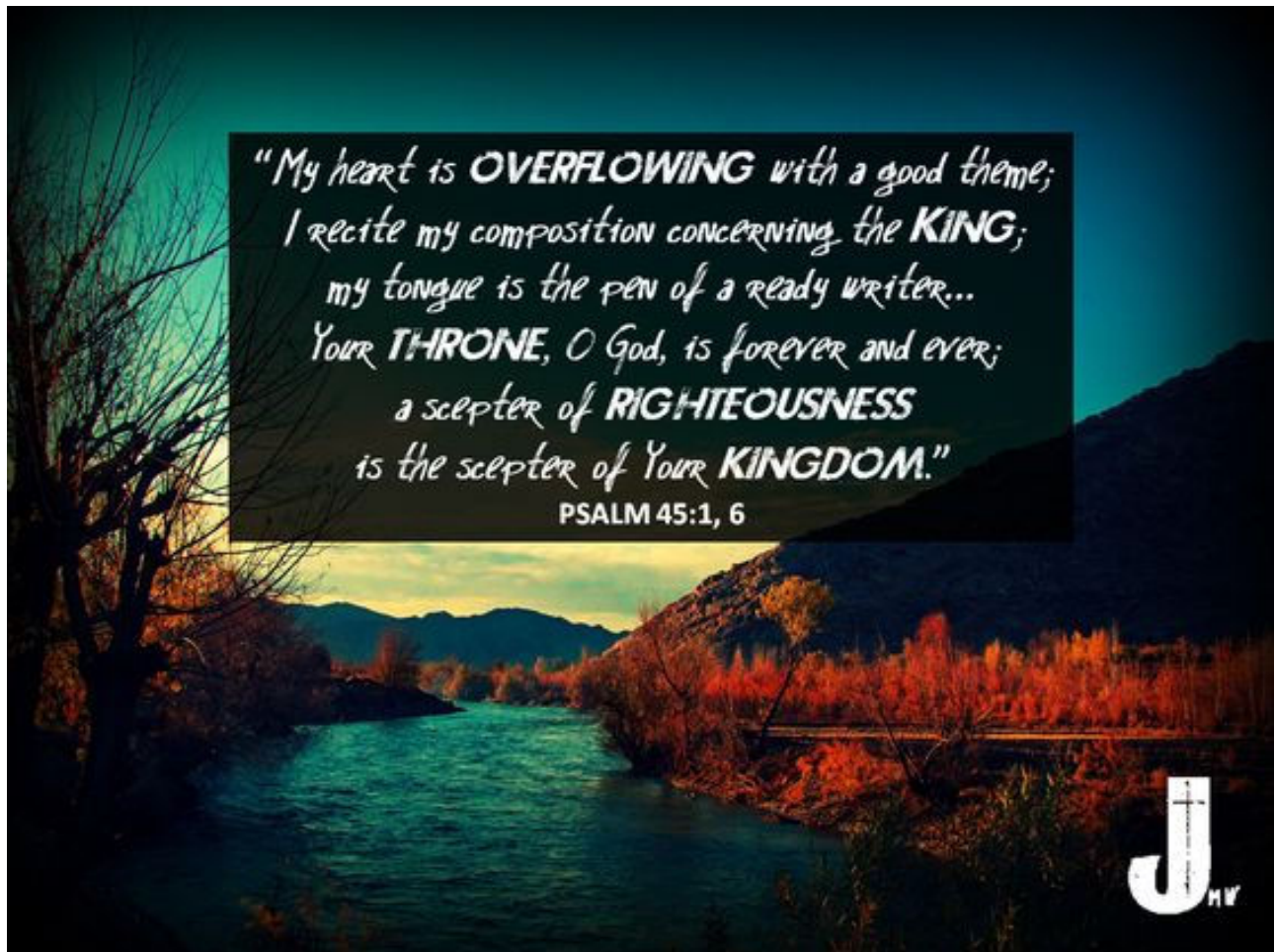


# The Skillful Scribe of Psalm 45: How Does He Sound in Translation?



(<https://za.pinterest.com/pin/528961918714954896/>)

## 0. Introduction

In this study<sup>1</sup> I survey seven characteristics of the poetic style of Psalm 45, with special reference to the ‘sound effects’ (musical phonological features) of the Hebrew original and the importance of this text’s manifold literary (artistic-rhetorical) technique in

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this remains but a partial, selective investigation. Due to space limitations, not all of the crucial text critical issues or items of stylistic interest and thematic importance have been referred to, let alone examined in sufficient detail. For additional examples of the type demonstrated in the present study (with variations), see Wendland 2013b.

communicating its essential message via translation. After an initial survey of the Hebrew text in relation to several English versions, the rendering of this psalm in chiChewa, a Bantu language of SE Africa is considered. How ‘skillful’ (מְהִיר, v. 2) does this version sound in the vernacular, and why is this an essential aspect of the translator’s task in order to ensure that the ‘good word’ (דְּבַר טוֹב) (‘beautiful song’, v. 2 – NET)<sup>2</sup> of the Bible is transmitted faithfully, as well as in a lovely and lively manner?<sup>3</sup> Suggestions will be offered to indicate how current Chewa and English versions might be improved so as to ‘stir the heart’ (רָחַשׁ לִבִּי) and the mouth (lit. ‘tongue’ לְשׁוֹן) (v. 2) of singers and listeners also today—to complement a potentially royal, messianic theme.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. Orientation—the Text

The SBL version of the difficult Hebrew text (MT) of Psalm 45 is given below in strophic sections alongside the *New English Translation* and an edited selection of the NET’s expository footnotes combined with those of the UBS *Handbook on Psalms* (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991), adapted from *Paratext* 7.5; a number of items of possible phonological (literary-poetic) significance have been highlighted in the text:

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| <p>For the music director;<sup>1</sup> according to the tune of “Lilies;”<sup>2</sup> by the Korahites, a well-written poem,<sup>3</sup> a love song.</p> <p><b>1</b> My heart is stirred by a beautiful song.<sup>4</sup></p> <p>I say, “I have composed this special song<sup>5</sup> for the king;</p> <p>my tongue is as skilled as the stylus of an experienced scribe.”<sup>6</sup></p> | <p>1 לְמִנְצַח עַל־שִׁשְׁנִים לְבִנְיָקָרַח</p> <p>מְשָׁפִיל שִׁיר יְדִידָת:</p> <p>2 רָחַשׁ לִבִּי   דְּבַר טוֹב</p> <p>אֵמַר אֲנִי מַעֲשֵׂי לְמֶלֶךְ</p> <p>לְשׁוֹנִי עֵט   סוֹפֵר מְהִיר:</p> |
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<sup>2</sup> Verse references are to the Hebrew text (MT) throughout, thus numbering one more than in English versions; for the NET material, see at: <https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Psalms+45:12>.

<sup>3</sup> When stimulated—even inspired—by the original text, translators will seek to observe its ‘rhetorical numbers [i.e., oratorical style]’, according to the early French scholar and translator Estienne Dolet, ‘that is to say, a joining and arranging of terms [in the TL] with such sweetness that not alone the soul is pleased, but also the ear is delighted...by such harmony of language’ (from ‘The Way to Translate Well’ [1540], cited in Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 2006:75).

<sup>4</sup> ‘The language of this verse [2] is so unusual that some commentators believe the poet is claiming special inspiration. Herman Gunkel even translated the verse, *Mein Herz wallt ueber von begeisterten Worte* (“My heart overflows with inspired words”)’ (Boice 1996:382).

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| <p><sup>1</sup> <i>Psalm 45</i>. This is a romantic poem celebrating the Davidic king's marriage to a lovely princess. The psalmist praises the king for his military prowess and commitment to justice, urges the bride to be loyal to the king, and anticipates that the marriage will be blessed with royal offspring. After the opening dedication (verse 1), the psalm addresses itself to the king (verses 2-9), who is praised in extravagant terms; then the poet addresses the bride (verses 10-15), after which he brings his poem to a conclusion with a final promise to the king (verses 16-17). This psalm has a minimum of semantic parallelism. Each line is a statement, and apart from verses 12-14 the second line does not emphasize the idea of the first line.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> <i>Heb</i> "according to lilies." "Lilies" may be a tune title or musical style, suggestive of romantic love. The imagery of a "lily" appears frequently in the Song of Solomon in a variety of contexts (see 2:1-2, 16; 4:5; 5:13; 6:2-3; 7:2).</p> | <p><sup>3</sup> The meaning of the Hebrew term מַשְׁכִּיל (<i>maskil</i>) is uncertain (cf. the superscription of Ps 42).</p> <p><sup>4</sup> <i>Heb</i> "[with] a good word." The "good word" probably refers here to the song that follows.</p> <p><sup>5</sup> <i>Heb</i> "my works [are] for a king." The plural "works" may here indicate degree, referring to the special musical composition that follows. "My verses" (RSV; GNT "this song") translates what is literally "my deeds" in the Masoretic text; with different vowels the Hebrew word can be read as "my deed." Most translate "my poem"; NEB has "the song I have made."</p> <p><sup>6</sup> <i>Heb</i> "my tongue [is] a stylus of a skillful scribe." Words flow from the psalmist's tongue just as they do from a scribe's stylus. The composition is dedicated to the king, and the psalmist compares himself to the pen of a ready scribe. The word translated ready means quick, skilled, expert (see its use in Ezek 7.6); scribe here means "writer."</p> |
| <p><b>2</b> You are the most handsome of all men!<sup>7</sup></p> <p>You speak in an impressive and fitting manner!<sup>8</sup></p> <p>For this reason<sup>9</sup> God grants you continual blessings.<sup>10</sup></p> <p><b>3</b> Strap your sword to your thigh, O warrior!<sup>11</sup></p> <p>Appear in your majestic splendor!<sup>12</sup></p> <p><b>4</b> Appear in your majesty and be victorious!<sup>13</sup></p> <p>Ride forth for the sake of what is right,<sup>14</sup> on behalf of justice!<sup>15</sup></p> <p>Then your right hand will accomplish mighty acts!<sup>16</sup></p> <p><b>5</b> Your arrows are sharp</p> <p>and penetrate the hearts of the king's enemies.</p> <p>Nations fall at your feet.<sup>17</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>3 יְפִיפִיתָ מִבְּנֵי אָדָם<br/>הוֹצֵק חַז בְּשִׁפְתוֹתֶיךָ<br/>עַל־כֵּן בִּרְכָךְ אֱלֹהִים לְעוֹלָם:<br/>4 תִּגְזֹר־חַרְבְּךָ עַל־יֶרֶךְ גִּבּוֹר<br/>הוֹדֵךְ וְהִדְרֶךָ:<br/>5 וְהִדְרֶךָ   צֹלַח רֶכֶב<br/>עַל־דְּבַר־אַמַּת וְעִנְיָה־צָדִיק<br/>וְתוֹרֶךָ נִוְרָאוֹת יְמִינֶךָ:<br/>6 חֲצִיךָ שְׁנוּנִים<br/>עַמִּים תַּחְתֶּיךָ יִפְּלוּ<br/>בָּלֵב אוֹיְבֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ:</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p><sup>7</sup> <i>Heb</i> "you are handsome from the sons of man." The preposition "from" is used in a comparative ("more than") sense. The peculiar verb form יְפִיפִיתָ (<i>yafyafita</i>) is probably the result of dittography of <i>yod-pe</i> and should be emended to <i>yafita</i>. See GKC 152 §55.e. It was</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p><sup>14</sup> Or "for the sake of truth."</p> <p><sup>15</sup> The precise meaning of the MT is uncertain. The form עִנְיָה (<i>'anvah</i>) occurs only here. One could emend the text to <i>'anavah vÿtsedeq</i>, "[for the sake of truth], humility, and justice"). In this case "humility" would perhaps allude to the</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

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| <p>expected that a king be handsome (see the description of Absalom in 2 Sam 14.25), and here the poet describes him in exaggerated terms as the fairest of the sons of men, that is, the most handsome man living; for sons of men see comment on “children of men” in 11.4.</p> <p><sup>8</sup> Heb “favor is poured out on your lips.” “Lips” probably stands by metonymy for the king’s speech. Some interpret the Hebrew term כֶּן (<i>khen</i>) as referring here to “gracious (i.e., kind and polite) speech”, but the word probably refers more generally to “attractive” speech that is impressively articulated and fitting for the occasion. For other instances of the term being used of speech, see Prov 22:11 and Eccl 10:12.</p> <p><sup>9</sup> Or “this demonstrates.” The construction עַל־כֵּן (<i>‘al-ken</i>, “therefore”) usually indicates what logically follows from a preceding statement. However, here it may infer the cause from the effect, indicating the underlying basis or reason for what precedes. It seems best in this context to take the Hebrew <i>‘al-ken</i> as pointing backwards, that is, that the king’s beauty and eloquence are <i>evidence of</i> God’s favor.</p> <p><sup>10</sup> Or “blesses you forever” (Briggs; see NJB and Weiser “for God has blessed you forever”). Here “bless” means to “endue with the power and skill to rule effectively,” as the following verses indicate.</p> <p><sup>11</sup> Or “mighty one.”</p> <p><sup>12</sup> The Hebrew text has simply, “your majesty and your splendor,” which probably refers to the king’s majestic splendor when he appears in full royal battle regalia. Most versions connect this line with what precedes, “in your glory and majesty” (RSV); GNT takes it as an independent statement, “you are glorious and majestic.” Note the phonological correspondences and parallels in this verse—a literary device for embellishment.</p> <p><sup>13</sup> Heb “and your majesty, be successful.” The syntax is awkward. Some scholars regard the appearance of “and your majesty” in verse 4a (immediately after “and your majesty” at the end of verse 3) as an accidental repetition; and so they connect the last words of verse 3 with the opening words of verse 4, “ride on to victory in majesty and glory.” Most versions stay with the Masoretic text.</p> | <p>king’s responsibility to “serve” his people by promoting justice (cf. NIV “in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness”). The present translation assumes an emendation to <i>ya’an</i>, “because; on account of”) which would form a suitable parallel to עַל־דְּבַר (<i>‘al-dÿvar</i>, “because; for the sake of”) in the preceding line. The <i>Psalms Handbook</i> notes this difficulty in line b, which in Hebrew is “ride on in behalf of truth and meekness (of) justice”; HOTTP prefers this and translates “for loyalty’s sake and for mild justice.” With a slight change the Hebrew can be made to mean “executing justice on behalf of the humble” or “in defense of the poor and of justice.” Some would translate the Masoretic text “for the cause of faithfulness, meekness, and right” (similarly NIV).</p> <p><sup>16</sup> Heb “and your right hand will teach you mighty acts”; or “and may your right hand teach you mighty acts.” After the imperatives in the first half of the verse, the prefixed verbal form with <i>vav</i> (ו) conjunctive likely indicates purpose (“so that your right hand might teach you mighty acts”) or result (see the present translation). The “right hand” here symbolizes the king’s military strength. His right hand will “teach” him mighty acts by performing them and thereby causing him to experience their magnificence. “Awesome deeds,” that is, deeds that strike terror in the hearts of the king’s enemies and evoke awe and respect from his allies. GNT takes the Hebrew as a statement, but it can also be construed as a wish.</p> <p><sup>17</sup> Heb “your arrows are sharp – peoples beneath you fall – in the heart of the enemies of the king.” The choppy style reflects the poet’s excitement and high emotion as he pens (or proclaims!) these words. In Hebrew the line translated “in the heart of the king’s enemies” is the last one of the verse; both RSV and GNT have joined it to the first line, for clarity of meaning. This line refers to the king in the third person, which could be mistakenly understood to be someone other than the king himself, who is addressed in the second person (Your arrows); so in this line GNT keeps the second person, “your enemies.”</p> |
| <p>6 Your throne, <sup>18</sup> O God, is permanent. <sup>19</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <p>7 בְּסֵאֵן אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |



