalm LXXVIII: Vestiges of a Tribal Polemic," *VT* 21.2 (1971): 133–50. here, 148-49; also John Day, "Pre-Deuteronomic Allusions To the Covenant in Hosea and Psalm LXXVIII," article, *VT* 36.1 (1986): 1–12.

Psalm 77 also utilises the Exodus tradition at the end of the psalm, in verses 19–20:

> Your way was through the sea,
> your path, through the mighty waters;
> yet your footprints were unseen.
> You led your people like a flock
> by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

This psalm, as a communal lament, is explicitly concerned with the destruction of the northern kingdom: 'Jacob' and 'Joseph' (verse 15) give us a sense of its northern pedigree. The preservation of this psalm must have been through Judah, the surviving kingdom, after 721, in the south. So 'your people' (verse 20) is no longer about the people of the north, but now refers to the Jerusalem community. Psalms 77 and 78 thus have a similar function: the exodus tradition speaks not only about privilege but responsibility, first for Israel and then for Judah.

Psalms 80 and 81, like Psalms 77 and 78, also re-use northern elements. All four psalms have the title 'Psalm of Asaph', and many of the psalms in this collection have a northern orientation. Psalm 80 is a communal lament, like Psalm 77: that it was associated even in later times with the fall of the north is evident from the additional Greek superscription, 'concerning the Assyrians' (ὑπὲρ τοῦ Ἀσσυρίου). The northern tribe of Joseph and the northern clans of Manasseh and Ephraim are explicitly referred to in verses 1 and 2. The exodus tradition is found in verse 8:

> You brought a vine out of Egypt;
> you drove out the nations and planted it.

Again, like Psalm 77, what was probably once a prayer for God's protection of the northern kingdom is now re-used, after its defeat by the Assyrians, by the southern kingdom. Verses 17–19 at the end of the psalm could be seen as applying now to the Davidic king and to the Lord of Hosts at the Jerusalem Temple:

> But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
> the one whom you made strong for yourself.
> Then we will never turn back from you;
> give us life, and we will call on your name.
> Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
> let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Psalm 81 is a judgement liturgy, and if Psalm 80 has some correspondences with Psalm 77, then Psalm 81 has some associations with Psalm 78, where the exodus tradition is also used in a negative way. Its northern elements are seen in the references to the 'God of Jacob' in verses 1 and 4, to the 'decree in Joseph' in verse 5, and the references to 'Israel' in verses 4, 5 and 11. The exodus

tradition is found especially in verse 10, which is an allusion to the preface of the Decalogue (Exod. 20:2 and Deut. 5:6).

> I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
> Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

Verse 9 has therefore been displaced, for one would normally expect it to follow, not precede, verse 10 (see Exod. 20:3 and Deut. 5:7):

> There shall be no strange god among you;
> you shall not bow down to a foreign god.

The admonition in verse 6 ('I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket') also implicitly refers to the time of slavery in Egypt. The psalm reads as a prophetic liturgy, where the 'I' speaking is not the psalmist, but God himself: this is a psalm with a clear judgement theme. It then becomes another 'charter myth' for the southern kingdom: Joseph and Jacob have been rejected, so the onus is on the community of Judah to worship and obey the God who brought his people out of Egypt. So, again, we see how the southern kingdom, after the fate of the northern kingdom in 721, is now also linked to the exodus tradition, and it bears the same responsibility as Israel should have done.

Psalm 114 is a very different psalm. Verses 1–2 are a summary of Israel's origins, linking together the exodus tradition with that of Judah as God's sanctuary (i.e. referring here to Jerusalem). Verses 3 and 4 link together the two traditions of the crossing of the sea (from Exodus 14–15) and the crossing of the river Jordan upon the entry into the land (from Joshua 3–4). The personification of the mountain and hills rejoicing is typical of hymns of praise from the exile, as seen in Psalms 96:1–12; 98:7–8, and in Isa. 42:10–12; 43:20–21; 44:23; 51:3 and 55:12-13. Verses 5–6 repeat verses 3–4 in question form. Verses 7–8 call on the earth to join in the dance of creation – another exilic motif as seen in second Isaiah (e.g. 55:12). This is a composite psalm: it uses both Israel's own traditions alongside ancient Near Eastern mythological theophany traditions, especially those of the Canaanite myth of Baal's Victory over Prince River and Judge Sea, and the combat with chaotic waters. With a compression of so many traditions, it is likely to be a later psalm from the exile, where the tradition of exodus from Egypt and the escape from a foreign land becomes a paradigm for the exile in Babylon and the hope for a similar return to the land of Judah. The clearest use of the exodus tradition is in verses 3 and 5:

> The sea looked and fled; Jordan turned back…
> Why is it, O sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back?

