sciendo

Perichoresis
Volume 24. Issue 1 (2026): 22-38
DOI: 10.2478/perc-2026-0002

THE ROLE OF ORALITY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOUBLET PSALMS 14 AND 53

BRYAN ELLIFF*

ABSTRACT: The divergences between the 'twin' Psalms 14 and 53 have typically been explained either by appeal to textual corruption in transmission or to editorial redaction associated with the canonical shaping of the Psalter. In this article, however, I argue that both the text-critical and redaction-critical approaches fail to take serious account of the role of orality in the development of biblical, and especially psalmic, literature. Drawing from the work of scholars such as Susan Niditch and David Carr, while also pointing to ancient and modern examples of textual divergence due to oral performance and memory variance, I make the case that the most significant differences between Psalms 14 and 53 are likely due to these psalms' diverging development in distinct contexts of oral performance and liturgical use. I conclude with several reflections on what this inference might tell us about the development of a Psalter that contains both psalms, each with Davidic superscriptions and each given without harmonization toward the other.

KEY WORDS: Psalms, Oral Performance, Textual Pluriformity, Editing of the Psalter, Textual Criticism

Introduction

Psalms 14 and 53, being 'identical twins,' as Erhard Gerstenberger once called them, offer an instructive opportunity for parallel reading (Gerstenberger 1988: 218). Gerstenberger's comparison of the two psalms to identical twins is remarkably apt. Like human identical twins, the two psalms are so alike that they are undoubtedly derivatives of a common source. It would be easy to confuse them at a dinner party. However, the more time you spend with them, the more noticeable their distinctive character traits become. The resulting situation is ideal for empirical observation and theological reflection. Here, as is often not the case in our interactions with the Old Testament Scriptures, we are able to compare and contrast two very ancient versions of the same text. Also remarkable is the fact that the two versions belong to the same canonical collection of psalms. Put another way, we have one psalm that has now become two different psalms, yet both in one canonical Psalter, and both to be considered scripture. There is much to be said about this situation, both in regard to

* BRYAN ELLIFF (PhD 2025, University of California, Los Angeles) is a pastor at The Commons LA in Los Angeles, CA. He also serves as the director of the Augustine Center, a center for Christian study at UCLA. Email: bryanelliff@g.ucla.edu.

the literary and theological shape of the Psalter and in regard to the compositional history of the Psalms, but my focus in this study is on the second of these two issues. In particular, I wish to draw attention to the underappreciated role of orality in the development of Psalms 14 and 53.

The twin psalms 14 and 53, with their differences here marked, appear as follows in the MT. Lexical interchanges are underlined while pluses/minuses are indicated with brackets.

Psalm 53	**Psalm 14**
1 למנצח [על־מחלת משכיל] לדוד	1 למנצח [ ] לדוד
	אמר נבל בלבו אין אלהים השחיתו []
	התעיבו עלילה אין עשה־טוב
2 אמר נבל בלבו אין אלהים השחיתו [ו]	2 יהוה משמים השקיף על־בני־אדם לראות
התעיבו עול אין עשה־טוב	היש משכיל דרש את־אלהים
3 אלהים משמים השקיף על־בני אדם לראות	3 הכל סר יחדו נאלחו אין עשה־טוב אין
היש משכיל דרש את־אלהים	גם־אחד
4 כלו סג יחדו נאלחו אין עשה־טוב אין גם־	4 הלא ידעו [כל־]פעלי און אכלי עמי אכלו
אחד	לחם יהוה לא קראו
5 הלא ידעו [ ] פעלי און אכלי עמי אכלו לחם	5 שם פחדו פחד כי־אלהים בדור [צדיק]
אלהים לא קראו	
6 שם פחדו־פחד [לא־היה פחד] כי־אלהים פזר	6 עצת־עני תבישו כי יהוה מחסהו
[ ] עצמות חנך הבשתה כי־אלהים מאסם	
7 מי יתן מציון ישעות ישראל בשוב אלהים	7 מי יתן מציון ישועת ישראל בשוב יהוה
שבות עמו יגל יעקב ישמח ישראל	שבות עמו יגל יעקב ישמח ישראל

The two psalms diverge widely in their titles, with Psalm 53 reading על־מחלת משכיל against the simpler לדוד in Psalm 14. Several minor differences appear in the next few lines, including the reading עול in Psalm 53 rather than עלילה in Psalm 14 and an interchange of the phrase כלו סג with הכל סר in 14:3//53:4. The most significant vari-

ances between the two psalms emerge in 14:5–6//53:6, which, though quite different in meaning, display fascinating similarity. This section will be the primary emphasis of my analysis below. Finally, there is a relatively consistent exchange of יהוה and אהלים throughout. This feature relates to the larger question of an elohistic redaction of Psalms 42–89 (the so-called 'Elohistic Psalter') and falls outside the scope of this study (Joffe 2001; Hossfeld and Zenger 2003; Burnett 2007; Wardlaw, Jr. 2015).