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| <p>The scepter<sup>20</sup> of your kingdom is a scepter of justice.</p> <p>7 You love<sup>21</sup> justice and hate evil.<sup>22</sup> For this reason God, your God<sup>23</sup> has anointed you<sup>24</sup> with the oil of joy,<sup>25</sup> elevating you above your companions.<sup>26</sup></p> <p>8 All your garments are perfumed with<sup>27</sup> myrrh, aloes, and cassia. From the luxurious palaces<sup>28</sup> comes the music of stringed instruments that makes you happy.<sup>29</sup></p> <p>9 Princesses<sup>30</sup> are among your honored guests,<sup>31</sup> your bride<sup>32</sup> stands at your right hand, wearing jewelry made with gold from Ophir.<sup>33</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>שֵׁבֶט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל שֵׁבֶט מַלְכוּתָךְ:</p> <p>8 אֶהְבֵּתָ צֶדֶק וְתִשְׁנֵא רָשָׁע:</p> <p>עַל־כֵּן   מָשַׁחְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֶיךָ</p> <p>שֶׁמֶן שִׂשׂוֹן מִחֲבֵרֶיךָ:</p> <p>9 מֵרִוְאֵה לֹחַת קִצְיֹעוֹת כָּל־בְּגְדֹתֶיךָ</p> <p>מִן־הַיִּכְלִי שֶׁן מִנִּי שִׁמְחָה:</p> <p>10 בָּנוֹת מַלְכִּים בִּיקְרוֹתֶיךָ</p> <p>נִצְבָּה שִׁגְלָ לִימִינְךָ בְּכֶתֶם אוֹפִיר:</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p><sup>18</sup> The king's <i>throne</i> here symbolizes his rule.</p> <p><sup>19</sup> Or "forever and ever." <i>O God</i>. The king is clearly the addressee here, as in vv. 2-5 and 7-9. Rather than taking the statement at face value, many prefer to emend the text because the concept of deifying the earthly king is foreign to ancient Israelite thinking (cf. NEB "your throne is like God's throne, eternal"). However, it is preferable to retain the text and take this statement as another instance of the royal hyperbole that permeates the royal psalms. Because the Davidic king is God's vice-regent on earth, the psalmist addresses him as if he were God incarnate. God energizes the king for battle and accomplishes justice through him. A similar use of hyperbole appears in Isa 9:6, where the ideal Davidic king of the eschaton is given the title "Mighty God" (see the note on this phrase there). Ancient Near Eastern art and literature picture gods training kings for battle, bestowing special weapons, and intervening in battle. According to Egyptian propaganda, the Hittites described Rameses II as follows: "No man is he who is among us, It is Seth great-of-strength, Baal in person; Not deeds of man are these his doings, They are of one who is unique" (see Miriam Lichtheim, <i>Ancient Egyptian Literature</i>, 2:67). Ps 45:6 and Isa 9:6 probably envision a similar kind of response when friends and foes alike look at the Davidic king in full battle regalia. When the king's enemies oppose him on the battlefield, they are, as it were, fighting against God himself.</p> <p><sup>20</sup> The king's <i>scepter</i> symbolizes his royal authority. The psalmist praises the king's devotion to equity and righteousness, on</p> | <p>Perhaps the reference to his anointing at his coronation facilitates the transition to the description of the wedding, for the king was also anointed on this occasion.</p> <p><sup>25</sup> The phrase <i>oil of joy</i> alludes to the fact that the coronation of the king, which was ritually accomplished by anointing his head with olive oil, was a time of great celebration and renewed hope. (If one understands the anointing in conjunction with the wedding ceremony, the "joy" would be that associated with the marriage.) The phrase "oil of joy" also appears in Isa 61:3, where mourners are granted "oil of joy" in conjunction with their deliverance from oppression.</p> <p><sup>26</sup> <i>Heb</i> "from your companions." The "companions" are most naturally understood as others in the royal family or, more generally, as the king's countrymen. Verses 6-7 are quoted in Heb 1:8-9, where they are applied to Jesus. The verb "anointed" may be understood in a twofold sense; thus, the translation can be "God (has anointed you and) has chosen you (to be king) instead of any other man"; GNT translates the verse: "Therefore God has appointed you as ruler, your God has given you more honor and gladness than to all your people."</p> <p><sup>27</sup> The words "perfumed with" are supplied in the translation for clarification. The poet describes the magnificence of the royal court. The king's robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. All three are perfumes derived from vegetable substances. In languages where there are known substances for making perfume, these may be substituted for myrrh and aloes and cassia. Alternatively, the</p> |

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| <p>account of which God has made him the happiest of all kings. In verse 6 scepter is a figure of the king's power; a scepter of equity means that the king is fair and just in ruling his people. In languages where a chief's authority is symbolized in an object associated with him, such as a cane, stool, or scepter, line b can be translated using such symbols of authority; for example, "Your scepter shows that you rule your people fairly."</p> <p><sup>21</sup> To <i>love justice</i> means to actively promote it. In verse 7a the abstract qualities righteousness and wickedness stand for deeds or conduct: "righteous actions... evil actions." The expression you love righteousness and hate wickedness must be rendered by verb phrases in many languages.</p> <p><sup>22</sup> To <i>hate evil</i> means to actively oppose it.</p> <p><sup>23</sup> For other examples of the repetition of Elohim, "God," see Pss 43:4; 48:8, 14; 50:7; 51:14; 67:7. Because the name Yahweh ("Lord") is relatively rare in Pss 42-83, where the name Elohim ("God") predominates, this compounding of Elohim may be an alternative form of the compound name "the Lord my/your/our God."</p> <p><sup>24</sup> <i>Anointed you</i>. When read in the light of the preceding context, the anointing is most naturally taken as referring to the king's coronation. However, the following context (vv. 8-9) focuses on the wedding ceremony, so some prefer to see this anointing as part of the king's preparations for the wedding celebration.</p> | <p>translator must either employ the specific terms with a generic such as "substance," or use some kind of descriptive phrase; for example, "a sweet smelling liquid."</p> <p><sup>28</sup> <i>Heb</i> "the palaces of ivory." The phrase "palaces of ivory" refers to palaces that had ivory panels and furniture decorated with ivory inlays. Such decoration with ivory was characteristic of a high level of luxury. See 1 Kgs 22:39 and Amos 3:15.</p> <p><sup>29</sup> <i>Heb</i> "from the palaces of ivory stringed instrument[s] make you happy." The stringed instruments in verse 8b are not further identified (the word occurs elsewhere only in 150.4); NEB "music of strings"; NJV translates "lutes"; NJB "harps."</p> <p><sup>30</sup> <i>Heb</i> "daughters of kings."</p> <p><sup>31</sup> <i>Heb</i> "valuable ones." The form is feminine plural.</p> <p><sup>32</sup> This rare Hebrew noun apparently refers to the king's bride, who will soon be queen (see Neh 2:6). The Aramaic cognate is used of royal wives in Dan 5:2-3, 23. At your right is the place of honor (see 16.11)</p> <p><sup>33</sup> <i>Heb</i> "a consort stands at your right hand, gold of Ophir." It is not known exactly where Ophir was; southwest Arabia seems the most likely location. Its gold was the finest (see 1 Kgs 9.28; 10.11; Job 22.24; 28.16), and so GNT has translated: "and at the right of your throne stands the queen, wearing ornaments of finest gold." Note the lengthy lines in this descriptive strophe that embellishes the king's regal glory.</p> |
| <p><b>10</b> Listen, O princess! <sup>34</sup></p> <p>Observe and pay attention! <sup>35</sup></p> <p>Forget your homeland <sup>36</sup></p> <p>and your family! <sup>37</sup></p> <p><b>11</b> Then <sup>38</sup> the king will be attracted by <sup>39</sup> your beauty.</p> <p>After all, he is your master!</p> <p>Submit <sup>40</sup> to him! <sup>41</sup></p> <p><b>12</b> Rich people from Tyre <sup>42</sup></p> <p>will seek your favor by bringing a gift. <sup>43</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <p>11 שְׁמַעֲיֵבֶת<br/>וְרֹאֵי וְהִטִּי אָזְנוֹךָ<br/>וְשַׁכַּחִי עַמִּי<br/>וּבֵית אָבִיךָ:<br/>12 וְיִתְּאוּ הַמַּלְךְ יִפְיֶךָ<br/>כִּי־הוּא אֲדֹנֶיךָ<br/>וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִי־לוֹ:<br/>13 וּבִתְצֹר   בְּמִנְחָה פָּגֶיךָ<br/>יַחֲלוּ עֲשִׂירֵי עָם:</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

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| <p><sup>34</sup> <i>Heb</i> “daughter.” The Hebrew noun בַּת (“daughter”) can sometimes refer to a young woman in a general sense. Note the relatively short poetic lines in this word of admonition to the future queen—in contrast with the preceding strophe. <i>Listen, O princess</i>. The poet now addresses the bride.</p> <p><sup>35</sup> <i>Heb</i> “see and turn your ear.” The verb רָאָה (<i>ra’ah</i>, “see”) is used here of mental observation.</p> <p><sup>36</sup> <i>Heb</i> “your people.” This reference to the “people” of the princess suggests she was a foreigner. Perhaps the marriage was arranged as part of a political alliance between Israel (or Judah) and a neighboring state. The translation “your homeland” reflects such a situation. Note the end-line repetition of the 2pf pron. <i>sfx</i>, אַ, which highlights the referent being addressed.</p> <p><sup>37</sup> <i>Heb</i> “and the house of your father.” The expression “forget your people” is somewhat metaphorical, since the intention is not one of forgetting, but rather of not obeying. Therefore, in languages where forget will only be understood literally, it is better to say “don’t be commanded by your people and your relatives” or “no longer follow the advice of your....”</p> <p><sup>38</sup> “Then” might not be a good model for translation, i.e., if it suggests a temporal rather than a logical connection with the preceding verse. After the preceding imperatives, the jussive verbal form with <i>vav</i> (ו) conjunctive is best understood as introducing a purpose (“so that the king might desire your beauty”) or result clause (see the present translation and cf. also NASB). The point seems to be this: The bride might tend to be homesick, which in turn might cause her to mourn and diminish her attractiveness. She needs to overcome this temptation to unhappiness and enter into the marriage with joy. Then the king will be drawn to her natural beauty.</p> | <p><sup>39</sup> Or “desire.”</p> <p><sup>40</sup> Or “bow down.” Here too the translation should not be too literal and suggest servitude. Lines b and c are probably better rendered together, as in the NIV: “Honor him for he is your lord.”</p> <p><sup>41</sup> The poet here makes the point that the young bride is expected to bring pleasure to her new husband. Though a foreign concept to modern western culture, this was accepted as the cultural norm in the psalmist’s day.</p> <p><sup>42</sup> <i>Heb</i> “and a daughter of Tyre with a gift, your face they will appease, the rich of people.” The phrase “daughter of Tyre” occurs only here in the OT. It could be understood as addressed to the bride, indicating she was a Phoenician (cf. NEB). However, often in the OT the word “daughter,” when collocated with the name of a city or country, is used to personify the referent (see, for example, “Daughter Zion” in Ps 9:14, and “Daughter Babylon” in Ps 137:8). If that is the case here, then “Daughter Tyre” identifies the city-state of Tyre as the place from which the rich people come (cf. NRSV). The idiom “appease the face” refers to seeking one’s favor (see Exod 32:11; 1 Sam 13:12; 1 Kgs 13:6; 2 Kgs 13:4; 2 Chr 33:12; Job 11:19; Ps 119:58; Prov 19:6; Jer 26:19; Dan 9:13; Zech 7:2; 8:21–22; Mal 1:9).</p> <p><sup>43</sup> RSV translates the Hebrew phrase כְּל־כְּבוֹדָהּ in v. 13a as “all kinds of wealth” (כְּל־כְּבוֹדָהּ) and links this with v. 12. However, this expression is better understood as a description of the bride (“all glorious”), as in the GNT: “The princess is in the palace—how beautiful she is!” In any case, one must recognize that there are considerable challenges presented by the Hebrew text as it now stands, and commentators and translations vary quite widely.</p> |
| <p><b>13</b> The princess <sup>44</sup> looks absolutely magnificent, <sup>45</sup></p> <p>decked out in pearls and clothed in a brocade trimmed with gold. <sup>46</sup></p> <p><b>14</b> In embroidered robes she is escorted to the king.</p> <p>Her attendants, the maidens of honor who follow her, are led before you. <sup>47</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p>14 כָּל־כְּבוֹדָהּ בַּת־מֶלֶךְ פְּנִימָה<br/>מְשֻׁבָּצוֹת זָהָב לְבוּשָׁה:<br/>15 לְרִקְמוֹת תּוֹבֵל לְמֶלֶךְ<br/>בְּתוֹלוֹת אַחֲרֶיהָ רַעוּתֶיהָ<br/>מוֹבְאוֹת לְךָ:</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