Psalm 114 has several links with Exodus 15:1–18. Although set in a narrative, Exodus 15 also has several hallmarks of a composite hymn: verses 1–3 signify the call to praise, and the rest of the psalm states the reasons for doing so. Verses 4–10, on the victory at the Reed Sea, makes use of the exodus tradition:

> Pharaoh's chariots and his army he cast into the sea;
> his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea.
> The floods covered them;
> they went down into the depths like a stone.
> Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power—
> your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy. (verses 4–6)

The ending of this hymn, concerning the sanctuary of God, clearly connects the exodus and Zion traditions in the same way as in Psalm 114:1–2:

> You brought them in
> and planted them on the mountain of your own possession,
> the place, O LORD, that you made your abode, the sanctuary,
> O LORD, that your hands have established… (Exod. 15:17)

> When Israel went out from Egypt,
> the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,
> Judah became God's sanctuary,
> Israel[10] his dominion. (Ps. 114:1–2)

Like Psalm 114, Exodus 15 uses mythological imagery concerning God as a divine warrior (verse 3), God's victory over the chaotic waters (verses 8–12), and his superiority over other gods (verse 11)—imagery which is again taken up in second Isaiah (for example, Isa. 51:9–10). Even though parts of this composite hymn are likely to be very early, the relevance of this for those in exile, like Psalm 114, is clear: both hymns combine the exodus tradition with the entry into the land (Exod. 15:17 and Ps. 114:1–2), thus offering hope amidst the peoples' despair in exile.

The four other psalms which each offer examples of the exodus tradition suggest a different period and a different sort of authentication. Rather than being used to address the superiority of Judah in the pre-exilic period, these psalms apply the exodus tradition to the post-exilic community in order to authenticate their election (and responsibilities for that election) at a time of living under foreign rule.

[10] In the context of the rest of the psalm, 'Israel' here is probably the exilic term for the people in exile. It is used frequently in this way in Isaiah, alongside Jacob: see Isa. 41:8; 44;1, 21; 45:4.

Psalms 105 and 106 are a pair. 1 Chronicles 16 uses the first fifteen verses of Psalm 105 and the last two verses of Psalm 106 in its account of the bringing of the Ark to the Jerusalem and the founding of the Temple. A post-exilic setting for both psalms is clear: the development of the traditions, at times in clear chronological order, is more organised than the composite traditions which made up the previous five psalms. In addition, the psalms use material from early sources in Genesis and Exodus, as well as priestly and Deuteronomic traditions—all suggesting a later date. Nothing is made of earlier tribal conflicts, nor of the David monarchy, and Pss. 106:27 and 47 allude to the experiences of the Diaspora. Psalm 105 uses the exodus traditions more positively than 106: 105:37–41 is a thanksgiving song, whilst Psalm 106 throughout uses a lament form, where the emphasis is more on divine judgement. Hence Psalm 106 the exodus tradition is used as a warning, with the aim of recovering the people's confidence in God and in their election during a period of critical uncertainty after their return to the land.[11]

In Psalm 105, the most detailed appeal to the exodus tradition is in verses 37–38, where again we see several typical exodus motifs such as 'leading forth' out of Egypt.[12]

> Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold,
> and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled.
> Egypt was glad when they departed,
> for dread of them had fallen upon it.

The use of the exodus tradition in Psalm 106 is mainly through the references to the escape through the Reed Sea. Verses 7–9 reverse any tradition of hope in election and the exodus becomes a direct form of admonishment to the people:

> Our ancestors, when they were in Egypt,
> did not consider your wonderful works;
> they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love,
> but rebelled against the Most High at the Red Sea.
> Yet he saved them for his name's sake,
> so that he might make known his mighty power.
> He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry;
> he led them through the deep as through a desert.

Verses 7–12 offer an extensive use of the exodus tradition, against a background of admonition, which leads to the confession of guilt and plea for restoration in verse 45–47:

[11] All four pairs use the exodus tradition both positively and negatively, whether as promise or as warning. Here the double use is for contrition and confession (106) and praise and worship (105).

[12] Interestingly there is no reference to Sinai in this psalm. Indeed, it rarely occurs at all throughout the Psalter, other than in Psalms 50 and 68. See Gillingham, "The Exodus Tradition." 41, fn 56.

For their sake he remembered his covenant,
and showed compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love.
He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive.
Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.