Past Perspectives on the Development of Psalms 14 and 53

Scholarly opinions on the divergences of Psalms 14 and 53 divide into two major categories, the first text-critical and the second redaction-critical. The earliest modern research on these psalms was text-critical in orientation, which is to say that it tended toward explanations of the psalms' differences that appealed to copy error and textual corruption. Bernhard Duhm, somewhat dismissively in his 1899 commentary, wrote that Psalm 53 displays 'such terrible distortions of the text ... that it is almost solely useful to furnish convincing examples of the stupidity of some copyists' (Duhm 1899: 39). Charles Torrey, writing more constructively in the 1920s, believed that the two psalms represented two separate scribal attempts to make sense of a single corrupt *Vorlage* (Torrey 1927; cf. Briggs and Briggs 1906: 104). In his view, the original text, or archetype, of the psalms' most divergent section in 14:5–6//53:6 could be hypothetically reconstructed as follows.

כי יהוה הפיר עצתם ובמה עצת עני תבישו כי יהוה מחסהו

> For the Lord has confounded their counsel, and how will you shame the counsel of the poor man, since the Lord is his refuge?

This text, he argued, became corrupt in a single surviving manuscript because of a scribal omission of the *heh* on הפיר and an omission of ובמה due to the repetition of עצת on either side. Since the resulting line was unintelligible, two scribes independently attempted to regain the sense of the passage when later copying the text, one adding בדור צדיק and the other conjecturing פזר עצמות and adjusting a few other points to work out a meaningful line. Karl Budde, also in the 1920s, responded to Torrey with an alternative reconstruction of the archetype, which he also believed to have been corrupted in the process of copying (Budde 1928). Budde argued that the original was closer to Psalm 53 and preserved an ancient celebration of the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib in 701 BCE.

More recently, Emanuel Tov has also defended a text-critical approach, though without any attempt to reconstruct a hypothetical archetype or to determine which psalm is closer to the original (Tov 2012: 14–15). Tov builds his case on the idea that many of the words that interchange in the psalms display graphic similarity. For

example, he writes that עלילה and עול (14:1//53:2) are tantalizingly close, and therefore graphic interchange is likely' (Tov 2012: 15). Likewise, concerning the variants עצמות חנך הבישתה//ישועצת עני תבישו and מחסהו // מאסם, he states, '... because [the two lines] are graphically similar, one version developed from the other one' (Tov 2012: 15). Tov is less explicit as to the cause of the interchange of סר//סג and בדור//פזר except to say that they have developed from one another in the course of scribal transmission. In the case of a few small variants (the interchange of הכל//כלו in 14:3//53:4, the addition of כל in 14:4, and the addition לא היה פחד in 53:6), Tov argues for an intentional editorial explanation. In this context he acknowledges that it can be difficult to determine which differences are redactional and which are simply transmission errors.

In connection with the growing interest in the editorial shaping of the Psalter, following especially on Gerald Wilson's 1985 dissertation (see Wilson 1985; McCann 1993; deClaissé-Walford 2014; Hensley 2018; Prinsloo 2021), a number of scholars have revisited the relationship of Psalms 14 and 53 with an eye for intentional redaction. The foremost proponents of this approach, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, contend that the editors of the Psalter adapted Psalm 14 to fit a new context in the Second Davidic Psalter (Psalms 51–72) and that each difference in Psalm 53 represents an adaptation to this new setting (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005: 35–39). For example, they argue that the editors changed 'they do abominable *deed(s)* (עלילה)' to 'they do abominable *wrong* (עול)' in order to intensify it, thus making God's more severe judgment in 53:6 seem more appropriate. Similarly, Hossfeld and Zenger maintain that 'everyone is disloyal' (כלו סג) in 53:4 is 'a more nuanced and pointed assertion' than 'all have gone astray' (הכל סר) in 14:3 (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005: 38). Reflecting on the divergences of 14:5–6//53:6, they argue that each version fits its respective context in the Psalter. They point out that Psalm 14 is the final psalm of a sub-collection of petitionary 'search for refuge' psalms (cf. the root חסה in 5:12, 7:2, and 11:1). Within this collection, the statement כי אלהים מחסהו ('for God is his refuge') fits nicely. They further note that Psalms 10–14 constitute a cohesive group of 'psalms of the poor,' in which the question 'will you shame the counsel of the poor?' (14:6) makes good sense. On the other hand, they suggest that Psalm 53:6 (especially the statement, 'God has scattered the bones of those who camp against you') connects better to the military concerns of the Second Davidic Psalter. Furthermore, Psalms 52 and 54 are so closely connected thematically that they believe Psalm 53 was inserted between them in order to tie this section of psalms to the First Davidic Psalter. Hossfeld and Zenger conclude that Psalm 14 focuses on the poor as a group whereas Psalm 53 emphasizes 'the individual as a victim of evildoers and aims to give that individual the courage to resist' (Hossfeld and Zenger 2005: 39).