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| <p><b>15</b> They are bubbling with joy as they walk in procession<br/>and enter the royal palace.<sup>48</sup></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>16 תּוֹבֵלְנָה בְּשִׂמְחַת וְגִיל<br/>תְּבִאֶינָה בְּהִיכַל מֶלֶךְ:</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <p><sup>44</sup> <i>Heb</i> “[the] daughter of a king.” The term princess, if translated literally as in Hebrew “daughter of the king,” will in most cases no longer refer to the bride. Therefore, in many languages one must say “the woman the king will marry.”<br/><sup>45</sup> <i>Heb</i> “[is] completely glorious.”<br/><sup>46</sup> <i>Heb</i> “within, from settings of gold, her clothing.” The Hebrew term פְּנִימָה (<i>pynimah</i>, “within”), if retained, would go with the preceding line and perhaps refer to the bride being “within” the palace or her bridal chamber (cf. NIV, NRSV). Since the next two lines refer to her attire (see also v. 9b), it is preferable to emend the form to פְּנִינִים (“pearls”) or to “her pearls.” The <i>mem</i> (מ) prefixed to “settings” is probably dittographic. Verses 13-15 describe the bridal procession into the palace; first the princess comes in. GNT’s rendering “in the palace” translates the Hebrew word “within,” which RSV takes to be rather the place where the princess was decked—“in her chamber.”</p> | <p><sup>47</sup> <i>Heb</i> “virgins after her, her companions, are led to you.” GNT and others take the Hebrew text to mean that only one group of bridesmaids follows her (her virgin companions, her escort); but some take these to be two groups, “bridesmaids” and “ladies-in-waiting” (or, less elegantly, her servants). There is no way to be certain; the Hebrew text is none too clear. In some languages her virgin companions may be rendered “the young girls who assist her,” or “the young women who escort her.”<br/>Some emend לָךְ (<i>lakh</i>, “to you”) to לה, “to her,” i.e., the princess), because the princess is now being spoken of in the third person (vv. 13-14a), rather than being addressed directly (as in vv. 10-12). However, the ambiguous suffixed form לָךְ need not be taken as second feminine singular. The suffix can be understood as a pausal second masculine singular form, addressed to the king. The translation assumes this to be the case; note that the king is addressed once more in vv. 16-17, where the second person pronouns are masculine.<br/><sup>48</sup> <i>Heb</i> “they are led with joy and happiness, they enter the house of the king.”</p> |
| <p><b>16</b> Your<sup>49</sup> sons will carry<sup>50</sup> on the dynasty of your ancestors;<sup>51</sup><br/>you will make them princes throughout the land.<br/><b>17</b> I will proclaim your greatness through the coming years,<sup>52</sup><br/>then the nations will praise you<sup>53</sup> forever.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <p>17 תַּחַת אֲבֹתֶיךָ יִהְיוּ בְּנֶיךָ תְּשִׁיתָמוּ<br/>לְשָׂרִים בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ:<br/>18 אֲזַכִּירָה שְׁמֶךָ בְּכָל־יָדָר וְדָר עַל־כֵּן<br/>עַמִּים יְהוֹדֶךָ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד:</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <p><sup>49</sup> The pronoun is second masculine singular, indicating the king is being addressed from this point to the end of the psalm.<br/><sup>50</sup> The prefixed verbal form could be taken as jussive and the statement interpreted as a prayer, “May your sons carry on the dynasty of your ancestors!” The next line could then be taken as a relative clause, “[your sons] whom you will make princes throughout the land.”<br/><sup>51</sup> <i>Heb</i> “in place of your fathers will be your sons.” The RSV translation of verse 16a is unintelligible. The Hebrew expression “instead</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <p><sup>52</sup> <i>Heb</i> “I will cause your name to be remembered in every generation and generation.” The cohortative verbal form expresses the poet’s resolve. The king’s “name” stands here for his reputation and character, which the poet praised in vv. 2-7.<br/><sup>53</sup> <i>The nations will praise you.</i> As God’s vice-regent on earth, the king is deserving of such honor and praise. In verse 17 the poet promises that he will keep the king’s name, that is, his “fame,” alive forever (see comments on “name” in 5.12). For all time people will remember the</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |



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| of your fathers shall be your sons” means that the king’s male descendants, his sons, will be kings, replacing, as it were, the king’s male ancestors (your fathers), who also had been kings. Princes were a kind of “rulers.” The title was not limited to sons of a king. | king and praise him. Obviously the poet is referring to this song that he has just composed as the way in which the king’s memory will be kept alive forever, not only in Israel but in all the world. In some languages it is not possible to refer to someone’s fame as being alive. Therefore one must often say, for example, “I will cause people to remember always what great things you did.” |
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The two English versions of Psalm 45 below provide a further, now contrastive translational orientation. In the left column, a more literal, ‘foreignized’ rendition (favoring the SL),<sup>5</sup> the *English Standard Version* (ESV) is given; on the right, a more natural, ‘domesticated’ rendering (favoring the TL), the *New Living Translation* (NLT):<sup>6</sup>

| ESV                                                                                                                                                  | NLT                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Your Throne, O God, Is Forever<br><i>To the choirmaster: according to Lilies. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah; a love song.</i>                        | <i>For the choir director: A love song to be sung to the tune “Lilies.”<br/>A psalm of the descendants of Korah.</i>                 |
| 1 My heart overflows with a pleasing theme;<br>I address my verses to the king;<br>my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.                      | 1 Beautiful words stir my heart.<br>I will recite a lovely poem about the king,<br>for my tongue is like the pen of a skillful poet. |
| 2 You are the most handsome of the sons of men;<br>grace is poured upon your lips;<br>therefore God has blessed you forever.                         | 2 You are the most handsome of all.<br>Gracious words stream from your lips.<br>God himself has blessed you forever.                 |
| 3 Gird your sword on your thigh,<br>O mighty one,<br>in your splendor and majesty!                                                                   | 3 Put on your sword, O mighty warrior!<br>You are so glorious, so majestic!                                                          |
| 4 In your majesty ride out victoriously<br>for the cause of truth<br>and meekness and righteousness;<br>let your right hand teach you awesome deeds! | 4 In your majesty, ride out to victory,<br>defending truth, humility, and justice.<br>Go forth to perform awe-inspiring deeds!       |

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<sup>5</sup> Potentially problematic (unnatural, ambiguous, unclear, etc.) expressions in this version (ESV), which has been reproduced as formatted (namely, the line breaks), are marked in boldface. Do you agree? If so, propose more naturalized English renderings. How about the signification of the *format*: how legible is the text—how readily read aloud?

<sup>6</sup> *English Standard Version* (2001), Wheaton: Crossway Bibles; *New Living Translation* (2004), Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers.

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| 5 Your arrows are sharp<br>in the heart of the king's<br>enemies;<br>the peoples fall under you.                                                               | 5 Your arrows are sharp, piercing your<br>enemies' hearts.<br>The nations fall beneath your feet.                                                 |
| 6 Your throne, O God, is forever and<br>ever.<br>The scepter of your kingdom is<br>a scepter of uprightness;                                                   | 6 Your throne, O God endures forever and<br>ever.<br>You rule with a scepter of justice.                                                          |
| 7 you have loved righteousness<br>and hated wickedness.<br>Therefore God, your God, has<br>anointed you<br>with the oil of gladness beyond<br>your companions; | 7 You love justice and hate evil.<br>Therefore God, your God, has anointed you,<br>pouring out the oil of joy on you more than on<br>anyone else. |
| 8 your robes are all fragrant with<br>myrrh and aloes and<br>cassia.<br>From ivory palaces stringed<br>instruments make you glad;                              | 8 Myrrh, aloes, and cassia perfume your robes.<br>In ivory palaces the music of strings entertains<br>you.                                        |
| 9 daughters of kings are among<br>your ladies of honor;<br>at your right hand stands the<br>queen in gold of Ophir.                                            | 9 Kings' daughters are among your noble<br>women.<br>At your right side stands the queen,<br>wearing jewelry of finest gold from Ophir!           |
| 10 Hear, O daughter, and consider,<br>and incline your ear:<br>forget your people and your<br>father's house,                                                  | 10 Listen to me, O royal daughter; take to heart<br>what I say.<br>Forget your people and your family far away.                                   |
| 11 and the king will desire your<br>beauty.<br>Since he is your lord, bow to<br>him.                                                                           | 11 For your royal husband delights in your<br>beauty;<br>honor him, for he is your lord.                                                          |
| 12 The people of Tyre will seek<br>your favor with gifts,<br>the richest of the people.                                                                        | 12 The princess of Tyre will shower you with<br>gifts.<br>The wealthy will beg your favor.                                                        |
| 13 All glorious is the princess in her<br>chamber, with robes<br>interwoven with gold. <sup>7</sup>                                                            | 13 The bride, a princess, looks glorious<br>in her golden gown.                                                                                   |
| 14 In many-colored robes she is<br>led to the king,<br>with her virgin companions<br>following behind her.                                                     | 14 In her beautiful robes, she is led to the king,<br>accompanied by her bridesmaids.                                                             |
| 15 With joy and gladness they are led                                                                                                                          | 15 What a joyful and enthusiastic procession                                                                                                      |

<sup>7</sup> In v. 14a we have a sample of the sort of *text critical issues* that challenge the translator of Psalm 45: 'Heb. "within, from settings of gold, her clothing." The Hebrew term פְּנִימָה (*nimah*, "within"), if retained, would go with the preceding line and perhaps refer to the bride being "within" the palace or her bridal chamber (cf. NIV, NRSV). Since the next two lines refer to her attire (see also v. 9), it is preferable to emend the form to פְּנִינִיָּה ("her pearls") or to פְּנִינִים ("pearls"). The *mem* (מ) prefixed to "settings" is probably dittographic' (NET text note).

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| along<br>as they enter the palace of the<br>king.                                                                              | as they enter the king's palace!                                                                                              |
| 16 In place of your fathers shall be<br>your sons;<br>you will make them princes in<br>all the earth.                          | 16 Your sons will become kings like their father.<br>You will make them rulers over many lands.                               |
| 17 I will cause your name to be<br>remembered in all<br>generations;<br>therefore nations will praise you<br>forever and ever. | 17 I will bring honor to your name in every<br>generation.<br><br>Therefore, the nations will praise you forever<br>and ever. |

## 2. Psalm 45 is “unique”

‘Nearly every study of Psalm 45 contains some variation on the statement “Psalm 45 is unique”’ (Bowen 2003:53). In fact, this psalm seems to be known more for its problematic text and extraordinary theme than for its theological insights and distinctive style.<sup>8</sup> ‘Many words and word usages are unique to this psalm’ (Bowen *ibid.*:loc. cit.; cf. Mulder 1972:113-142). As Craigie observes: ‘the text is difficult to translate and interpret at many points, and the analysis of the poetic structure is equally uncertain’ (1983:337). Its subject matter also presents a bit of a conceptual barrier. This is because ‘Psalm 45 is unique in the Psalter in that it is a royal marriage psalm’ (Day 1992:93) and ‘focuses on human beings rather than God’ (Goldingay 2007:54; cf. McCann 1996:860); ‘[i]t is also the only psalm where women occupy a central place’ (Bowen 2003:53).<sup>9</sup> With respect to overt content, its setting of normal performance would be the royal court, not the holy Temple (Broyles 1999:206). The spotlight of attention is clearly fixed upon ‘the king’ (הַמֶּלֶךְ—vv. 2, 12, MT) (Mays 1994:180), who is the primary addressee (v. 3):

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<sup>8</sup> ‘This psalm differs from all others in the canonical collection both rhetorically and stylistically. Only here do we have a poet who begins by celebrating his own art—a gesture that might well be appropriate for a court poet...’ (Alter 2007:158). For detailed text-critical notes, see Craigie 1983: 336-337).

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps as a result of the preceding compositional characteristics, it may also be that ‘Psalm is unique in that it seems to have no function of any kind in contemporary communities of faith’ (Bowen 2003:55), for example, in hymnbooks or worship liturgies.

Psalm 45, a royal psalm, is unlike any other psalm. Most psalms praise God (with God as the sentences' grammatical subject), but this one praises the king. It opens with, 'You (i.e., the king in v. [2]) are the most excellent of men,' and closes with, 'the nations will praise you (i.e., the king) for ever and ever' (Broyles 1999:206).

However, 'God' (אֱלֹהִים) is not entirely absent, being referred to explicitly twice (vv. 3, 8), and indeed, many commentators, beginning with the Targum (Whybray 1996:91), have seen an underlying, 'secondary meaning', with reference to the divinely promised Messiah running as a covert theme throughout the psalm (Craigie 1983:340; Harman 2011:365; Boice n.d.). But the main thrust of my investigation is not text-critical, exegetical, or theological in nature (as important as such studies may be, cf. Nel 1998), but rather it has a *stylistic* emphasis, with special reference to the translational transmission of Psalm 45 in a Bantu language, namely, Chewa. I will concentrate therefore on the art and craft of the translator—the person with the 'skillful stylus' (or 'eloquent voice') today—and how well s/he is able to match something of the beauty of poetic expression as well as the power of the psalmist's persuasive (indeed, 'inspired' רחש –v. 2) rhetoric in a contemporary vernacular.<sup>10</sup> As Wm. A. Smalley stated the case in an earlier age of translation:

In applying the principles of dynamic equivalence translation to poetry, I think it is essential to expand 'meaning' to be the author's overall purpose in the broadest sense. . . . Why did the original writer write in poetry? What was the original effect? . . . To the degree that there is a poem in the original, there should be a poem of nearly equivalent value in the receptor language if the other functions involved are also suitable for verse form in the receptor language (1974:359, 366).

Among the seven stylistic features identified for discussion, I will pay particular attention to the psalm's *phonic* component because: (a) this is such an essential aspect of poetry in

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<sup>10</sup> The exquisite quality of this composition may also be suggested by its apparent emic genre—a *maskil* (מִשְׁכִּיל): 'The word is derived from a verb meaning "to be prudent; to be wise." Various options are: "a contemplative song," "a song imparting moral wisdom," or "a skillful [i.e., well-written] song' (NET text note; cf. LXX εἰς σύνεσιν). The technical term *maskil* suggests 'presenting songs and poems in a skilled, intelligent, and artistic way'—cf. 2 Chr. 30:22 (Kraus 1993:25).



any language; (b) this auditory element is so often neglected in translations, past and present; and (c) more specifically, sound is also a vital facet of the Hebrew text of Psalm 45, both in its original form and, ideally, also during its subsequent dynamic oral-aural transmission in another language.<sup>11</sup>

To be sure, the challenge of rendering literary poetry within the framework of a completely different sound system is indeed great. As a practicing translator of modern Hebrew observes: ‘Poetic music — the untranslatable sound of a poem that carries and conveys so much of the poem’s meaning and essence — is fleeting and changing’ (Rachel Tzvia Back 2014) on account of the transient medium of sound via which it is most naturally conveyed. But on the other hand, the joy of (at least partial success in) matching sound effect [TL] for sound effect [SL] (*with respect to impact and appeal—not necessarily the linguistic forms!*) provides all the encouragement that Bible translators need as they continue their ongoing efforts to pay honest attention to the complementary esthetic-emotive dimension of the original text of Scripture.