Such confessions of guilt and please for restoration are evident from the times of Haggai (chapter 2) and Zechariah (chapters 7 and 8) up to the time of Nehemiah (chapter 9). It is interesting that neither Psalm 105 nor 106 refers neither to Zion nor to David: the exodus tradition is the sole defining means of identity.

In contrast to Psalms 105–106, the pairing of Psalms 135 and 136 lacks any lament: the focus is entirely on praise of God's mercy in restoring his people through the escape from Egypt, and again it seems that the thanksgiving also refers to the restoration to the land after the exile. Psalm 135:8–9 refers to the sojourn in Egypt:

He it was who struck down the firstborn of Egypt,
both human beings and animals;
he sent signs and wonders into your midst, O Egypt,
against Pharaoh and all his servants.

The fact that the exodus reference passes on quickly to the recounting of the wilderness and settlement traditions (verse 10–12) again suggests its relevance to the post-exilic community in their hope for independence in their possession of the land. Here, unlike Psalms 105 and 106, the exodus tradition is combined with the traditions concerned with Zion and the Temple (verses 1–4, 19–21). Indeed, the psalm ends with praise of God in Zion:

Blessed be the LORD from Zion, he who resides in Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD! (verse 21)

Psalm 136:10–15, with its repeated refrain, focuses especially on the Reed Sea traditions:

who struck Egypt through their firstborn,
for his steadfast love endures forever;…
who divided the Red Sea in two,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
and made Israel pass through the midst of it,
for his steadfast love endures forever;
but overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,
for his steadfast love endures forever… (verses 10, 13–15)

The key difference from Psalm 135 is that here the exodus tradition is used alongside the Zion/Temple traditions. The psalm is actually less concerned with the status of God's people, unlike 135; its final verse offers, instead, praise to the 'God of heaven':

O give thanks to the God of heaven,
for his steadfast love endures forever. (verse 26)

The paper concluded that, although the exodus tradition is a minor theme in the Psalter as a whole, it plays an important part in shaping the identity of the Jerusalem Temple community at different stages in its history. In the first two pairs of psalms this is done by inverting the essence of the tradition itself: the exodus is no longer about God's protection of a wandering, landless people, but rather about the ratification of a settled, established community at various stages of their development. Psalms 77/78, and Psalms 80/81 appear to have used this tradition to ratify the election of the southern kingdom, after the fall of the north. In its claim to nationhood it combined the Moses/exodus tradition with the David/Zion tradition, so showing (in effect twice over) the superiority of the kingdom of Judah. Psalm 114 and Exodus 15, both apparently composite works, seem to have had a greater appeal to those in exile: the exodus tradition here is used to give the people hope in God's ability to provide 'a way through the waters' and so bring them back to the land with renewed worship at the Temple. The two other pairs of psalms (105/106 and 135/136) are most probably from the post-exilic period and together they illustrate the use of the exodus tradition in another way. These are psalms for the returned exiles, and here the exodus tradition ratifies their claims to the land and legitimates the importance of Zion and the Temple, despite the people being under Persian rule.

In that paper some twenty years ago I unashamedly suggested a dating for each of these psalms, albeit in very general terms: four psalms as pre-exilic, one psalm as exilic and the other four as post-exilic. I actually still stand by these observations, although now I would be more cautious about assuming anything further about any historical context—for example, now I would say little about any specific festival (in that article I presumed the Passover liturgy enabled much of the preservation of these psalms, from pre-exilic to post-exilic times). I would also be very cautious about saying more about the survival of the exodus tradition in the north (in that article, I presumed Gilgal was an important sanctuary in this respect).

2. A Literary-Critical Reading of the Exodus Tradition in the Psalter

Were I to revise that article today, I would say more, from a literary-critical point of view, about the placing and arrangement of these psalms within the Psalter as a whole. This symposium allows me to make such revisions. So, for example, with Psalms 77 and 78, I would now argue, more thoroughly and from a linguistic point of view, that these two psalms were intentionally paired together by the editors of this collection in the Psalter. Just as Psalm 77 ends with Moses and Aaron

leading the people 'like a flock' (verse 29), Psalm 78 ends with David as the shepherd of his people (verse 71). And just as Psalm 77:1 begins by asking God to hear, Ps. 78:1 begins by asking the people to hear instead. Just as Ps. 77:5 and 11 (Hebrew verses 6 and 12) reflect on God's mighty deeds 'of old' (מִקֶּדֶם) so in Ps. 78:2 the psalmist also speaks of these mighty deeds, also using קֶדֶם. Furthermore, we read in both psalms of the mighty waters (77:16, 19; 78:13, 16, 20) of God's 'redeeming' his people (77:15 and 78:35) who are addressed as Jacob (78:5, 21, 31, 71 and 77:15), and who in Ps. 78:52 are led 'like a flock' (כַּעֵדֶר), as in 77:20 (כַצֹּאן, despite its use of a different word).[13]

But in addition, and also using a literary-critical approach, I would argue that the placing of all these 'twinned psalms' (*Zwillingpsalmen*) at the different points in the Psalter enables us to see them highlighted, with their double emphasis, within the context of the unfolding of the story of the Psalter as a whole.