Phil Botha follows Hossfeld and Zenger in attempting to show the literary coherence of Psalms 52–55 and in arguing that the differences between Psalms 14 and 53 result from editorial changes made to Psalm 53 to fit its new context (Botha 2013). His particular view is that Psalms 52–55 should be read against the intertextual backdrop of David's persecution by Saul as recounted in 1 Samuel (compare Goulder 1990 and van Staalduine-Sulman 2011, who read it with different episodes in David's life). Such a connection is already made by the superscriptions of Psalm 52 and 54, but Botha argues that Psalm 53 should also be included in this literary scheme. He argues that the psalm's most divergent line from Psalm 14 (53:6) was changed by the editors in order to link lexically and thematically to the Saul-David story. Where Psalm 53 claims that Yhwh has 'rejected' (מאס) the workers of iniquity, Botha argues that this echoes Yhwh's rejection of Saul in 1 Samuel 15:23. Where Psalm 53 speaks of 'the one who encamps against you,' Botha claims that this harkens to the time when Saul 'encamped' with his troops near David (1 Samuel 26:3–5). Botha also associates the reference to 'scattering the bones' in Psalm 53 with the act of the men of Jabesh-Gilead who removed Saul's and his sons' bodies from the wall of Beth-Shan to burn them and bury their bones (1 Samuel 31:9–13). Botha's conclusion is that Psalm 53 is a psalm with wisdom themes adapted into the context of Psalms 52–55 in order to assure those Israelites who 'seek after God' that the arrogant 'fools' who oppress them will be put to shame just as Saul was rejected and overcome despite his attempts to destroy David.

Toward a More Complex Explanation: Oral-Written Development

Each of the positions that I have so far outlined contains some element of truth. It is feasible, for example, that a text-critical analysis can make sense of the change from עלילה to עול, as Tov suggests. The second *lamed* in עלילה could have been dropped because of haplography and the resulting word been construed as עולה because of a confusion of *yod* and *waw* (this reading appears in the version of Psalm 14 in 11QPs^{c}). From here, an accidental omission of *heh* is possible. Similarly, the redactional-critical approach also has much value. Especially important is the idea that the two psalms are not to be treated simply as corruptions of an earlier original or as if one is a corruption of the other. It is rather to be assumed that each psalm is distinctly meaningful in its own right and in its own literary context within the Psalter, as indeed is confirmed by the studies of Hossfeld and Zenger, Botha, and others.

However, while I am sympathetic in general to the growing interest in the Psalter's editorial shape and shaping, I wish to point out in this study that it, along with the text-critical views I have also outlined, can fall prey to anachronistic assumptions about textual production and transmission. Specifically, previous text-critical and redactional approaches to Psalms 14 and 53 do not give sufficient attention to the

place of orality in the textual culture of ancient Israel and Judah—attention that, I will argue, helps us make more sense of at least a few of the intriguing divergences between these two 'twin' psalms.

The anachronism to which I refer is perhaps most evident in the early analysis of Torrey when he builds his case that the original archetype of Psalms 14 and 53 was at some point lost except for the survival of a single corrupt manuscript. With this argument, Torrey assumes that psalms such as these had faded from performative use and cultural memory relatively early. He depicts a situation in which two scribes independently come across a single musty manuscript and say, 'I have never read or heard this before. How should I make sense of it?' Then, each of these scribes' efforts at clarification is eventually brought together into the later collection of the Psalter. As I will argue below, this scenario relies on the problematic assumption that these psalms from an early stage were being copied primarily for archival purposes divorced from the practices of religious worship and, as time went on, from the larger project of carrying forward Israel's cultural traditions via memorization.

Tov also succumbs to this anachronism in his focus on text-critical issues. We get a clue of this when he does not adequately explain the reasons for which many of the variants arose. One expects him to appeal to conventional causes of textual corruption (e.g., dittography, parablepsis, etc.), but he makes instead only a vague appeal to graphic similarity, as we have seen. And even this appeal is sometimes off the mark. For instance, observing, as he does, that מחסהו and מאסם have two identical graphemes (*mêm* and *sāmek*) does not explain why the other graphemes (*ḥêt* and *āleph* in this case) are different. In fact, when we examine this difference and others like it (e.g., *ʿayin* and *ḥêt* in עני/חנך), we discover that most are not graphically similar at all, at any stage of the script, and therefore not attributable to normal graphic interchange in scribal transmission. On the other hand—and this is a key point that I will develop below—the variations are often *phonetically* similar. This, as I will argue, points to an oral rather than written explanation for them.