### 3. Seven artistic-rhetorical features of Psalm 45

‘Psalm 45 is rich in literary features’ (Patterson 1985:30). By way of summary, I have selected seven important stylistic, specifically artistic-rhetorical, devices for consideration: patterned organization, sonic effect, dynamic speech, figurative language, contextual reference, semantic density, and pervasive intertextuality. I will not be able to examine any of these ‘poetic’ characteristics in detail, but can simply point out certain aspects of their purposeful significance (i.e., ‘meaning’!) within the Hebrew text of Psalm 45, which implies that they must also be handled with corresponding care and craft in

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<sup>11</sup> A concern for the essential *orality* of the biblical text and its corresponding *echoing* in translation practice was the primary emphasis of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century German translators Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. The latter points out that ‘the most familiar term denoting the Old Testament [is] *queri’ah*, the “calling out”. It is in response to this command that in all worship Scripture is customarily read aloud; it is in the service of this command that Luther in his translation has recourse to the spoken language of the people’ (from ‘Scripture and Word’ [1925], cited in Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 2006:312-313). Rosenzweig also made the important practical observation that ‘We must free from beneath the logical punctuation that is sometimes its ally and sometimes its foe the fundamental principle of natural, oral punctuation: the act of breathing’ (ibid.:313). That is my goal in the utterance-based Chewa samples found below in sections 4.2-4.3.

any translation (to be discussed in section 3). The attribute ‘artistic’ refers to the original text’s attractive *formal*, linguistic features, while ‘rhetorical’ calls attention to their vital *functional*, or pragmatic, dimension in religious-cultic communication. Thus, in addition to conveying theological and/or ethical content, the sacred text aims to *please* as well as to *persuade* with corresponding effect (convincing impact, emotive force, aesthetic appeal, and oral-aural resonance) in its envisioned setting of religious use, whether for praising, instructing, petitioning, warning, encouraging, or simply broadcasting a ‘remembrance’ of God’s ‘name’ (אֶזְכֹּרָה שְׁמֶךָ) (v. 18). This same literary dimension, if granted (*whether more or less*), should be correspondingly prominent in any contemporary version that aims to be ‘functionally equivalent’ in nature, that is, in accordance with the project’s overall job description (*brief*) and primary communicative goal (*skopos*) (Wendland 2011:95-122).

### 3.1 Patterned organization

‘Hebrew poetry is most often organized according to patterns’ (Beldman 2012: 90). Although this is not reflected in most (English) translations, the structural organization of Psalm 45 is rather symmetrical and binarily arranged in Hebrew, a feature that would contribute to both its memorizability and oral performance. This structure is summarized in the outline below (cf. VanGemeren 1991:343; Gerstenberger 1988:186).<sup>12</sup> After each descriptive heading, the applicable verses are given in parentheses, followed by the principal text ‘markers’ indicating the particular rhetorical-poetic devices that help to distinguish the onset (‘aperture’) of a new discourse unit, or ‘strophe’ (cf. Wendland 2002:118–119). The psalm’s superscription is also significant in relation to the text’s overall genre and theme (e.g., ‘song of loves’ שִׁיר יְדִידָת) and has therefore been included in the following architectural overview of the compositional arrangement of Psalm 45:

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<sup>12</sup> Harman suggests a more basic structure that is determined by shifts in the primary addressee, which in turn is centered around the king (2011:365):

The king (vv. 2-5, English versions)

*God* (vv. 6-7)

The king (vv. 8-9)

*The bride* (vv. 10-15)

The king (vv. 16-17)

I. A. **Introduction** (1–2): technical poetic-musical information + 1<sup>st</sup> person authorial (self) reference announcing *the poet's personal goal of praising the king!*

B. **Appeal** to the king (3–6): shift to 2<sup>nd</sup> pers. sing. masc. pronouns

C. **Description** of the king's glory (7–10): vocative opener + shift to non-imperative verbs; *'God' is the king's personal point of reference*

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II. B' **Appeal** to the bride/queen (11–13): vocative opener + shift to 2<sup>nd</sup> pers. sing. fem. pronouns (*the addressee suddenly shifts from the king to his bride*)

C' **Description** of the bride's glory (14–16): shift to 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. sing. fem. pronouns; *'the king' is the bride's personal point of reference*

A' **Conclusion** (17–18): shift back to 2<sup>nd</sup> pers. sg. masc. pronouns + a concluding 1<sup>st</sup> person authorial (self) reference announcing *the poet's goal of praising the king (and the King) forever!* (compositional *end stress*)

Thus, personal pronouns are instrumental in guiding the hearer/reader through this psalm's well-crafted organization, that is, along with the distinctive subject matter which is expressed within a given discourse unit (strophe).<sup>13</sup> Poetic symmetry, too, is manifest, as the royal bard (one of 'the sons of Korah') begins and ends his lyric with a dramatic declaration of purpose—to *praise the king/King*. In between, he presents an expressive summary of the wonderful wedding to which he was evidently a specially invited eye-witness and perhaps even an active participant. The psalm is thus divided into two major 'stanzas'—the second being somewhat shorter than the first—and the text is developed around a pair of authorial exhortations: first to the king/groom, second to his queen/bride. The two stanzas are transitioned at their medial border by means of an overlapping lexical link of the key term 'daughters/daughter' (בָּנוֹת/בַּת—10a/11a), and each unit may be further segmented into a set of three matching 'strophes' (a semi-chiastic arrangement: A-B-C / B'-C'-A').

In addition to the climactic, text-final promise and vow regarding the king's future blessings (vv. 17-18), there is one sub-strophe of particular thematic import in this royal eulogy, namely, an internal segment that may have implicit Messianic implications (vv.

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<sup>13</sup> A 'discourse' is a verbal text, or a segment of one, that derives specifically from *direct speech*, whether actual (vocal) or represented (written), i.e., intended to be spoken, as in the case of the Psalter.

7-8; I, C, a). It appears to be chiastically arranged in order to highlight its semantic prominence within the discourse, that is, with a *focus* on the ‘upright’ king—whose reign is, in turn, *framed* by the divine promise that is based upon the premise of righteous ruling (see further below for additional support for this interpretation):<sup>14</sup>

A. temporal blessing by ‘God’ (אֱלֹהִים) – king’s ‘eternal’ rule [7a]

B. description of the king’s ethical ‘justice’ (מִשְׁוֹר) [7b]

B’ description of the king’s moral ‘uprightness’ (צֶדֶק) [8a]

A’ personal blessing by ‘God’ (אֱלֹהִים) – king’s ‘superior’, regal status [8b]

The covenantal (*Yahwistic*) vocabulary that permeates this passage (cf. Ps. 2:2, 33:5; Isa. 61:1-3) clearly indicates its importance, which must also be signaled somehow in a translation (or noted in its *paratext* with reference to vv. 7-8).<sup>15</sup>

The balanced arrangement of Ps. 45, including its spotlighted strophes in the middle (7-8) and at the end (17-18), would have been made familiar through repeated liturgical choral performances. This communal participatory factor would also be helpful to any audience—that is, to assist them in following along or joining in, in responsive fashion, as the text is being chanted, recited, or probably (given the occasion) sung to the accompaniment of selected musical instruments (cf. v. 9b).<sup>16</sup> A discourse analysis of

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<sup>14</sup> I therefore interpret these verses as operating according to the covenantal (*Torah*) principle of gracious divine blessing *before* (encouraging) human righteous response (Deut. 17:18-20, 28:12-13). Thus, with reference to the amazing deeds described in v. 5, ‘God’s blessing will mean that the king sees God do them by means of his own deeds as he himself rides out in the cause of truthfulness and faithfulness’ (Goldingay 2007:58). Furthermore, Israel’s kings were divinely ‘anointed’ (v. 8b) based ‘on the supposition that they affirmed that commitment’ to righteous behavior, that is, ‘faithfulness’ to the Mosaic covenant (ibid.:59). ‘Elsewhere, such as in Psalm 65:5, ‘awesome deeds’ refers to God’s own actions’ (Harman 2011:367).

<sup>15</sup> Terrien suggests that Psalm 45’s ‘emphasis on the religious, moral, and ethical obligations of royalty’ was another reason for its inclusion in the Psalter (2003:365; cf. Deut. 17:18-20 and the category of ‘extensive intertextuality’ below).

<sup>16</sup> No doubt the type of melody would modulate according to the prevailing subject matter and emotive mood of each strophe, for example (some tentative suggestions), *contemplative* for the opening and closing authorial reflections; *majestically grand* for the king’s stanza (*military*, vv. 3-6 + *celebratory*, vv. 7-10); *delicately beautiful* for the bride’s piece (*instructive*, vv. 11-13 + *triumphant*, vv. 11-16).



the entire text gives us a grasp of the poetic *whole* and its *parts*; from this viewpoint—and ‘soundscape’—we are in a better position to discover and evaluate its microstructural features.

### 3.2 Sonic effect

The predominant phonological quality and identifying characteristic of Hebrew (Semitic) poetry is the familiar (*but never to be underestimated!*) device of concise, lineal parallelism, a rhythmic, progressive sequence that is delineated into strophes comprised of variable sets of bi- and tri-cola.<sup>17</sup> Bratcher and Reyburn assert that ‘this psalm has a minimum of semantic parallelism’ (1991:420), but this view would have to be understood in a very narrow sense as referring to *synonymous* parallelism. In fact, Psalm 45, like any other, is constituted completely by paralleled poetic line couplets (and triads, cf. Wendland 2007), here primarily of the *additive* type, including five tricola (vv. 2, 3, 8, 12, 15; Craigie 1983:335-336) and with a prevalent accentual rhythm of 4 + 4 (Goldingay 2007:55).<sup>18</sup> These deliberate poetic line parallels combine to form the text’s most prominent ‘sound effect’, one that creates an extended cadenced, oft patterned style of composition. This is a lyric feature that literally calls out for public oral articulation, as indeed, the psalmist himself attests at this song-poem’s very beginning. But the phonic frame of Psalm 45 is very much evident (audible) in other ways as well.

For example, sound is referred to at the onset of the poem as the psalmist reveals that he ‘is uttering his (praiseworthy) work to the king (with his) tongue’ (אָמַר אֲנִי מִטְּשִׁי (לְמַלְכוֹת לְשׁוֹנִי). The particular type of ‘utterance’ in this case is undoubtedly a musical piece—a ‘love lyric’ (שִׁיר יְדִידָת), or ‘wedding song’ (NIV), as specified in the text’s

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<sup>17</sup> ‘The first characteristic of Hebrew poetry, a feature it shares with much poetry throughout history, is its *terseness*. Even in translation the lines of poetry are shorter than those of prose, and in Hebrew this economy of words is even more pronounced. . . . The second and most distinctive characteristic [then why is it not listed *first*?] is *parallelism*. . . . [T]here is always a dynamic movement from the first line to the second. This progression or intensification is most significant on the semantic level, increasing the impact of a statement’ (Beldman 2012:88; words italicized and in brackets added).

<sup>18</sup> Poetic parallelism also creates a certain corresponding conceptual pattern or thought progression to complement the verbal utterance rhythm linking bi-/tri-cola and even larger lyric segments (strophes, stanzas). ‘Poetry was a welcome aid to memory, for it employed parallel lines that had a certain rhythm of thought, though no set meter’ (Wilson 1989:141).

superscription.<sup>19</sup> The prime subject of the bard’s flowing, flowery praise—the [handsome]<sup>20</sup> king—is also quaintly described as having ‘lips [speech] poured on with grace’ (הַיּוֹצֵק חֵן בְּשִׁפְתוֹתָיִךְ) (v. 3).<sup>21</sup> The bride/future queen (lit. ‘daughter’) is correspondingly exhorted at the onset of the psalm’s second half to ‘listen, and see (visualize?), and give ear’ (שְׁמַע־בֵּת וְרֹאֵי וְהִטִּי אָזְנוֹךְ) to what the psalmist has to say to her (v. 11). Sound is also suggested in the ‘stringed instruments’ (Craigie 1983:337) of v. 9 and the corresponding voices of ‘gladness’ (שִׂמְחָה) emanating from the bridal procession (v. 16). It is further implied in the singer’s concluding vow to ‘perpetuate the (king’s) memory’ (אֲזַכֵּרְהָ שְׁמֶךָ), which, quite significantly and perhaps surprisingly, *results in* everlasting world-wide acclamation (עַמִּים יְהוּדִים לְעֹלָם וָעֶד) (v. 18b).

The preceding colon exhibits some of the resonant, rhythmic alliteration that is heard periodically throughout this psalm. This is evident also in v. 8b-c:<sup>22</sup>

עַל־כֵּן | מִשְׁחַךְ אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֶיךָ – al-kên mîshach<sup>a</sup>kha ʿlôhiym ʿlôhekha  
שֶׁמֶן שָׂשׂוֹן מִחֲבֵרֶיךָ – shemen sâsown mech<sup>a</sup>bherekha

On the other hand, and by way of *contrast* (perhaps to signal a final strophic boundary, i.e., *closure*), we observe a broken, breathless style (asyndetic, perhaps to convey

<sup>19</sup> The vocal lyric nature of this psalm is suggested already by the technical term *shoshanim* (שֹׁשַׁנִּים) in its title: ‘This is still another unknown musical term, though the literal meaning is “lilies”’ (Alter 2007:158). This term frequently appears—quite significantly for comparative purposes—in the Song of Songs (e.g., 2:1-2, 16; 4:5; 5:13; 6:2-3; 7:2).