In order to support these observations, it is important to summarise briefly the so-called 'story' of the Psalter as it is understood by several scholars today.[14] ***Books One to Three (Psalms 1-41; 42-72; 73 -89)*** tell the story about the rise and fall of David.[15] This can be illustrated by reference to the first and last royal psalm in these three books. Psalm 2, heading up Book One, introduces us to the heights of God's relationship with the king, for whom God speaks, using ancient Near Eastern terminology, as a father speaks to his son ('You are my son; today I have begotten you.' Ps. 2:7). By contrast, Psalm 89, at the very end of Book Three, speaks from the depths of despair, because God has broken his promises to the king ('But now you have spurned and rejected him; you are full of

[13] The connecting of different psalms linguistically is a feature of my reception history commentary, where I argue that this intentional 'placing' marks the first stages of the psalm's reception history. I note this connection with most of the psalms, especially the pairs of psalms under discussion here. In the space allowed here I have restricted myself to a reference only to Psalms 77 and 78 in this respect.

[14] Scholars who have written on this topic include Jean Marie Auwers, *La Composition Littéraire du Psautier: Un État de la Question*, Cahiers de la Revue Biblique. 46 (Paris: Gabalda, 2000).; Peter W Flint and Patrick D Miller, *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum; v. 99 (Leiden: Brill, 2005).; J. Clinton McCann, ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*, JSOTSup; 159 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).; Klaus Seybold and Erich Zenger, eds., *Neue Wege Der Psalmenforschung: Für Walter Beyerlin*, 2nd ed., Herders Biblische Studien; 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1994).; Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, *Reading from the Beginning: The Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997).; Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, Ancient Israel and Its Literature; 20 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014).; Gerald Henry Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS; 76 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985).; and Erich Zenger, ed., *The Composition of the Book of Psalms*, BETL; 238 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010).

[15] In what follows I have adapted my own outline of the story of the Psalter from Susan E. Gillingham, "Psalms of David, Psalms of Christ," in *Rooted and Grounded: Faith Formation and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Steven Croft (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2019), 68–85.

wrath against your anointed. You have renounced the covenant with your servant; you have defiled his crown in the dust.' Ps. 89:38–39). Between these two poles of affirmation and rejection of the Davidic dynasty, Books One and Two mostly offer psalms to be read through the life of King David (seen by the plethora of headings 'a Psalm of David'). Book Three, meanwhile, includes psalms which are more concerned with the demise of the northern and southern kingdoms: Psalms 74 and 79, for example, lament the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple ('O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture? Direct your steps to the perpetual ruins; the enemy has destroyed everything in the sanctuary. Your foes have roared within your holy place; they set up their emblems there….' Ps. 74:1–3).

Book Four (Psalms 90-106) contrasts starkly with Book Three. Psalm 90 starts with the heading 'Psalm of Moses', reminding us of that covenant God made with his people which is centuries older than that made with David. Throughout Book Four, human finitude and vulnerability are repeatedly contrasted with the overriding power and constancy of God. The seventeen psalms can be divided into four sub-groups, each comprising different themes which highlight different facets of the character of God, who here is presented as Refuge, King, Defender, and Creator/Redeemer. The first three psalms (90–92) are quiet and reflective prayer; the focus is on God as Refuge, and the figure of Moses and the traditions of the Exodus and wilderness are prominent. The next eight psalms are jubilant praise (Psalms 93, 95–100), interrupted by a lament, reflecting on the judgement of God, in Psalm 94; throughout the emphasis is on God as King, both over his people and over the entire cosmos. Here too the figure of Moses and the Exodus plays an important part. The following three psalms (101–103) return to the mood of reflective prayer, with personal complaints interspersed with declarations of faith: the theme is God as Defender, and although there are some echoes of Psalms 90–92, the focus is not on Moses, but a fleeting glimpse of David as a paradigm of obedient faith. In the final collection (Psalms 104–106) the figure of Moses comes back in view: this collection starts with a psalm of praise, and the emphasis is now on God as Creator (Psalm 104) and Redeemer (105–106), with Psalm 106, closely linked to 105, concluding Book Four with its more negative use of the exodus tradition. If Book Three was a 'Book of Questions', Book Four offers some tentative answers, in four movements, twice progressing from quiet reflection to corporate praise. The conclusion is more solemn, as it was at the beginning, with a considered reflection of the peoples' inconstancy compared with the constancy of their God; in both psalms, implicitly and explicitly, the 'God of Exodus' play an important part.