Even those who argue for a redactional explanation—who have appreciably advanced the discussion by encouraging us to consider each of the twin psalms as a distinct individual contributing to its own literary context—do not sufficiently account for the possibility that meaningful textual development can occur outside of and alongside of written editing. In fact, I would suggest that the superscription of Psalm 53 hints that the proposed situation in which a scribe sat down to make written editorial changes to Psalm 14 when placing it into the context of Psalms 52–55 is not likely to explain the case fully. Here I am referring specifically to the inclusion of the instruction על מחלת in Psalm 53 and not Psalm 14. We are, of course, hard pressed to know what precisely this phrase means (in this we are in good company, since the

LXX translators also seem not to have known), but scholars have rightly proposed that this and other similar superscripted elements are instructions for liturgical use or performance (Kraus 1988: 21–32; deClaissé-Walford et al. 2014: 12). Importantly, while Wilson and others have suggested that psalm titles indicating authorship (e.g., לדוד) and genre (e.g., מזמר) were employed editorially to give shape to the Psalter, the superscriptions that seem to indicate psalm tunes or liturgical instructions do not function in this way (Hensley 2018: 48). If this is so, we have in the phrase על מחלת evidence that Psalm 53 already led a distinct liturgical life apart from Psalm 14 before being included in its present literary context. The most likely conclusion is well expressed by Gerstenberger: the two psalms 'could be variants in their own right, transmitted in different circles of liturgists' (Gerstenberger 1988: 218).

The textual anachronisms of composition and transmission that I am noting here have been persuasively challenged by Susan Niditch in her 1996 book *Oral World and Written Word*. She argues in this work that 'oral' and 'written' in ancient Israelite society existed together and interacted with one another. Biblical scholars, she maintains, have too often conceptualized biblical texts as essentially written objects that incorporate oral material from early, rural settings but that are composed, transmitted, and edited only as written texts. She critiques, for example, the underlying image in the documentary hypothesis of 'an individual like Emperor Claudius of the PBS series, having his various written sources laid out before him as he chooses this verse, or that, includes this tale not that, edits, elaborates, all in a library setting' (Niditch 1996: 113). Drawing from studies on orality in a variety of traditional cultures and examining the evidence of writing technology and variations of literacy in ancient Israel, Niditch, in contrast, encourages us to imagine the Bible as a collection of texts that fall at various points along an oral-written continuum. For Niditch, orality and writtenness are not diachronic stages in the composition of Hebrew literature but contemporaneous and entangled modes of communication and cultural preservation. She suggests, therefore, an approach to understanding biblical composition and development that recognizes the varied possibilities of oral-written interplay. Some texts may have been composed entirely in writing. Others may have been copied or built from oral works. Still others may have functioned as written aids to oral performances. And many of these, in one way or other, may have undergone development through an oral process of performance and reception (Niditch 1996: 117). Her point overall is that the texts inhabited and supported an oral world.

David Carr picks up Niditch's project in his *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, though with a more focused interest in ancient education (Carr 2009; cf. Carr 2011: 3–11). He suggests that both orality and writing were part of a larger project of preserving a culture's traditions in the minds of its people, especially its elite. After ex-

amining examples of textuality and education across the ancient Near East, Carr concludes that classic written texts served both as a teaching tool (as scribes learned to read and reproduce written texts) and as an aid for recitation (most written texts would only have been useful to those who were already familiar with them), all with the ultimate goal that the scribe would memorize the cultural traditions. Thus, long-form, enculturation texts, and the cultural heritage bound up in them, lived primarily in the mind, not in the scroll (Carr 2009: 3–14). Carr's work is particularly useful for its attention to the internal evidence for oral-written dynamics of education and enculturation within the biblical literature, especially in Proverbs, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Jeremiah (Carr 2009: 134–56).

It has long been recognized that the psalms, perhaps even more than other biblical literature, are likely to have lived a life outside of and alongside the written manuscript. While the point is debated, most scholars today recognize the validity of Sigmund Mowinckel's seminal claim that many of the psalms bear the marks of derivation and use in liturgy and oral-performative worship (Mowinckel 1962; cf. Gunkel 1967, with whom he disagreed on the idea that many psalms were spiritual imitations of earlier cultic liturgies; Bellinger, Jr. 2014). The superscriptions that contain musical directions, the processional elements of psalms like Psalm 132, the use of antiphon in psalms like Psalm 136, and the persistent presence of liturgical instruction (e.g., 'Sing to Yhwh!') all support validity of this claim. Even beyond these surface markers, Mowinckel pointed out the pervasive subtle evidences of cult-function in the psalms, such as their references to the temple and sacrifice and festival, their envisioning of the assembly of worshipers, and their inherent awareness of accompanying song and dance. Pulling from similar data, Susan Gillingham notes that even personal psalms that were not originally composed for the cult were sometimes adopted for communal use with musical accompaniment (Gillingham 2014: 202–203). The resulting picture is that many psalms either originated in, or were adapted for, communal worship in which oral performance, singing, and recitation played an important role.