<sup>20</sup> Alter renders the superlative descriptive verb יָפִיפִיִּיתָ as ‘you are loveliest’, which seems rather strange when applied to a man. In any case, he comments: ‘[This word] is unique to this poem and looks like an elegant stylistic flourish suited to the celebratory language of the psalm’ (2007:158). The key question is: How ‘elegant’ (in terms of form) or ‘celebratory’ (with regard to function) does the translation in my/our language sound when enunciated aloud?

<sup>21</sup> ‘[T]he context of other references to gracious speech...suggests that the king has a way with words, a facility for speaking a winning word (Prov. 22:1; Eccles. 10:12)’ (Goldingay 2007:57). ‘Part of God’s gift to the king was loveliness of speech, an indication of his blessing’—‘forever’, that is, for as long as he lived (Harman 2011:366).

<sup>22</sup> The tricolon of v. 8 is the longest verse of the psalm as well as its physical (lexical) midpoint, viz. vv. 1-8: 77 words, vv. 9-18: 82 ‘words’. Often, as here, this location is often a point of *thematic prominence* within a psalm. Note also the corresponding occurrences of the consequential conjunction ‘therefore’ (עַל־כֵּן) at the beginning, middle, and ending of Ps. 45 (vv. 3b, 8b, and 18b).

excitement)<sup>23</sup> as the king’s wartime exploits are described (v. 6, in literal translation; note the *phonological* chiasmus):

|                              |   |                                                   |
|------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------------------|
| חֲצִיף שְׁנוּנִים            | – | [A] your arrows <i>are</i> [B] sharpened          |
| יִפְּלוּ עַמִּים תַּחְתֶּיךָ | – | [B'] peoples [A'] under you <i>they</i> will fall |
| בְּלֵב אוֹיְבֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ    | – | in <i>the</i> heart of the enemies of the king    |

The verb ‘they will fall’ (יִפְּלוּ) at the end of the pre-positioned second line appears to do poetically-motivated double-duty.<sup>24</sup> Thus as the royal army’s arrows rain down upon hostile hearts, the affected enemy peoples correspondingly ‘drop’ beneath the king’s control (note the corresponding verse/strophe-final climactic position of ‘the king’).

### 3.3 Dynamic speech

This third poetic feature is closely related to ‘sonic effect’ (3.2). Thus, Psalm 45 psalm was, like virtually all ancient formal and informal discourse, composed as well as transmitted aloud (cf. Craigie 1983:339; Hilber 2009:357)—in the case of the Psalter also explicitly in the form of direct [*prayerful*] speech, whether individual or communal in nature.<sup>25</sup> God, or the LORD (*YHWH*), was normally the primary addressee (in contrast to Ps. 45), while the psalmist and/or the people of God were the usual speaker(s).

Such composition thus lends itself well to a functional (‘speech-act’) analysis: what were the speakers *doing* through their words; what pragmatic *goals* were they seeking to accomplish? In general, are the varied cola (poetic utterances) of a given psalm informative, expressive, directive, evocative, eulogistic, relational, performative, and/or artistic in nature?<sup>26</sup> More specifically then, what vocalized communicative intention does

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<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the asyndeton in the tricolon of v. 2 may convey a ‘sonorous’ vocal impression (Goldingay 2007:56).

<sup>24</sup> A similar thing occurs at the close of the next strophe in v. 10, where the verb that begins colon B in the MT, ‘she stands’ (נִצְבָּה) may be construed as applying also to the preceding verbless line A (despite its plural subject, ‘daughters’; cf. Goldingay 2007:60; Craigie 1983:336-337).

<sup>25</sup> As the German translator Martin Buber correctly emphasized: ‘The Bible is a product of living recitation, and is intended for living recitation; that speech is its nature, and the written text is only a form for preserving it’ (from ‘A Translation of the Bible’ [1927], cited in Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 2006:320).

<sup>26</sup> Gerstenberger outlines the structure of Ps. 45 in terms of these functional elements (1988:186).

a particular colon (bicolon) embody or express, and what is the expected outcome or impact upon the audience or addressee(s)? In short, ‘the three [speech] acts are “*of saying*” (locution), “*in saying*” (illocution) and “*by saying*” (perlocution)’ (Briggs 2008:88, original italics).

What can a speech-act (SA) study tell us about Psalm 45? First of all, we note that related sets of SAs tend to group themselves according to the stanzaic and strophic structure of the text that was outlined above (for two classificatory systems, see Wendland 2011:44, 46; cf. Levine 1995:95). Thus, the psalm leads off with a short strophe consisting of several combined SAs of expressive exaltation and authorial self-affirmation (v. 2).<sup>27</sup> The second strophe of stanza one then consists of a sequence of SAs that generally praise and exhort the king/groom in terms of his royal character: commendation, encouragement, and especially an appeal to valor in the face of Israel’s enemies (vv. 3–6). This strophe sounds rather militaristic in tone as the psalmist impressively focuses his verbal spotlight upon the royal warrior being displayed on stage:<sup>28</sup>

He addresses the king directly with verses that sound appropriate to a pre-battle liturgy anticipating victory and that highlight the military accoutrement of this supreme warrior (Broyles 1999:206).

This leads to the third strophe (vv. 7–10), which begins by describing the king with regard to his benevolent, ‘righteous’ governance, but then subtly shifts to a portrayal of the extravagant physical setting of the royal wedding.

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<sup>27</sup> From a secular perspective, such functional ‘self-presentation’ ‘is necessary whenever a singer performs before an audience, whose benevolence is vital to him’; cf. medieval minstrels (Gerstenberger 1988:187).

<sup>28</sup> ‘From loveliness and grace, the poem quickly moves on to military might, something the kings of the ancient Near East proverbially needed to exercise in order to maintain securely the grandeur of their courts even in times of peace, such as the wedding occasion of this poem’ (Alter 2007:159). Longman feels that the ‘divine warrior’ motif, which first occurs in Exod. 15:4, is a ‘theme that ties together many of the writings of the Old Testament’ (1993:105).



Stanza two begins by offering fatherly counsel, advice, and encouragement to the future bride (1<sup>st</sup> strophe, vv. 11–13),<sup>29</sup> followed by a more physical description of her beautiful person and blissful surroundings (2<sup>nd</sup> strophe, vv. 14–16). The psalmist interjects himself again at the end of his song (vv. 17–18) with a benediction *cum* prediction concerning future progeny, coupled with a vow to perpetuate the king’s glorious memory forever through his poetry. This is an instance of what Patterson calls ‘rhetorical parallelism that fits the stated needs of lyricism for progression’ (1985:31)—a poem with a particular purpose in mind.

In any such classificatory scheme there is of course a considerable amount of interlocking and overlapping, as one SA meshes with or is molded into another. The *drama* of direct discourse becomes a challenge for translators as they must seek to convey the same, or similar pragmatic implications—*naturally*—in their language. Especially difficult are those cases of *convergence*, where a single utterance (colon or bicolon) appears to express two or more SAs at once, but on different levels of interpretation. For example, a strong case can be made that the apparent (surface level) *descriptive* and/or *predictive* praise of the king in vv. 7-8 is simultaneously also an implicit (deep level) *exhortation* for him to continue to reflect the godly attributes of ‘justice’ (perhaps ‘truth’ and ‘humility’ עֲנִיָּה as well, cf. v. 5; Craigie 1983:336; Perowne 1878:376).<sup>30</sup> Such godly behavior must be manifested throughout his current rule for the good of his subjects (the people of God, implied in v. 3) and for the sake of his future reputation (v. 18b).

### 3.4 Figurative language

‘Images are the glory, perhaps the essence of poetry’ (Schoekel 1988:95)—intended to stimulate the imagination and to generate interest and allure. In terms of its genre, or literary type, Psalm 45 may be classified as a ‘royal psalm’ (Craigie 1983:337; Wendland 2002:51) that functions more specifically as an ‘epithalamium’ – a marriage hymn and, especially if a public choral arrangement were involved, also as an ‘encomium’ – a song

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<sup>29</sup> These words of admonition to the bride (esp. vv. 11-12) may have formed part of the ritualized bridal instructions delivered as part of the wedding ceremony (Gerstenberger 1988:188).

<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the apparent authorial *wish* of v. 17 may actually serve as a more substantive divine *promise*, declared by the ‘inspired’ singer (v. 2) (Gerstenberger 1988:189).

of communal praise (Alter 2007:17; Gerstenberger 1988:189; Preminger & Brogan 1993:332, 378; Ryken 1992:273, 293;) in honor of the king, the ‘mighty one’ (גִּבּוֹר), an attribute also appropriate for God (Ps. 24:8, 120:4). The elaborate, albeit rather cryptic (to scholars today!) Hebrew title (לְמִנְצָח עַל-שְׁשָׁנִים לְבִנְיָ-קָרַח מְשָׁכִיל), with its reference to ‘lilies’ (as frequently in the *Song of Songs*, e.g., 2:1), seems to refer to ‘a popular tune about romantic love’ (Terrien 2003:365), or contrastively, to a ‘hymn tune’ (Bullock 2001:30)—in any case, a *musical* composition of some sort (Craigie 1983:264, 336), which would certainly be suitable for ‘a love song’ (שִׁיר יְדִידוּת) (v. 1). Such a lovely lyric typically features a diversity of picturesque figurative language (especially metaphor) and related imagery that pertains to the personage(s) being praised.<sup>31</sup> This song-poem thus ‘ties together in a single bunch of many colored flowers a variety of essential motifs and thoughts associated with the [marriage] feast’ (Weiser 1962:362); it thereby depicts the various ceremonies that accompanied the several distinct stages of an ancient Jewish traditional wedding celebration.

Ryken et.al. set the scene well in what amounts to a semi-narrative description of the festive communal, dual processional event, a scenario that abounds in ‘extravagant joy and sensory richness’ (1996:938)—naturally with jubilant sounds implied:

The poet sets the tone at the outset when he asserts, ‘My heart overflows with a goodly theme’ (Ps 45:1, RSV). The couple stands at the center of the event, and both appear at their best. The king is ‘fairest of the sons of men’ (Ps 45:2, RSV), girded with his sword in ‘glory and majesty’ (Ps 45:3). He is anointed with ‘the oil of gladness’, and his robes ‘are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia’ (Ps 45:7-8, RSV). The princess, for her part, ‘is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes’ (Ps 45:13) and then led to the king ‘in many robes . . . with her

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<sup>31</sup> In Hebrew poetry generally, ‘an abundant use of various figures of speech enhanced its liveliness, creativity, and depth of meaning’ (Wilson 1989:141) in relation to the topic at hand. Furthermore, ‘[t]he nature of Hebrew poetry is to paint pictures with broad strokes of the brush. The Hebrew authors of Scripture were not so much interested in the fine details and harmonious pattern of what they painted as they were in the picture as a whole’ (ibid.:145). A good example of this the overall ‘wedding scenario’ suggestively sketched in broad, metonymic strokes by the author(s) of Psalm 45. And yet, the descriptive evocations can also be quite specific in nature, such as those ‘sharp arrows that pierce through the hearts of the king’s enemies’ (v. 6).

virgin companions' (Ps 45:14, RSV). The whole procession enters the palace of the king 'with joy and gladness' (Ps 45:15, RSV).<sup>32</sup>

But although two persons are naturally center-stage in this wedding scene, the focus is undoubtedly fixed upon the regal groom, who is highlighted even when his bride is being described (e.g., vv. 12, 14–15). This picturesque song includes not only rich nuptial images, but it also incorporates, as befits a royal personage, figurative references to the king's outstanding gifts of speech (v. 3b), fighting prowess (vv. 4–5), and ruling capabilities (vv. 7–8a). It is important to note too that, while the 'imagery' of Psalm 45 is patently *visual* in nature, it further appeals to the sense of *smell* (e.g., 'myrrh and aloes and cassia', v. 9a) and *sound* as well (e.g., 'strings', v. 9b).

### 3.5 Contextual reference

Every *text* automatically comes with a *context*—verbal (intra- and intertextual) and nonverbal (sociocultural and environmental)—which is necessary for proper audience understanding and appreciation.<sup>33</sup> Even the author's opening self-reference as being a 'scribe' (סֹפֵר) cannot be taken for granted or interpreted anachronistically; thus, they were not mere copyists, but '[s]cribes and sages were the official storytellers of the kings of the Ancient Near East' (Walton et. al. 2000:528).<sup>34</sup> Some commentators take space to speculate about the historical life-setting of Psalm 45 and who might have been the king and bride concerned, for example: Solomon and the daughter, either of Pharaoh or of Hiram, king of Tyre; Ahab and Jezebel (which would be most ironic in view of the psalm's later typological hermeneutical history, but see Terrien 2003:367–368 and Holladay 1996:28); Joram, son of Jehoshaphat, and Athaliah (also ironic), or most far-fetched,

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<sup>32</sup> The custom of the husband-to-be awaiting his bride for the imminent wedding ceremony (as depicted in Ps. 45) is also reflected in 'the Jewish marriage service' (Wilson 1989:204).

<sup>33</sup> '[I]n order to understand Psalm 45 we need to know something about ancient betrothal and wedding customs' (Boice 1996:381; these are then summarized, *ibid.*:381-382).

<sup>34</sup> Walton continues: 'Their command of the traditions and their association with the royal bureaucracy made it appropriate that they perform songs and stories that remind the people of the king's role to feed and protect the land as God's political agent' (*ibid.*:528). Traditional royal 'praise' poets and griots perform an analogous role in many African societies.

some later Persian king and his wife (or one of them) (Perowne 1878:367).<sup>35</sup> But truth be told, we cannot know for sure, and ‘all that can be safely said is that [this psalm] originated during the existence of the [Jewish] monarchy and was probably used [officially] at several royal weddings’ (McCann 1996:861, words in brackets added; cf. Day 1992:93). However, it is most probable that Psalm 45 was also used ‘unofficially’ and in a transferred sense, that is, liturgically for Temple worship, especially in later years to celebrate the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and his chosen people.<sup>36</sup>

As our preceding survey of the psalm’s figurative language would suggest, an awareness of the text’s real or assumed extralinguistic setting is a crucial factor in its contemporary interpretation.<sup>37</sup> Such imagery, whether expressed in greater or lesser explicitness, always evokes a richer, often less obvious ‘cognitive environment’ than more prosaic discourse. Thus, precise knowledge of the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) situational background is essential to reveal this added semantic and connotative significance, hence also to provide some vital contextually-based hermeneutical insight. For example, the customs referred to in verses 8 and 9 (anointing the head, wearing perfumed, gold-embroidered robes, festive stringed music, etc.) could be applied to both a wedding ceremony and also the coronation of a king, two public events that were often combined (Walton et. al. 2000:528).