In ***Book Five (Psalms 107-150)*** the story of the Psalms reaches its conclusion. It uses the themes of the other books and weaves them into an ongoing story of hope. There are two short collections of psalms headed 'Of David'. One is at the beginning (Psalms 108–110) and the other is

near the end (Psalms 138–145), and these remind us that God has not forgotten his promise made to David, despite all appearances. There are two 'Alleluia' collections, also known as 'Hallel Psalms' from the use of the term in the Hebrew: these are Psalms 113–118 and Psalms 146–150,and serve as a reminder that whatever happens to God's people, God is still their King. The first Alleluia collection returns to the theme in Book Four: that God proved his kingship by redeeming his people from slavery in Egypt. The second Alleluia collection, at the very end of the Psalter, takes up the theme of God's kingship as seen in his role as Creator of the universe. Other psalms have been included to show that God's plans for his people require some response. The long Torah Psalm, 119, reflects on the other part of the Exodus story, the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Law is not an irksome duty, but it is a gift of grace from God. Smaller psalms of instruction (111 and 112) and other psalms about God's provision for his people in the face of awful suffering (135–136 and 137) have been interwoven into this story. At the heart of Book Five is the collection of fifteen 'Songs of Ascent', Psalms 120–134. These may have been used when the people made their pilgrimage up to Jerusalem. The collection reminds the people that Zion still plays an important part in God's plans for his people, and this is where they receive God's blessing. For example, Psalm 125 reads: 'Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time on and for evermore…'.

It is now possible to see how our exodus psalms fit into this overall story. There are no such 'exodus psalms' in Books One and Two, and understandably so, given that the focus is on personal prayers seen through the life of David. Psalms 77 /78 and Psalms 80 /81 are set within Book Three. As we noted earlier, they each belong to a collection of eleven psalms headed 'of Asaph', a group whose 'family likeness' is the judgement of God on his people. As we have seen, some psalms refer to tribes and places in the northern kingdom before the fall to the Assyrians in 721BCE. So, in Book Three as a whole, with its overriding theme of God's judgement, we can now see how the four so-called 'exodus psalms' play a vital role in this story. They are a reminder that God had made another covenant with his people through Moses, and that the God who 'set his people free' from slavery in Egypt has the power to do so again as the people face not only the end of the northern kingdom, and then not only the end of Judah, but also, with the demise of the monarchy and the destruction of the Temple, their exile to a foreign land.

Psalms 105 and 106 close Book Four, a book which has many other allusions to the experience of the exile: the heading 'Psalm of Moses' over Psalm 90 allows us to see how again we might read the whole of Book Four not primarily through the covenant with David, which has ended (Psalm 89), but instead through the covenant with Moses. We saw earlier how Psalm 105 praises the God of Exodus and has confidence in what God can do for his people, whilst Psalm 106 laments the

people's constant disobedience, suggesting that the oppressive experience of the exile is what the people have deserved in their refusal to live obediently in the light of the covenant with Moses. So, Psalms 105 and 106, about God's provision for his people during the Exodus, serve overall to offer a sense of hope (105) and yet also warning (106). The hope is expressed in the word 'Alleluia!' ('Praise the Lord!') which is found, for the first time in the Psalter, at the end of Psalm 105 and the beginning and even at the end of Psalm 106. These two psalms thus play a critical part in Book Four.

Psalms 114 and 135/136 are set with Book Five. Psalm 114 belongs to the first of the two 'Alleluia' collections, thus linking it back to the word 'Alleluia' in Psalms 105 and 106; it is another important reminder that God once before redeemed his people from Egypt, leading them to the promised land. Psalm 114 reminds us of the exodus tradition expressed more generally in Book Four, not least the reference to God's victory over the sea in, for example, Psalm 98:3, 7 (see 114:3, 5).