In Mowinckel's perspective, the cultic origins of the psalms were largely pre-exilic and associated with the First Temple. Yet the evidence for the oral-liturgical use of the psalms also extends into the Second Temple Period. First Chronicles, for instance, attests to a pre-exilic musical liturgy initiated by David (cf. 1 Chronicles 16; 23:5, 31), but also, by implication, to an ongoing role for Levitical singers in the Second Temple. In the Hellenistic period, both the Letter of Aristeas and Ben Sira describe temple liturgies that include singing (*Ep. Aris.* 96–101; Sirach 50:18–19). The conclusion of the Qumran Psalm scroll 11QPs[a], in the section known as 'David's Compositions,' attributes 4,050 songs to David, all of which are said to be composed for performative contexts such as the *tamid* offering ritual, the Sabbath offerings, and the annual

festival days. This and other rabbinic evidence suggests that the psalms continued to be used in temple worship and religious liturgy even into the late Second Temple Period (m. Sukkah 5:4; m. Middot 2:5; m. Tamid 7:4; Josephus 1892, 20.216–18; cf. Trudinger 2004).

At some point in the Second Temple Period, alongside their place in liturgy, the Psalms also begin to inhabit an emerging role as oral-written teaching literature (Carr 2009: 153–54). As Carr reminds us, the later shape of the Psalter—with its introduction in Psalm 1, five-book division, and strategically-placed wisdom psalms—indicates that the psalms were by this time also coming to be seen as part of a larger cultural heritage to be passed on through memorization and recitation and supported by writing (Carr 2009: 153–54). Gordon Wenham has also argued that as the psalms come to be viewed more as an object of study in the Second Temple Period they were memorized and recited orally, similar to other ancient anthologies of classic texts (Wenham 2012; for a broader discussion on the use of psalms in the Second Temple Period, see Pajunen and Penner 2017). My conclusion is that psalms like Psalms 14 and 53 would have, in one way or other (and perhaps in more than one way), been developed and passed down in an entangled interplay of orality and writtenness.

When we approach the problem of Psalms 14 and 53 with a greater appreciation for the place of orality in their transmission, we are able to make sense of certain issues, particularly the problem of the divergence of 14:5–6 and 53:6. Let us observe what happens when we approach these parallel lines from a *phonetic* rather than a *graphic* perspective.

כי אלהים בדור צדיק עצת עני תבישו כי יהוה מחסהו	Psalm 14
כי אלהים פזר עצמות חנך הבשתה כי אלהים מאסם	Psalm 53

We may observe that a few phonetic sequences are exactly the same, namely the initial כי אלהים and the later כי toward the end of the line. More importantly, each of the other consonantal phonetic units *with only one exception* (the addition of צדיק) displays a close phonetic rather than graphic correspondence to its counterpart in the twin psalm.

Psalm 14	**Psalm 53**	**Phonetic Correspondence**
בדור	פזר	labial - dental - *rêš*
עצת	עצמות	*ṣādê* - *ʿayin*- *tāw* + *mêm*
עני	חנך	pharyngeal fricative - *nûn*
תבישו	הבשתה	shared phonemes *bêt*, *šîn*, *tāw*
מחסהו	מאסם	*mêm* - guttural - *sāmek*

While it is theoretically possible that such remarkably close phonetic variations could have arisen in the course of scribal copying (if, for example, the scribe were copying from dictation), the amount of sequential variations renders this explanation implausible. It is also possible that the differences were intentionally generated by a writing redactor, but this would require an unusually high level of ingenuity. I propose, rather, that the most natural explanation is that the different lines developed in the context of independent, oral use. One psalm was adopted by two different communities or in two different contexts of use and was gradually and subtly changed, yet in such a way that it retained the same sound and poetic aesthetics. If these psalms were sung, it is even possible that differing melodies influenced their diverging development. And if the psalm existed in a written versions as well, the version known and heard in a given community or oral use-context would have been viewed as standard. As Torrey pointed out, though without tracing the implications of his observation, something similar has happened with many hymns that have developed in separate Christian communities (Torrey 1927: 186–87; cf. Wardlaw, Jr. 2015: 162–63 and 113–21).

We can support this proposal by appealing to studies done on oral memory recall. In one such study, Ira Hyman and David Rubin asked university students to supply lyrics to the several Beatles songs after being given a prompt (Hyman and Rubin 1990). Their findings are significant for our purposes because they document how the students often deviated from the original song lyrics in ways that attempted to retain the song's original sound and aesthetics. As we might anticipate, this happened often when rhyming with another line was expected, but also sometimes when it was not, as in the replacement of 'Stan' for 'Dan' and 'survival' for 'revival' in the song 'Rocky Raccoon' (Hyman and Rubin 1990: 210–11).