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<sup>35</sup> With reference to the word מַלְאָכָה in v. 10b, the NET notes: ‘This rare Hebrew noun apparently refers to the king’s bride, who will soon be queen (see Ne 2:6). The Aramaic cognate is used of royal wives in Da 5:2-3, Da 5:23.’ Alter adds: ‘The Hebrew *shegal* is probably an Akkadian loan-word. Other features of the poem’s style are also archaic, and some commentators, given the wedding with a Tyrian princess (see verse 13), have been tempted to see the psalm as a product of Solomon’s court’ (2007:160).

<sup>36</sup> Westermann wrongly concludes that Psalm 45 was ‘really a completely secular song, which originally had nothing to do with worship’ (1980:107).

<sup>37</sup> ‘This psalm contains language and detail suitable for a marriage anthem or the anointing of a king (Ps 133:2). In the Ancient Near East these two were combined in the sacred marriage ritual described...’ (Walton et. al. 2000:528). The scene envisioned includes its general setting, for example, the ‘ivory palaces’ (v. 9), which refers to ‘the lavish use of ivory to decorate furniture and wall panels... The wealth of a nation might well be displayed in the king’s palace—a sign of power and prestige for the state’ (ibid.:loc.cit.; cf. Gerstenberger 1988:188; Amos 3:15).



Another important perspective affects the analysis and hence also the translation of verse 13. ‘A daughter of Tyre’ (בַּת־צֹר) might refer to a particular person—some prominent woman (perhaps even the queen herself!) from the Phoenician seaport city of Tyre—but it is more likely a figurative reference to the affluent merchant inhabitants of that location, which ‘was associated with the epitome of wealth (Ezek. 27:1-33)’ (Hilber 2009:359; cf. Goldingay 2007:61; Walton et.al. 2000:529; NET study notes).

The psalm’s prevailing frame of reference involving ANE marriage ceremonies and associated family traditions is helpful also for understanding the structure as well as the message of Psalm 45. As suggested earlier, this psalm consists of a narrator frame that opens (v. 1) and closes (vv. 17–18) the text as a whole. In between we have two principal poetic units (‘stanzas’) that present a quasi-narrative discourse featuring two central characters, first the groom and then his bride. These stanzas correspond to the two ritualized journeys connected with a typical Jewish wedding celebration: the groom must first travel with his company to the bride’s residence (3–10), and then with the addition of her entourage they all move in the opposite direction back to the groom’s home (11–16).<sup>38</sup> In the first stanza we hear effusive praise extolling the virtues of the groom—how fitting a person he is (*or should be!*) in terms of character and capacity (performance).<sup>39</sup> The second stanza then features a contrast in both content and tone as the bride-to-be is paternally advised (perhaps with some maternal influence as well), in *sapiential* fashion (cf. Proverbs 1:8, 3:1, 4:1, 5:1), to adopt a completely new outlook on life (v. 11). This would be in customary submission to her husband, yes (v. 12), but also in the prospect of an optimistic future (v. 16) that promised both public respect (v. 13) and considerable domestic responsibility (implied in v. 17).<sup>40</sup>

### 3.6 ‘Semantic density’

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<sup>38</sup> ‘Wedding processions that mark the transition into another sphere of life are customary in many parts of the world. . . . The text [of Ps. 45] reflects this “rite of passage”’ (Gerstenberger 1988:188-189).

<sup>39</sup> ‘This text also supports the view that the royal psalms speak of the royal ideal in ancient Israel, an ideal often unfulfilled’ (Bellinger 1990:114).

<sup>40</sup> We find the corresponding didactic-hortatory custom involving the bride and groom in Chewa traditional marriage ceremonies.

The device of ‘semantic density’ is characteristic of the typical ‘terseness’, or formal-semantic condensation, of poetry.<sup>41</sup> It specifically applies to words or phrases that arguably have more than one compatible sense or reference in a given cotextual setting (Wendland 1990:302–304). The qualifier ‘arguably’ is necessary because commentators may disagree on whether or not this literary device is actually present in the biblical text, and whether deliberate authorial intention can be demonstrated in such usage, as distinct from its being a product of the history of Scripture interpretation and/or contemporary scholarly consensus. Such functional semantic ambiguity is a typical characteristic of most, if not all lyrical traditions, and it certainly plays a central role in the poetic books of the Hebrew Bible, especially in texts that are more expressive and panegyric in nature, such as the Canticles and Psalm 45.

We may have an example of such lexical ‘density’ at the very onset of the psalm, as the composer describes himself as a ‘scribe’ who is מְהִיר. This adjective, derived from the verb ‘hasten’ (מָהַר), could refer to the writer’s actual quickness of composition and/or, metonymically, to his artistic ‘expertise’ in doing so, as in the case of Ezra; cf. 7:6 (cf. Harman 2011:366). The ‘swiftness’ of the author’s skill (v. 2) would then contrast with the potentially long ‘duration’ of his song’s panegyric message (v. 18).<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the mention of ‘tongue’ in the third colon (v. 2) might also indicate that the term ‘scribe’ (סוֹפֵר) is to be taken figuratively and the reference made (in addition) to his manner of oral delivery, ‘whose words are fluent and mellifluous’ (Goldingay 2007:56).

Along with the abundance of emblematic speech, already noted, hyperbolic exaggeration appears to be an important poetic element in this psalm—that is, if a human personage, even some prominent royal figure (or dynasty), is being so greatly lauded, for example, in the case of statements like ‘God has blessed you forever’ (בִּרְכָךְ אֱלֹהִים לְעוֹלָם) in v. 3b, or ‘your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever’ (בְּסֵאֵךְ אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד) in v. 7a

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<sup>41</sup> In the opinion of Adele Berlin, ‘[i]t is not parallelism per se, but the predominance of parallelism with terseness, which marks the poetic expression of the Bible’ (1985:5).

<sup>42</sup> ‘Etymologically “quick,” but Ethiopic suggests “expert”...which makes better sense esp. in Ezra 7:6; Prov. 22:29’ (Goldingay 2007:52).

(cf. 18b).<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the king is described at times with ‘characteristics normally reserved for God, namely, “splendor” and “majesty” (v 4; cf. Ps. 96:6)’ (Craigie 1983:339; cf. also vv. 5–6).<sup>44</sup> In the wider context of Scripture then (see ‘intertextuality’ below), early Jewish (and later Christian) commentators began to construe the language of these texts as exceeding ‘poetic license’ and thus having divine or messianic typological significance (Craghan 1967:91; Hilber 2009:378; Mays 1994:182; McCann 1996:863; Whybray 1996:91).<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> ‘Suddenly the psalmist looks beyond the immediate occupant of the throne of David to the kingly glory of the messianic ruler. This is similar to the way in which Isaiah inserts direct address to “Immanuel” into a passage that is dealing with the impending Assyrian invasion (Isa. 8:8)’ (Harman 2011:367)

Alter translates the latter text somewhat awkwardly as ‘Your throne of God is forevermore’ since he feels that ‘it would be anomalous to have an address to God in the middle of the poem because the entire psalm is directed to the king or to his bride’ (2007:159). However, the deliberately ambiguous vocative ‘O god [king]’ might also be interpreted as another subtle literary-rhetorical device which acts as a hermeneutical key denoting the secondary divine personage (‘O God [King YHWH]’) that underlies the overt royal referent of this psalm. Broyles suggests that the change of addressee at the onset of v. 7 with the unexpected reference to ‘God’ may indicate a typical psalmic liturgical turn: ‘If we were to hear [Ps. 45] performed, it may have been obvious [that] these words were directed to God above, not to the king’ (1999:207).

The NET text note comments: ‘Rather than taking the statement at face value, many prefer to emend the text because the concept of deifying the earthly king is foreign to ancient Israelite thinking (cf. NEB: “your throne is like God's throne, eternal”). However, it is preferable to retain the text and take this statement as another instance of the royal hyperbole that permeates the royal psalms. Because the Davidic king is God's vice-regent on earth, the psalmist addresses him as if he were God incarnate. God energizes the king for battle and accomplishes justice through him.’ Broyles proposes that vv. 7-8 ‘thus make the same point as the one made in the longer liturgy of Ps. 89, namely that Yahweh’s kingship is the basis for David’s...’ (1999:207; on the exegetical difficulties of this verse, see Goldingay 2007:53). The LXX supports the reading of the MT: ὁ θρόνος σου, ὁ θεός, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος...

Another option is to follow Dahood’s proposed emendation to *kis’ākā* ‘[God] has enthroned you’ (Holladay 1996:125), which provides a close parallel (and an instance of structural *anaphora*) with ‘God has blessed you forever’ in v. 3b. The potential Messianic implication would nevertheless be the same.

<sup>44</sup> It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the people of Israel viewed their kings as being endowed with ‘divine status’ (Gillingham 1994:221).

<sup>45</sup> ‘Either we have here a piece of poetical exaggeration far beyond the limits of poetic license, or a “greater than Solomon is here”’ (Alexander Maclaren, cited in Boice 1996:381).

A distinct lexical-semantic feature of Psalm 45 that supports this broader interpretive perspective is its use of the term ‘God’ (אֱלֹהִים) to refer figuratively to the king, but within a wider (psalmic-canonical) hermeneutical framework also to its literal divine referent (v. 7a). Such conceptually ‘dense’ nominal usage is coupled with the associated second person (m.) singular pronoun ‘you/your’ in referential cotexts where, humanly speaking and hyperbole aside, it does not quite belong, for example: ‘the nations [i.e., the whole wide world!] will praise *you* forever and ever’ (עַמִּים יְהוֹדוּךָ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד) (v. 18; cf. also vv. 3, 7–8).<sup>46</sup> This semantic overlay comes to the fore in the conjoined expression ‘God, your God’ (אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֶיךָ) in v. 8b: ‘The person designated as “God” in the previous verse is now marked off from him by the reference to “your God”’ (Harman 2011:368). ‘Thus, vv. 6-7 [7-8] may use a pun to make the point that the enthroned king, while a “mighty ruler,” must acknowledge [*the rule of*] his God above’ (Broyles 1999:207).<sup>47</sup>

### 3.7 Pervasive intertextuality<sup>48</sup>

As suggested above, the surrounding cotextual setting of the Psalter itself serves to stimulate and to shape our understanding of Psalm 45 with regard to its literal as well as any deeper theological significance. The various individual psalms, though probably

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<sup>46</sup> With reference to v. 18a, Alter comments: ‘*Let me make your name heard*. Though some interpreters understand “you” to refer to God and read this final verse as a stock psalmic ending, it is more plausible to see it as a conclusion of the address to the king. This would be in keeping with our understanding of verse 7, “Your throne of (sic) God is forevermore,” as well as with “Therefore has God blessed you forever” in verse 3’ (2007:161). However, my point is this: why can this not be rather a ‘both-and’ interpretation, overtly designating the ‘king’ of Israel, but also having a secondary, canonically-shaped reference to the great ‘King’, Yahweh, the Lord of all ‘generations’ and ‘nations’? This too would then be an instance of hermeneutical ‘semantic density’ (cf. 3.6).

<sup>47</sup> Alter suggests that ‘this odd phrasing is the result of an editorial substitution of *’elohim ’elohekha* for YHWH *’elohekha*’ (2007:158), which would not be an unexpected occurrence in the so-called ‘Elohistic Psalter’ (Pss. 42-83) (Broyles 1999:207; cf. Bellinger 1990:11). Whether this is true or not (one cannot really be as certain as Alter about such textual emendations), it does not change the interpretation being proposed here.

<sup>48</sup> For the purposes of this essay, we might adopt the following working definition: ‘Intertextuality relates various “texts” to one another in a way that is not concerned with issues of priority or dependence. Instead, it is concerned with the way a text acquires different meanings when it is situated in relationship to other texts’ (Bowen 2003:54).

composed separately, were normally not meant to be silently read and interpreted in isolation. Rather, they were gathered into smaller compositional groups (e.g., the ‘psalms of ascent’—Pss. 120-134), later into edited ‘books’ (I-V), and finally the Psalms-scroll as a whole so that they might be sung, recited, chanted, or otherwise articulated—whether in familial meditative (*but audible!*) devotion and prayer—or more frequently, during public worship and communal liturgical expression. The memory of the entire psalmic corpus acted metonymically as a broad conceptual point of reference and an associated hermeneutical guide for the community of faith.<sup>49</sup> This reflective process is well illustrated in the book of Hebrews with respect to the Psalter and, in particular, the passage under consideration: Ps. 45:7–8 > Heb. 1:8–9 (with an emphasis on the text’s ‘spoken’ orality in Heb. 1:6, 2:12, 3:7, 3:15, 4:3, and so on).

The most immediate cotextual grouping for Psalm 45 is that ‘of/for/by the sons of Korah’ (לְבִנֵי־קֹרַח), a distinct corpus that is divided between Books II (Pss. 42–49) and III (Pss. 84–88).<sup>50</sup> Psalm 45 is most closely related thematically to the Korahite psalms that immediately follow it: ‘The psalm insists on the close relationship between God and his king and prepares the way for the great affirmations about the reign of God that we find in Psalms 46–48’ (Firth 2008:27; cf. Patterson 1985:32). Psalm 48 is especially relevant, as we shall see.

There are a number of other psalms having an explicit reference to the king (or King)—the so-called ‘royal psalms’, which according to Gunkel include at least the following: ‘Psalms 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; 144:1–11’ (Tucker 2008:584;

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<sup>49</sup> This is analogous to the conceptual relationship viewed as contextualizing and connecting one narrative or poem with the entire oral tradition in which it arose and to which it meaningfully contributes, an analytical notion that was popularized by the early French Structuralist approach to ‘myth’ (e.g., Lévi-Strauss 1972:174-184).