Psalms 135–136 follow the collection of fifteen Pilgrimage Psalms, 120–134, which are mostly concerned with the presence of God in the Jerusalem Temple. So, again, within the Psalter's overall story, the introduction of the exodus tradition in Psalms 135–136 is a reminder that the Jerusalem Temple community needs also to be built upon that ancient tradition of Exodus and the figure of Moses—a tradition which is especially relevant given that the Davidic monarchy was not restored.

In this way these four pairs of psalms, as well as Psalm 114, are not just isolated psalms which independently offer some insight into the origins and purpose of the exodus tradition in the Psalter, as a historical critical reading can demonstrate. This literary-critical appraisal, seeing the significance of these psalms as part of the shaping of the Psalter as a whole, offers new insights about the composite story of the Psalter, integrating the Exodus theology with the theology of Zion and the Temple, and replacing the disappointed hopes regarding the apparent end of the Davidic monarchy.

3. A Reception History Reading of the Exodus Tradition in the Psalter

We are now in a position to assess another use of the exodus tradition in the psalms. Just as the historical-critical method is interested in the early history of psalmody, and the literary-critical interest in the Psalter is concerned with the later stages of the formation of the Psalter as a whole, a reception history approach looks at the later stages still. Reception history is about seeing the psalms throughout their entire cultural history, both Jewish and Christian, and so, in the light of our

concerns in this paper, it is about seeing how the exodus tradition functions not only in the formation and the placing of the relevant psalms, but in their later interpretation—initially through the liturgy and the commentary tradition, but later and most importantly in their representation through art and their performance through music.[16]

It is impossible to demonstrate the importance of this approach through all these nine psalms (excluding Exodus 15). What I intend to do, therefore, is to focus on Book Four of the Psalter, which as we saw above utilises most the tradition of Moses and the exodus, especially in the Hebrew text. I will highlight the later reception of the exodus tradition in just two pertinent psalms, Psalm 90 at the beginning of this book and Psalm 106 at the end of it.

We cannot understand the process of the reception history of these two psalms without understanding that Book Four is infused with exodus theology because of the need to make sense of the exile, and indeed, in Jewish reception, of experiences of ongoing exile. Book Four has many associations with Isaiah 40–55, a work which also uses the exodus tradition to address the trauma of the experience of exile. For example, Book Four begins and ends with pleas to God to 'take pity' on his people (90:13 and 106:45, using נחם);[17] the beginning and ending of Isaiah 40–55 emphasise exactly the same theme (Isa. 40:1 and 54:11, also using נחם).[18] At the beginning of each book, in Ps. 90:5 and Isa. 40:6-8, human frailty is compared with grass (חָצִיר). And in Pss. 96:1 and 98:1, as well as in Isa. 42:10, we read of the 'new song' which is to be sung to celebrate what God will later do for his people. Furthermore, the universal reign of God is defiantly declared throughout both works, for example in Ps. 96:4–5 and Isa. 40:18–23. Each denounces the worship of all idols, each playing on the Hebrew words for 'gods' (אֱלֹהִים) and 'nobodies' (אֱלִילִים) as in Ps. 96:5 and Isa. 40:17–18.[19]

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[16] See Susan E. Gillingham, *Psalms through the Centuries, Volume One*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).; Susan E. Gillingham, *Psalms through the Centuries: A Reception History Commentary on Psalms 1-72. Volume Two*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2018). and Susan E. Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries: A Reception History Commentary on Psalms 73-150. Volume Three.*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming). Much of what follows here has been adapted from the as yet unpublished third volume.

[17] 'Return O Lord! How long? *Have pity* on thy servants!' (Ps. 90:3); and ''*He caused them to be pitied* by all those who held them captive' (Ps.106:45 [Heb 47]).

[18] '*Comfort, comfort [pity, pity]* my people, says your God.' (Isa. 40:1). 'O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and *not comforted* [*='not pitied'*] …' (Isa. 54:11).

[19] See Jerome Creach, "The Shape of Book Four of the Psalter and the Shape of Second Isaiah," *JSOT* 23.80 (1998): 63–76.; Anthony Gelston, "Editorial Arrangement in Book IV of the Psalter," in *Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms: A Festschrift to Honour Professor John Emerton for His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. James Adney Emerton et al. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 165–76. Susan E. Gillingham, "Psalms 90-106: Book Four and the Covenant with David," *European Judaism* 48.2 (2015): 83–101.; Krista Mournet, "Moses and the Psalms: The Significance of Psalms 90 and 106 within Book IV of the Masoretic Psalter," *Conversations with the Biblical World* 31 (2011):