Original lyric	**Replaced with**
'Now she and her man who called himself *Dan*'	'Now she and her man who called himself *Stan*'
'To help with good Rocky's *revival*'	'To help with good Rocky's *survival*'

Importantly, such transpositions even happened within lines and not at the end, where greater emphasis was often placed. In these instances, the students remembered that the line should sound a certain way and therefore inserted words that were phonetically approximate to the original (Hyman and Rubin 1990: 212).

Original lyric	Replaced with
'always *know* sometimes think it's *me*'	'always *though* sometimes think it's *free*'
'he come *grooving* up slowly'	'he come *moving* up slowly'
'he got *toe jam* football'	'he got *trojan* football'
'I said something *wrong* now I long for yesterday'	'I must move along but I *long* for yesterday'
'I sit and *mean*while back'	'I sit and *lean* right back'

These dynamics of change are exactly consonant with what we find in Psalms 14 and 53 (e.g., מחסהו and מאסם) showing that they fit the context of communal performance and memorization.

An enlightening ancient analogue to the phenomenon we here encounter in Psalms 14 and 53 can be found in Papyrus Amherst 63 (PA63). PA63 is an anthology of primarily religious texts written in Aramaic using Demotic script. Its date and provenance are uncertain, but the manuscript itself was produced in Egypt, probably in the 4th BCE, and it preserves an amalgam of cultural, religious, and literary traditions of a seemingly mixed group of Aramean immigrants to Egypt (van der Toorn 2018: 39; Holm 2022: 323–51). Perhaps the most striking feature of the text for biblical scholars is that it contains a hymn (col. XII 11–19) bearing unmistakable similarities with the Hebrew Psalm 20 (Vleeming and Wesselius 1982; Steiner 1983; Heckl 2014; van der Toorn 2017). These similarities pervade the text, but one line stands out as a particularly interesting illustration:

Psalm 20:3	PA63 col. XII 13-14
'May he send your help [*'zrk*] from his holy place [*mqdš*]! And from Zion [*wmṣywn*] may he help you.'	'Send your messengers [*syr'k*] from the temple of Arash/Rash [*mn 'gr 'rš*]! And from Zaphon [*wmn ṣp'n*] may Yaho (Horus?) help us.'

The two hymns are more widely divergent than Psalms 14 and 53 and are preserved for us in two languages, but they seem to preserve similar traces of oral-derived divergences occurring at earlier stages of development. In the above lines, for example, the correspondence of *ṣyr'k* and *'zrk* likely points, not to written redaction but to independent oral development (considering the historical phonetic relationship between Aramaic *ṣādê* and Hebrew *ʿayin*) similar to what we find in Psalms 14 and 53. Likewise, the later line 'some by chariots and some by horses' (Psalm 20:8) is matched in PA63 with 'some by bow and some by spear' (col. XII 16), a classic exchange of memory variants dealing here with instruments of warfare. Furthermore, the ex-

changes of the phonetically similar *mn ʾgr ʾrš* ('from the temple of Rashʾ') for *mqdš* and *wmn ṣp'n* for *wmṣywn* lend themselves easily to an explanation that involves oral performance and memorization, each variant reflecting the particular religious and ideological outlook of its liturgical community. Though scholars debate over the origins of these hymns and the precise nature of the relationship between them, most recognize that they are adaptations of a common ancestor by two separate communities. Several scholars propose, with different nuances, that the two versions represent a Judahite (Psalm 20) and northern Israelite (PA63 col. XII) adaptation of an early hymn (for a survey of options, see Zevit 1990: 215). Regardless of how we resolve this question, it seems clear that we have in Papyrus Amherst 63 and Psalm 20 further proof of the way in which psalms in ancient Israel and beyond could develop divergent characteristics in the course of oral-written transmission.

Implications

I have to this point argued that a greater acknowledgement of the role of orality alongside writtenness in the development of Israel's psalmic literature can take us further in making sense of the complex of similarities and divergences we observe in Psalms 14 and 53. Some of the divergences plausibly do arise from developmental phenomena associated with writing, such as copy error or intentional written redaction. However, other divergences, most notably the core differences between 14:5–6 and 53:6, are better explained as variations that arose in the context of memorization, oral recitation, and communal liturgical use. Here I briefly note three possible implications of this proposal.

First, the existence of two divergent psalms that display evidence of distinct oral development suggests that these two psalms may have been used or transmitted by two different communities, or at least in two different use contexts, at some point in their development. As one possible, but by no means certain, scenario, we could speculate that Psalms 14 and 53 are northern Israelite and southern Judahite adaptations of the same hymn. Scholars have long been aware of peculiarly northern features in some psalms, and Gary Rendsburg has noted that Psalm 53 may display two characteristics of northern Hebrew in contrast to Psalm 14. He notes first that the word מחלת in the title may be a northern feminine singular ending in -at and, second, that ישעות in 53:7 may be a northern feminine singular construct ending in -ôt (as opposed to ישועת in 14:7) (Rendsburg 1990: 61; see also Dahood 1968: 19). This is of course only one of several possibilities, and I hesitate to speculate more.