<sup>50</sup> ‘The Korahites, like the Asaphites, are described in the Books of Chronicles as Levitical singers established by David to serve in the house of Yahweh (1 Chr. 6.31-37; 16.4-7)’ (Wallace 2009:92). Wallace endeavors to show certain semantic-thematic connections between the Korahite collection and King David: ‘The reference to anointing and victory reminds of Psalm 2, while his handsome features recall the description of David in 1 Sam. 16.12’ (ibid.:94).

cf. Futato 2008:181; Gerstenberger 1988:188).<sup>51</sup> Psalm 72, which is considered ‘Messianic’ by Jews and Christians alike (Wilson 1989:182), manifests a number of important correspondences with Psalm 45—for example, the ideal king of Israel defending and delivering his people (72:4; cf. 45:4-6)<sup>52</sup> and ruling over them in ‘justice’ and ‘righteousness’ (72:2-3; cf. 45:7-8).<sup>53</sup> The notion of God’s kingship may well be regarded as the ‘root metaphor’ of the entire Psalter: ‘All subsequent affirmations about the work and activity of Yahweh are predicated upon the assumption that Yahweh reigns as king’ (Tucker 2008:591; cf. Bullock 2001:62). In short, ‘the psalms are the poetry of the reign of the LORD’ (Mays 1994:30).

Such a prevailing intertextual resonance involving this preeminent theme of *divine kingship* was (and is) bound to affect the understanding of Psalm 45 as it was transmitted, and contextually reinterpreted, both orally and in writing over the ages (Miller 1986:12-13). This would be a natural historical hermeneutical development within a long liturgical tradition, despite the fact that this divine perspective was undoubtedly *not* within the cognitive frame of reference of its original composer and setting (Gerstenberger 1988:189-190). There is thus a marriage of hermeneutical horizons in

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<sup>51</sup> Bowen explores Ps. 45 in intertextual relation to several familiar OT texts from a ‘feminist’ perspective, e.g., Abigail (1 Sm. 25; ‘[a] common vocabulary binds the named and unnamed brides together’, 2003:57), Esther, the unfaithful wife of Ezek. 16, the assertive young woman of the SoS, and Jephthah’s daughter (Judg. 11). Bowen recognizes, for example, that ‘[l]ike Ezekiel 16, psalm 45 can be read as both a tale of human marriage as well as a story of divine-human marriage’ (ibid.:66), but unfortunately (in my opinion) concludes that ‘[t]he problem with Psalm 45 is that the gendered world it wishes for is the very world that feminists critique’ (ibid.:71).

<sup>52</sup> In the ANE, a king was *ipso facto* also a mighty Savior of his subjects (Wilson 1989:181). Commemorating the wonderful ‘name’ of the king ‘forever’ is also enjoined at the close of both psalms (72:17; cf. 45:18). Psalm 72 concludes Book II of the Psalter (a printed collection of hymns), while Psalm 45 occurs near its beginning—the significance being that ‘[t]he placement of royal psalms...at the “seams” of the Psalter appears to be intentional’ (McCann 2012:281). Thus, ‘[v]erses 12-14 of Psalm 72 amount to something like a job description for the earthly king in his role as the agent entrusted with the enactment and embodiment of God’s will’ (ibid.:286)—a role that is clearly celebrated in Psalm 45.

<sup>53</sup> ‘[T]he words “justice” and “righteousness” function as a summary of what God wills in and for the world (*torah*)’ (McCann 2012:285)—cp. 45:7-8 and 72:1. ‘To “love justice” and to “hate evil” is a standard requirement for everybody (Amos 5:15; Mic 3:2; Isa 61:8; Pss 5:5-6; 37:27; 52:5...) but especially for the king (Pss 72:4; 101:2-8)’ (Gerstenberger 1988:188).



this distinctive wedding hymn, and we see (hear) and mentally merge many thematic parallels like the following:

The poet proclaims of his earthly master [the king], ‘I commemorate your fame of all generations, / so people will praise you forever and ever’ (Ps. 45:18), just as the psalmist praises God, his heavenly lord and master: ‘Every day will I bless You / and praise Your name forever and ever’ (145:2) (Levine 1995:93–94; words in the brackets added).

In an interesting reversal of the anthropopathic theme of ‘divine suffering in the Psalter’ as documented by Gericke (2011), we may have here in Psalm 45 (among others) a glimpse of manifold ‘divine rejoicing’. Such pervasive happiness is elicited, as it were, by the acclamation, honor, devotion, and testimony of God’s people (45:2, 4-6, 7, 9, 12)—in the end (v. 18), a universal mixed multitude embracing members of every epoch, nation, culture, and language (Rev. 7:9–10).<sup>54</sup> To be sure, this is certainly a ‘noble theme’ concerning a most praiseworthy royal personage, which therefore requires the expert ‘tongue’ and ‘pen’ of a ‘skilled’ translator—and *songster!*—in order to ‘perpetuate [his] memory through all generations’ (Ps. 45:2, 18, NIV).

#### 4. A blunt ‘stylus’ and a dull sound in translation?

Why pay so much attention to the poetic-rhetorical forms and functions of the original text? Can translators not simply (more quickly and efficiently) access the text via a ‘secondary’ translation in some language of wider communication (e.g., English, French, Spanish, Swahili, etc.) and then work from there into the TL? This of course is the ‘easy way out’, and many translation teams operate that way in order to cut costs and the time needed to complete their work.<sup>55</sup> But such a policy does not demonstrate what Nord

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<sup>54</sup> As enjoined also in Ps. 45:18, ‘[t]he songs of praise regularly invite a world-encompassing congregation to praise God’ (McCann 2012:288)—a call that occasionally extends to all creation (e.g., Ps. 98:7-9).

<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, it must certainly be admitted that not every translator or team is artistically *competent* enough to translate literature well, poetry in particular. As John Dryden observed, ‘A man [sic] should be a nice critic in his mother tongue before he attempts to translate a foreign language. Neither is it sufficient that he be able to judge of words and style; but he must be a master of them too. He must perfectly understand his author’s tongue, and absolutely command his own; so that to be a thorough

(1997:125) terms sufficient ‘loyalty’ to—and, we might add, also *respect* for—the original author-composer of the source text, particularly in the case of a sacred, ‘high value’ corpus such as the Hebrew Scriptures.

First of all then, translators must convince themselves of this fact—namely, the excellent literary, indeed ‘oratorical’, quality of the biblical text (Wendland 2004:272–276). And the only way to do this is by means of a careful linguistic *and literary* analysis of the source document in order to reveal the diverse artistic, aural, rhetorical, and musical (or melodic) properties of the text which effectively complement its semantic content.<sup>56</sup> Such comprehensive study will both motivate and encourage them to seek to reproduce a stylistically corresponding ‘transposed’ version,<sup>57</sup> that is, an ‘analogical

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translator, he must be a thorough poet...to give his author’s sense in good English, in poetical expressions, and in musical numbers [i.e., style]’ (from ‘Preface’ to *Ovid’s Epistles* [1680], cited in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006:148).

In my experience I have found that this practical point cannot be taken for granted: an expert ST analyst (exegete) does not always (or even usually) make a proficient translator, especially in the case of a poetic text.

<sup>56</sup> In this respect, such a TL oriented procedure would correspond well with the position of the eminent 20<sup>th</sup> C. translator and critic, Ezra Pound, who was ‘one of the most important figures in the history of translation into English’ (Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006:271). Pound renounced the negative translation attitude that ‘poetry is what is lost in translation’. Furthermore, he rejected ‘a stilted dialect in translation...which imitates the idiom of the ancients’ in favor of an approach that gave ‘care for the beauty of the original...and the meaning’ via free verse in modern English (from ‘Notes on Elizabethan Classics’ [1917], cited in *ibid.*:275). That corresponds to my aim in resorting to Chewa traditional oral and modern written models for use in selected (‘special audience’) translations of Scripture. The American poet W. S. Merwin warns that the ‘musical [formal] elements’ of poetry ‘embedded in the original language’ normally cannot be reproduced in a formally correspondent translation. ‘You can torment your own language in repeating them, but even if you do, you’re not going to get the form doing in your language what it did in the original’ (from his ‘Foreword’ to *Selected Translations 1968-1978* [1980], cited in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006:466). Only a functionally equivalent rendition will do.

<sup>57</sup> According to the brilliant Russian literary theorist, linguist, and translator Roman Jakobson, ‘In poetry, verbal equations become a constructive principle of the text. . . . [Therefore,] poetry by definition is untranslatable. Only *creative transposition* is possible...’ (from ‘On Linguistic Aspects of Translation’ [1959], cited in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006:335, italics added).

form<sup>58</sup> or a *re*-presentation of the original,<sup>59</sup> in their mother tongue (all other conditions being equal—e.g., project funding and support, translator competence and experience, target audience desire and expectations, etc.). This would also be what the Czech Structuralist Jirí Levy figuratively terms an ‘illusionist version’—namely, one that offers to the intended audience an ‘illusion’, or mental image of the original text by retaining its principal aesthetic features through the use of equivalent devices in the target language.<sup>60</sup> And yet this ‘illusion’ must also be sufficiently *phonic* in nature—‘a new music’ that adequately echoes the original (Back 2014).<sup>61</sup>

But what confronts us when we read most versions in the major languages today? Generally speaking, most aurally-discerning English-speaking respondents are not very much impressed by the literary (let alone oratorical) properties of the many Bible translations that are available.<sup>62</sup> Even more ‘literary’ renditions often fall far short of the mark of excellence set by the original—the *Revised English Bible*, for example (v. 2, with several potentially problematic points underlined):

MY heart is astir with a noble theme;  
in honour of a king I recite the song I have composed,  
and my tongue runs swiftly like the pen of an expert scribe.

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<sup>58</sup> In the usage of James Holmes this is ‘a form that [fills] a parallel function [as that of the ST within] the poetic tradition of the target language’ (cited in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006:461).

<sup>59</sup> The latter is the explicit aim of the late Indian poet, A. K. Ramanujan: ‘One walks a tightrope between the *To-language* and the *From-language*, in a double loyalty. A translator is an “artist on oath”. Sometimes one may succeed only in *re*-presenting a poem, not in closely representing it’ (from *The Collected Essays* [1999], cited in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006:479, added italics). Of course, in the case of the Scriptures, the *priority* must necessarily be fixed upon the essential content (including intent) of the original text over and above its various literary (linguistic) forms. For Ps. 45 rendered dynamically and in the form of an English sonnet, see Boerger 2009:73.

<sup>60</sup> From *Umeni precladu* [‘The Art of Translation’, 1963] cited in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006:339.

<sup>61</sup> For a study of the emotive lyrics of the Psalter as compared with those of modern Western rock music, see Goodman 2012, especially ch. 2 in relation to Ps. 45.

<sup>62</sup> The ESV, cited in section 1, for example, claims that its highly literal rendition maintains ‘clarity of expression and literary excellence’ (2001:viii). I wonder how many lyric-critical respondents would support that assertion, especially after hearing only an oral articulation of the text.

Contemporary readers and especially hearers of the text of Scripture must certainly wonder (if they take the time to reflect about it): precisely where is that ‘skillful tongue’ that the psalmist lauds here? The translation that they are currently reading (or hearing) certainly does not sound so sweet, at least not in their language. The same sort of reaction is all too common in vernaculars all over the world today—if people are honest enough to admit it. For example, here is how v. 2 sounds in back-translation from the old (1922), but still very popular Chewa (Nyanja) Protestant ‘missionary’ version (formatted below as published):

*My heart overflows with a lovely thing:  
I say (am referring to) what I have composed of/about a chief/king:  
My tongue is a ‘pen’ that is quick to write.*

This rendering is neither ‘lovely’ in terms of Chewa stylistic poetic form nor intelligible with regard to what is meant. The translators were apparently too ‘quick to write’ down what they thought the text should say in the vernacular. In fact, they undoubtedly thought (cf. Wendland 1998:ch.1) that a more formally correspondent, ‘foreignized’ rendition was more accurate and closer to the ‘truth’ of the original text.<sup>63</sup> The result (in back-translation) indicates that just the opposite is the case.

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<sup>63</sup> The obvious lack of contemporary communicativeness of this older Chewa version (and many others like it in southeastern Africa) would contradict L. Venuti’s promotion of such ‘foreignized’ versions and their alleged sociocultural value, at least with reference to the ‘reading experience’ of most Bible users of this region: ‘Foreignizing translation signifies the difference of the foreign text [i.e., Hebrew], yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language [i.e., Chewa]. In its efforts to do right abroad, this translation method must do wrong at home [i.e., with reference to Schleiermacher’s familiar translation dictum], deviating from native norms to stage an alien reading experience’ (Venuti 1993, cited in Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 2006:548). It is interesting that Schleiermacher himself, when referring to such a translation that ‘has been bent toward a foreign likeness’, must aim ‘to do this *artfully* and with measure, *without disadvantage* to one’s own language or oneself’ (from ‘On the Different Methods of Translating’ [1813], cited in Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 2006:208, added italics).

In this section I will just briefly (due to space restrictions) propose a number of ways<sup>64</sup> in which a contemporary Chewa translation might be fashioned in order to express a closer literary (oratorical) ‘functional equivalent’ of Psalm 45 (Wendland 2004:12–14).<sup>65</sup> My suggestions will relate to the topics of the ‘seven rhetorical-poetic features’ of the Hebrew text that were outlined above, with special emphasis on those that involve the sound dimension of discourse.<sup>66</sup> When translating the poetry of any language there must be, as Eugene A. Nida pointed out years ago, ‘obviously a greater focus of attention upon formal [stylistic] elements than one normally finds in prose’.<sup>67</sup> If so in secular literature, how much more so in sacred Scripture, such as the Psalter, which

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<sup>64</sup> My suggestions in this section may be compared with the more general recommendations concerning how to investigate TL poetic and oratorical forms found in Schrag 2013:140-144.

<sup>65</sup> Having written this proposal, I am reminded of John Dryden’s caution: ‘No man is capable of translating poetry who, besides a genius to that art, is not a master both of his author’s language and of his own’ (from the ‘Preface’ to *Ovid’s Epistles* [1680], cited in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006:146). I can consider myself to be a ‘genius’ neither in the ‘art’ of poetic discourse nor the mastery of the Hebrew (Ps. 45) and Chewa languages. Therefore, the translation suggestions that follow are very much open to critique and correction. Dryden has many other insightful comments about the craft and qualities of translation. He preferred the method of ‘paraphrase’, which he defined as ‘translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense, and that too is admitted to be amplified [especially in poetry], but not altered. . . . [For] the sense of an author, generally speaking, is to be sacred and inviolable. . . . [On the other hand], a good poet [as in the case of the author of Ps. 45] is no more like himself in a dull translation, than his carcass would be to his living body’ (ibid.:145, 147).

<sup>66</sup> For my ‘sound-sensitive’ revision of *The Voice* translation, a modern version that caters for oral articulation, see the Appendix.