There is however one key difference: although Isaiah 40–55 is equally interested in using the exodus tradition as a means of encouraging the people (for example Isa. 43:1–5; 44:27; 51:9–11), Book Four is more explicitly interested in Moses. Moses is only mentioned once in the Psalter outside Book Four, but seven times within it.[20] The heading to Psalm 90 is thus significant in that it enables us to read the figure of Moses as not only pertaining to this psalm but to the whole of Book Four. The importance of Moses in this and in the next collection is clearly emphasised in later Jewish reception history: for example, in the *Midrash Tehillim* not only Psalm 90 is given Mosaic authorship, but also the next ten psalms, up to Psalm 100—one for each of the eleven of the tribes (Simeon is excluded on account of that tribe's disobedience as told in Numbers 25). So here Psalm 90 is for Reuben; Psalm 91, for Levi; and Psalm 92, for Judah.[21]

And so, what of the later reception of the 'Moses Psalm', Psalm 90? Its placing with Psalms 91 and 92 shows the importance of the shared motif of 'God as Refuge' (see Pss. 90:1; 91:1–2, 9–10, and 92:12-13) which, in all three psalms, contrasts the theme of human transience with God's constancy—a theme which we have already seen is very much attached to the exodus tradition. The reception of Psalm 90 utilises this theme in an extraordinary way. Firstly, it has been given a prominent liturgical use in both Jewish and Christian tradition. It is used at funerals in both traditions, and in Jewish liturgy It is also prominent in the *Shivah* service—the daily services lasting seven days at a mourner's home after the burial. It is also frequently used (along with Psalms 91, 92, 93 and 100) as 'Verses of Song' (*Pesuqe de-Zimra*) heralding the 'reception of Shabbat' (*Kabbalat Shabbat*). In Christian liturgy, this theme is developed even further: 'Man Frail and God Eternal' has been given a popular appeal in the hymn by Isaac Watts, composed in about 1719. Through this liturgical use the psalm then took on a political reading: Watts' version is frequently used at Remembrance Day services in Britain, as well as at State Funerals (for example, that of Winston Churchill) to commemorate the permanency of God over and against the futility of war and the fragility of life:

> O God, our help in ages past,
> our hope for years to come,

66–79. and Robert E. Wallace, *The Narrative Effect of Book IV of the Hebrew Psalter*, StBibLit; 112 (New York; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007).

[20] Outside Book Four Moses is referred to only in Ps. 77:21. In Book Four references are found in the title to Psalm 90 and in Pss. 99:6; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16, 23, 32.

[21] This contrasts markedly with the Davidic titles in the LXX tradition; it also explains the more Davidic/royal readings of these psalms in subsequent Christian readings because they were more dependent upon the Greek translation.

our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home.

A thousand ages, in thy sight,
are like an evening gone;
short as the watch that ends the night,
before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever rolling stream,
bears all who breathe away;
they fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.[22]

In 1921 Ralph Vaughan Williams composed 'Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge', also developing the theme of human fragility and dwelling in God's presence in this psalm. The choir (or sometimes a baritone soloist) chants the first verses, all explicitly on the brevity of life; this is followed by silence, and then the organ (or more arrestingly a single trumpet) breaks the hush with the first line of Watts' 'O God our Help in Ages Past', to its familiar tune of 'St Anne'. The two are performed in tandem until the end of the first verse of Watts' hymn, after which the psalm continues, interspersed with fugal instrumental echoes of 'St Anne', reaching a finale with the last verses, starting with 'The glorious majesty of the Lord be upon us'. This was sung by Westminster Abbey Choir at the 70th Anniversary Service of the Battle of Britain.[23]

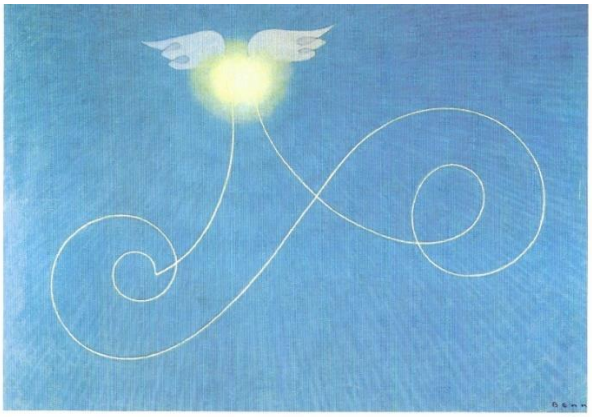
This might at first sight seem to be wide of the mark in its application of an exodus tradition. Initially Psalm 90 would have had a particular resonance within the Jewish community, whether as a reflection on their wanderings in the wilderness under Moses, or as exiles in Babylon, or as Diaspora communities from that time onwards; but then the references to the experience of human fragility, and the appeal to God as Refuge, has appealed to both Jewish and Christian migrant communities over two millennia. This has allowed it a wider reception still: it has become a universal psalm, for it teaches how an experience of human fragility can be transformed by knowing that although life is temporal, God is eternal. The following image by the Jewish artist Benn, dated 1952, to be viewed in the light of his experience in a French concentration camp during the Second World War, illustrates this well:[24] the angelic wings (perhaps signifying the wings of the cherubim) are set above the bright