Second, the fact that both of these psalms appear with their divergences within the Psalter suggests that they were not stand-alone works selected or adapted discretely to be part of a larger anthology of psalms but parts of smaller collections

whose earlier integrity was valued. If we accept the proposal that several of the major divergences between the psalms are due in part to oral factors, the idea that one of the two was intentionally reproduced with adaptations to a new context during the stage of written editing becomes less likely. More likely, these psalms' co-existence in one collection is a reflex of the intention to preserve the integrity of the two subcollections (perhaps minimally the collections extending from Psalms 3–14 and 52–55, or perhaps the larger collections extending from Psalm 3–41 and 51–72) in which the two different versions appeared (on the existence of such subcollections, see deClaissé-Walford et al. 2014: 25; Hossfeld and Zenger 1993: 12–16). As support for this argument, we may also point to the several indicators of a close relationship between each of the psalms and their surrounding neighbors, as has been documented in some cases convincingly by those who offer redaction-critical approaches (see above). This is to be expected even in the case of oral development. The subcollections that have developed, perhaps in separate communities or use contexts, would naturally reflect unifying interests and theological themes, and we should presume that each version of the psalm we have been examining would be adapted, through a complex of oral-written development, to 'fit' more closely with its neighbors. In this sense, the observations of the redactional approaches are welcome and should be appreciated literarily and theologically, even if they underappreciate the role of orality in the development of the psalms.

Finally, a note on the superscription לדוד, which introduces both psalms. One benefit of a careful parallel reading of Psalms 14 and 53 such as we have done is that it invites us to reflect on the question of the Davidic titles. For many years, scholars both critical and confessional have noted the range of possible meaning for the construction לדוד, from 'by David,' to 'pertaining to David,' to 'in the tradition of David,' to 'for David,' to 'dedicated to David' (Kleer 1996; Nogalski 2002; Rendtorff 2005; Waltke 2011: 871–72; Longman III 2014: 25–26; Witt 2021). It seems clear that the majority perspective of the Jewish communities of the middle to late Second Temple Period was that David was a composer of many of the psalms, though it is less obvious whether all of those psalms with a Davidic superscription were thought to originate directly from him (see 2 Chronicles 29:30; Sirach 47:8–10; 2 Maccabees 2:13; 11QPs[a] 27:2–11). A similar perspective seems to have been shared by certain writers in the New Testament, such as the case of Peter's Davidic ascription of Psalm 16 to David in Acts 2:25–32, Jesus's riddle about the meaning of Psalm 110 in Matthew 2:42–45 (cf. Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44), and Paul's reference to David as the originator of Psalm 32 in Romans 4:6–8.

While I do not intend to fully adjudicate scholarly opinions on this data here, I do wish to make what I think to be an important observation. That observation is what-

ever we may wish to say about the ascription לדוד as an indication of composition, we can learn from Psalm 14 and 53 that לדוד could not in this case indicate authorship in the precise sense carried by modern notions of intellectual and artistic production. It is a simple fact that the two psalms are different though they have a common origin. If my reconstruction is correct, the differences have arisen because of both oral use and written transmission over time. An implication of this is that, if the Psalm did originate with David (which is probably, though not certainly, the view recommended to us by the NT), it is in either or both cases preserved somewhat differently than it was composed. What to make of this? It is possible, on the one hand, to take this as an indication of the flexibility of the לדוד title—that it may indicate a Davidic origin but need not in every case (cf. Psalm 144, which has a Davidic superscription yet distinguishes between David and the first-person voice of the psalmist). On the other hand, borrowing a category from NT studies, perhaps we might propose that these psalms offer the *ipsissima vox* of David rather than the *ipsissima verba*—both psalms substantially and authentically, but not precisely, preserving the voice of David. Did the compilers and editors of the Psalter take this view? Perhaps the fact that they continued to transmit them together without harmonizing them shows that they did.

Bibliography

Bellinger WH Jr (2014) Psalms and the Question of Genre. In Brown WP (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, 313–25. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Botha PJ (2013) Psalm 53 in Canonical Perspective. *Old Testament Essays* 26: 583–606.

Briggs CA and Briggs EG (1906) *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. 2 vols. ICC. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

Burnett JS (2007) A Plea for David and Zion: The Elohistic Psalter as Psalm Collection for the Temple's Restoration. In Burnett JS, Bellinger WH Jr and Tucker WD (eds) *Diachronic and Synchronic—Reading the Psalms in Real Time*, 95–113. London: T&T Clark International.

Carr DM (2011) *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carr DM (2009) *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dahood MJ (1968) *Psalms II: 51–100: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. Anchor Bible. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

deClaisséWalford NL, Jacobson RA and Tanner BL (2014) *The Book of Psalms*. New International Commentary of the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

deClaisséWalford NL (ed) (2014) *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press.