[22] See https://www.ccel.org/ccel/watts/psalmshymns.Ps.191.html.

[23] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4vdOyc5Nnc.

[24] See Benn and Etienne Souriau, *Les Psaumes* (Lyon: Musée des beaux-arts, 1970).; also Roberta Lander Markus, "The Biblical Art of Benn," in *The Bible Retold by Jewish Artists, Writers, Composers and Filmmakers*, ed. Helen Leneman and Barry Walfish, Bible in the Modern World; 71 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 271–85.

light against a clear blue sky, and the light casts ever-encircling beams, emanating from and returning to their source: 'From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God'.



1952

Psaume 90-2

D'éternité en éternité, Tu es Dieu.

From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God.

What of the reception of the more specifically Exodus psalms, 105 and 106? Their reception by the Chronicler has encouraged their wider use in worship, at least in Jewish tradition. 1 Chron. 16:8–36 is recited at the beginning of *Pesuqe de-Zimra,* and so by implication so too are Psalms 105, 96 and 106:47–48, as well as other verses from Pss. 99:5, 9 and 94:1–2.

Perhaps the best-known musical reception of Psalms 105 and 106 is in Handel's *Israel in Egypt,* written in all but a month in 1738. This is the only oratorio, other than *The Messiah,* which is composed entirely from biblical texts, using choruses, airs and recitatives, but with no named characters. In Part I, the librettist, probably Charles Jennens, combined verses from Ps. 105:23–28 with parts of Exodus to describe the plagues and events leading up to the escape from Egypt, with the last two choruses using Ps. 106:9–11 (and Exod. 14:31) as God 'rebukes' the Red Sea.[25] (Part II comprises entirely the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15). So, in the first part of this oratorio, both psalms, despite their difference emphases, serve to point to a very different audience than the Jewish community after the exile that the grace of God is greater than the vicissitudes and infidelities of the people. The dire warnings in these two psalms, whether seen from the viewpoint of God's grace (Psalm 105) or human rebellion (Psalm 106), is ultimately human destruction in the context of evil. The image below, again the work of Benn illustrates this so well. The image of the boat with its mast and rigging torn and sinking is not about the chariots of Egypt but about more

[25] See Max Stern, "Exodus," in *Bible & Music: Influences of the Old Testament on Western Music* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2011), 89–100. Also https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdU8k0bpY1Y.

modern memories of the defeat of evil: and for Benn, again in the light of the Holocaust, this need to know that one day that might be an irrefutable destruction of human wickedness evil is critical for faith: 'And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left'. Psalm 106, like Psalm 90, is thus ultimately about hope.

1979

Psaume 106-11

Les eaux recouvrirent leurs persécuteurs,
pas un d'entre eux n'en réchappa.

And the waters covered their enemies :
there was not one of them left.

The Jewish and Christian reception of the exodus tradition in Psalms 90 and 105 /106, and indeed within Book Four as a whole, agrees on two issues. The first is that the experience of loss and the threats upon human fragility expressed in these psalms—originally literally the re-living the experience of the exodus in exile in Babylon, but later adapting the psalm to refer to any traumatic experience of loss—is held within the knowledge of the permanence and sovereignty of God. In Jewish reception, this usually relates to some physical experience of ongoing exile. In Christian reception, this is also sometimes physical, but more often it is associated with the ephemeral nature of humanity and the constancy of God's incarnate love for his people. The second point of agreement is about the future hope expressed in these psalms: this is not only about events in the past. In Jewish tradition, the hope is founded upon Moses and the Torah, and will one day be completed through David and the promise of a coming Messiah. In Christian reception, this is founded initially upon both Moses and David, but its final consummation is in the person and work

of Christ.[26] The trajectory of the exodus tradition in psalmody has a far broader compass than we might ever have been imagined.

[26] See Susan E. Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries: A Reception History Commentary on Psalms 73-150. Volume Three.*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, forthcoming), commentary on Psalm 106.