Duhm B (1899) *Die Psalmen erklärt von D. Bernh. Duhm*. Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament 14. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Gerstenberger ES (1988) *Psalms, Part 1, with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*. Forms of the Old Testament Literature 14. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Gillingham S (2014) The Levites and the Editorial Composition of the Psalms. In Brown WP (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, 201–13. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Goulder M (1990) *The Prayers of David: Psalms 51–72*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.

Gunkel H (1967) *The Psalms: A FormCritical Introduction*. Translated by Horner TM. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress.

Heckl R (2014) Inside the Canon and Out: The Relationship between Psalm 20 and Papyrus Amherst 63. *Semitica* 56: 359–79.

Hensley AD (2018) *Covenant Relationships and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*. London: T&T Clark.

Holm T (2022) Papyrus Amherst 63 and the Arameans of Egypt: a landscape of cultural nostalgia. In Kratz RG and Schipper BU (eds) *Elephantine in Context*, 323–51. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Hossfeld FL and Zenger E (1993) *Die Psalmen: Psalm 1–50*. Die Neue Echter Bibel 29. Würzburg: Echter.

Hossfeld FL and Zenger E (2003) The SoCalled Elohistic Psalter: A New Solution for an Old Problem. In Strawn BA and Bowen NR (eds) *God So Near*, 35–51. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns.

Hossfeld FL and Zenger E (2005) *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100*. Edited by Baltzer K, translated by Maloney LM. Hermeneia. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.

Hyman IE and Rubin DC (1990) Memorabeatlia: A Naturalistic Study of Long-Term Memory. *Memory & Cognition* 18: 205–14.

Joffe L (2001) The Elohistic Psalter: What, How, and Why? *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 15: 142–61.

Josephus F (1892) Ioudaikē archaiologia. In Niese B (ed) *Flavii Iosephi Opera*. Berlin: Wiedmann.

Kleer M (1996) *Der liebliche Sänger der Psalmen Israels*. Bodenheim: Philo.

Kraus HJ (1988) *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary*. Translated by Oswald HC. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

Longman T III (2014) *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*. TOTC. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

McCann JC (ed) (1993) *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic.

Mowinckel S (1962) *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*. 2 vols. Translated by ApThomas DR. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Niditch S (1997) *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*. London: SPCK.

Nogalski JD (2001) Reading David in the Psalter: A Study in Liturgical Hermeneutics. *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 23: 168–91.

Pajunen MS and Penner J (eds) (2017) *Functions of Psalms and Prayers in the Late Second Temple Period*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Prinsloo GTM (2021) Reading the Masoretic Psalter as a Book: Editorial Trends and Redactional Trajectories. *Currents in Biblical Research* 19: 145–77.

Rendtorff R (2005) The Psalms of David: David in the Psalms. In Flint PW and Miller PD (eds) *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, 53–64. Leiden: Brill.

Rendsburg GA (1990) *Linguistic Evidence for the Northern Origin of Selected Psalms*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press.

Steiner RC (1983) A Paganized Version of Psalm 20:2–6 from the Aramaic Text in Demotic script. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103: 261–74.

Torrey CC (1927) The Archetype of Psalms 14 and 53. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 46: 186–92.

Tov E (2012) *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. 3rd ed. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.

Trudinger PL (2004) *The Psalms of the Tamid Service: A Liturgical Text from the Second Temple*. Leiden: Brill.

van der Toorn K (2018) *Papyrus Amherst 63*. Münster: UgaritVerlag.

van der Toorn K (2017) Celebrating the New Year with the Israelites: Three Extrabiblical Psalms from Papyrus Amherst 63. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136: 633–47.

van StaalduineSulman E (2011) Where is God? Romans 3:13–18 as an Addition to Psalm 14. In Van Peursen WT and Dyk J (eds) *Tradition and Innovation in Biblical Interpretation*. Leiden: Brill.

Vayntrub J (2019) *Beyond Orality: Biblical Poetry on Its Own Terms*. London: Routledge.

Vleeming SP and Wesselius JW (1982) An Aramaic Hymn from the Fourth Century B.C. *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 39: 501–9.

Waltke BK with Yu C (2011) *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic.

Wardlaw TR Jr (2015) *Elohim within the Psalms: Petitioning the Creator to Order Chaos in OralDerived Literature*. London: T&T Clark.

Wenham GJ (2012) *Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Song Ethically*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Wilson GH (1985) *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*. SBLDS 76. Chico, CA: Scholars Press.

Witt AC (2021) *A Voice Without End: The Role of David in Psalms 3–14*. University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns.

Zevit Z (1990) The Common Origin of the Aramaicized Prayer to Horus and of Psalm 20. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110: 215–30.