<sup>67</sup> Nida 1964, cited in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006:347. This is because ‘the content of a message can never be completely abstracted from the form . . . [therefore] a lyric poem translated as prose is not an adequate equivalent of the original’ in most languages (ibid.:loc.cit.). Similarly, but in somewhat more detail, the Victorian translation critic C.S. Blackie observes: ‘The reader of a translated [poetic] work is entitled to demand a facsimile of the original; but *only in so far as is consistent with the grammatical and rhythmical genius of the language in which the translation is made*. Now what is included in that wide word the GENIUS of a language? It includes two things essentially different [. . .] in the first place and principally, whatever belongs organically to the grammatical and metrical *structure* of the language; and in the second place, whatever belongs by use and habit and association to the characteristic *style* and peculiar living expression of the language’ (from ‘A Few Remarks on English Hexameters’ [1856], cited in Weissbort and Eysteinsson 2006:223, original italics).

is meant to be articulated and accessed *aloud*, in communal worship. The problem is that most translations teams (projects) have not been constituted or commissioned with this inherent situational requirement in mind.

#### **4.1 Patterned organization**

The text of the old Chewa translation (*Buku Lopatulika* ‘Book Set-apart’) is not subdivided into meaningful paragraph segments at all. Rather, it consists of an intimidating sequence of individual verse units, all confined within a single narrow column of justified print. It is necessary, therefore, to assist readers—and through them hearers as well—to format the text in a way that gives them certain clues concerning the patterned structural organization of the original. In the case of Psalm 45, this would include the major divisions of an introduction (vv. 1–2), two principal stanzas (3–10, 11–16), and a conclusion (17–18). It may be helpful to insert the minor strophic (poetic paragraph) units as well since they reflect some important distinctions with regard to topic, tone, mood, implication, and so forth, e.g., for stanza one: vv. 3–6 and 7–10.

For certain more sophisticated readers, the format and typography of the text may be modified or enhanced further in order to display significant parallels (whether correspondences or contrasts) and high (peak) points. Indentation (to varying degrees), might be employed, for example, to distinguish this psalm’s author-oriented introduction and conclusion, or its chiastically-constructed, covenantal thematic core (vv. 7–8), while the use of different typefaces can draw attention to critical utterances in the discourse—boldface print, for example, to highlight the pair of passages that bring ‘God’ into a description of the character of the ‘king’ (and, significantly, are later cited in Hebrew 1:8–9). Most modern versions also feature brief headings, or titles, to indicate a psalm’s overall theme and sub-points, in Chewa, for example: ‘A song for the king/chief’s wedding’ (*Nyimbo ya pa ukwati wa mfumu*), followed by ‘Words concerning the king’ (*Mau okhudza mfumu*, vv. 3–10), ‘Words concerning the queen’ (*Mau okhudza mfumukazi*, vv. 11–16), and ‘Concluding words’ (*Mau omaliza*, vv. 17–18).

#### **4.2 Sonic effect**

A few general features involve the poetic phonology in conjunction with the text format referred to above. Thus, in the case of Hebrew poetry it is important to reflect the parallel



(half-)lines as clearly as possible.<sup>68</sup> In published versions, this normally requires a *single column* of unjustified print on the page—not the daunting, double blocks of justified text that characterize most (English) Bibles today. The latter oft-intimidating format frequently results in lines that are broken in awkward (non-meaningful) places along with excessive hyphenation (as illustrated by the Chewa sample given earlier). These are purely formal, typographical principles that can be applied no matter what the style of translation happens to be, whether more or less literal or idiomatic.

But the ‘sound effects’ of a given version may be either augmented (to correspond with the Hebrew text) or diminished, depending on the type of the translation (as stipulated by its production ‘brief’). In any case, it demands a special effort—and a good deal of poetic expertise!—to render the Psalms in a manner that does justice to their original sonic significance, that is, with rhythmic, euphonious utterances that have aural impact and aesthetic appeal. This phonological feature is what Ezra Pound termed ‘melopoeia’, wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the trend or bearing of that meaning’.<sup>69</sup> In particular, translators would want to stylistically mark those passages that are distinguished somehow in the Hebrew source text, whether in terms of poetic form, thematic content, and/or rhetorical function.

The inaugural verse two of Psalm 45 is an obvious candidate for such attention, as already noted. The old Chewa version, reproduced in back-translation above, certainly leaves much to be desired. The following is a revised (re-shaped and poetically ‘sharpened’) rendition of a more recent ‘popular-language’ version (*Buku Loyera* ‘Holy Book’, 1996); in this case, the actual vernacular text is reproduced for verbal (oral-aural) reference and critical evaluation:

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<sup>68</sup> It may be noted that in Chewa poetic discourse, such parallel phrasing is quite natural, even called for, depending on the text’s particular theme, mood, medium of transmission, and the sociocultural setting of presentation.

<sup>69</sup> From ‘How to Read’ (1929), cited in Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 2006:285. The American poet, critic, publisher, and translator Stanley Burnshaw called a poem ‘a work of sonal art’ (in ‘The Poem Itself’ [1960], cited in *ibid.*:361). He further proposed providing a literary commentary for a poetic text ‘aimed at enabling the reader [presumably hearers too!] both to *understand* the poem and to begin to *experience* it as a poem’ (*ibid.*:loc.cit., original italics).

*Wadzazatu mtima wanga ndi nkhani yokomadi.*

It's filled to the brim my heart with this lovely theme.

*Nditi ndiimbire mfumu yathu nyimbo yangayi.*

I propose to sing for our king/chief this song of mine.

*Lilime langali liri thwa! lofunitsa kulankhula,*

My own tongue is *very-sharp!* so eager to speak,

*Lifanafana ndi katswiri wodziwa kulembadi!*

It resembles an expert who really knows how to write!

The rhythmic, phonological qualities of this poetically-enhanced version should be audible, at least in part, even to those who do not speak Chewa. It is not governed by any sort of fixed metrical scheme based on accents,<sup>70</sup> but depends rather on a lexically-constituted 'utterance rhythm', that is, the sonically shaped, tactically patterned combination of related clauses and phrasal (open) syllable sequences. This is the first step towards an actual musical rendition of Psalm 45, which would match the original even more closely in terms of stylistic form and communicative intent.<sup>71</sup>

### 4.3 Dynamic speech

The first step in creatively dealing with the 'dynamic speech' of the biblical text in translation is to search for a functionally-equivalent, oral-aural genre of discourse in the 'target language' (TL). In Africa this is not usually a problem because most cultures of this continent can boast of an ancient and still vibrant tradition of oral art forms, including folk narratives, histories, myths, legends, riddles, proverbs, songs, and various kinds poetry, including royal 'praise verse'. Often these traditional oral genres extend their life, albeit in a somewhat modified form, in the extensive vernacular literatures that have developed both during the colonial age and in post-independence years.

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<sup>70</sup> 'Rhythm in English poetry is based on the varying recurrence of strong and weaker stresses; but Chichewa does not have variable stress, so the achievement of a rhythm effect must be based on different factors, such as a number of syllables, length of words, the penultimate length characteristic of words or groups of words' (Kishindo 2003:351).

<sup>71</sup> For some helpful guidance towards this goal, see Schrag 2013:148-150.

Among the Chewa people, for example, a multifaceted, oral and written genre of lyric poetry (*ndakatulo*) is available for use when translating various types of biblical ‘poetic’ discourse, including the Psalter.<sup>72</sup> *Ndakatulo* ‘free verse’ lyrics feature rhythmic lineation, vivid imagery (including emphatic evocative predications, or ‘ideophones’), syntactic transposition (for focus and emphasis), phonesthetic appeal (alliteration, punning, rhyme, etc.), deictic specification, formal and semantic condensation or expansion, lexical intensification, rhetorical questions, and synonymous reiteration (Wendland 2004:330–336).<sup>73</sup>

A sample of *ndakatulo* poetry was given above (Ps. 45:2). Another instance is the following rendition of this psalm’s final, climactic verse (18):

*Mbiri yanuyo ndidzaibukitsadi kumibadwo yonse.*

This reputation of yours I’ll surely broadcast it to all generations.

*Motero azikukumbukirani, inde, amitundu yonse—*

In this way they must remember you, yes, those of all nations—

*adzata mande dzina lanu lokomali kwa muyayaya!*

They will praise your pleasant name (or character) forever-and-ever!

At the very minimum, it would seem appropriate to employ such a manifestly poetic style (assuming functional proximity also in terms of illocutionary force) for the key verses of a given psalm (or any corresponding biblical pericope). This would normally embrace passages that mark major structural boundaries within the text (aperture or closure), those serving to signal a peak point with regard to the psalm’s principal theme(s) or theological content, and those that express the psalmist’s deepest feelings

<sup>72</sup> According to Kishindo, ‘[p]oetry is by far the most popular literary genre in Malawi’ (ibid.:351).

<sup>73</sup> The French poet Yves Bonnefoy emphasized the three important principles that ‘poetry is form as well as meaning’, that this meaning ‘is already determined’ by ‘the intent of the author’, and that ‘free verse’ is a ‘way of approaching the musicality of language’ in the translation of poetry (from ‘On the Translation of Form in Poetry’ [1979], cited in Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 2006:467–468). This approach stands in contrast to the procedure of Everett Fox in *The Five Books of Moses* who, while giving ‘careful attention to rhythm and sound’ seeks to ‘mimic the particular rhetoric of the Hebrew whenever possible’ (from the ‘Translator’s Preface’ [1995], cited in Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 2006:563). My attention too is focused rather on the indigenous Chewa poetic tradition, both oral and written, to serve as a *model* for a literary re-expression of the original.

and attitudes, whether positive or negative in tone (e.g., the strophic *aperture* of v. 7a). Furthermore, the speaker (author)-intended implication of the text must always be unambiguously expressed, for example, in the ‘descriptive praise’ of v. 7b, the implicit imperative needs to be conveyed, for example, through the use of a ‘habitual present’ (-ma-) tense (*m’ufumu wanuwu mumaweruza molungama*– ‘in this kingdom of yours, you [always/regularly] judge justly’), rather than by a more remote ‘future’ tense (‘you will judge...’).

#### 4.4 Figurative language

In some instances a biblical figure will find a close correspondent in the TL, e.g., the metonymic ‘tongue’ (לִשְׁוֹן) in Chewa with reference to ‘speech’ in v. 2. At other times, formally less proximate equivalents will be needed, like the king’s ‘mouth’ rather than his literal ‘lips’ (שִׁפְתָּי) in v. 3. The root metaphor of the ‘king’ (chief) and associated imagery, as surveyed above, would naturally be familiar in many regions of Africa, though some ethnic groups (e.g., the Tonga of southern Zambia) do not in fact have a strong royal tradition. In the third strophe of the first stanza, the images shift to those connected with the wedding of some wealthy person, and these too would not be very difficult to convey in a meaning-orientated translation.

The main issue that translators must confront with regard to figurative usage is the degree to which they will use local cultural equivalents for the specific items found in the biblical text. In many cases, the correspondence is rather close, e.g., ‘long knife’ (*lupanga*) for a ‘sword’ (חֶרֶב) in v. 4; ‘chief’s stick’ (*ndodo yachifumu*) for ‘scepter’ (שֵׁבֶט) in v. 7; or ‘[castor-bean] oil’ (*mafuta ansatsi*) for the ‘[olive] oil’ (שֶׁמֶן) of ceremonial anointing in v. 8. In other cases, however, either transliterations or indigenous correspondents must be employed. This decision becomes especially important in v. 9, for example, where the imagery also involves olfactory stimulation in the specific aromatic oils that are mentioned, ‘myrrh and aloes and cassia’ (מִרְיָאֵה לְוָיֹת קַצְיֹעוֹת). The old Chewa Bible tried a local substitute for ‘aloes’; unfortunately, it was the wrong choice, for *khonje* is a homonymic term that refers either to a ‘sisal plant’ or a ‘bunch of bananas’! The new Chewa version made use of three transliterations (*mure, aloe ndi kasiya*), which would be unknown to most listeners, but at least the text has marked the overall sense

impression intended by preceding the foreign terms with the generic qualifier *zonunkhira* ‘sweet-smelling things’.

#### 4.5 Contextual reference

In the case of the final three aspects of the poetic-rhetorical dimension of biblical discourse (in the Psalms and elsewhere), we move from a focus on the translated text to its accompanying *paratext* and the challenge of constructing a cognitive ‘frame of reference’ sufficient to guide and enrich the text’s interpretation (cf. Wilt & Wendland 2008:23–101). To be sure, there are quite a few contextual correspondences between the content conveyed in Psalm 45 and the world-view and way of life of traditional Africa, e.g., the notion of kingship (chiefdom) and the high honor accorded this social position, including both verbal and ritualized ‘praises’. However, as noted above, there also are a number of concepts and customs, either stated explicitly in Ps. 45 or implied within its cognitive background, which are alien or unfamiliar to the Chewa people living in SE Africa today. A few of these notions would be completely foreign and hence unknown, such as the transferred reference (via the king) to God as a militaristic ‘divine warrior’ (vv. 4–6; cf. Ps. 18:14, 77:17; Hilber 2009:358), or the application of the title ‘God’ to earthly rulers (v. 7; cf. Ps. 82:6; Exod. 22:6), or the psalmist’s instruction to the bride to ‘forget your people and your *father’s* house’ (v. 11; the Chewa are traditionally matrilineal and matrilocal).<sup>74</sup> Other concepts, though initially not understood, might be necessarily clarified through explanation, for example, the king’s ‘riding’ in a victory parade (v. 5), the divine covenantal implications of his royal ‘scepter’ (v. 7),<sup>75</sup> the festive

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<sup>74</sup> In this same sociocultural setting the content of v. 12 might also prove somewhat problematic: ‘Then the king will be attracted by your beauty. After all, he is your master! Submit to him!’ (NET). The difficulty concerns especially the term ‘master/lord’ (מֶלֶךְ). ‘This verse offers a capsule version of a royal marriage in a patriarchal society’ (Alter 2007:160). The NET provides this short explanatory note: ‘The poet here makes the point that the young bride is obligated to bring pleasure to her new husband. Though a foreign concept to modern western culture, this was accepted as the cultural norm in the psalmist’s day.’

<sup>75</sup> For a detailed study of the spiritual significance associated with the שֶׁטֶף, especially when combined with ‘righteousness’ (צִדִּיק), v. 8, see Oliver 1979; Johnson 1967:3-9, 35-37. The corresponding traditional Chewa ‘royal staff’ (*ndodo yachifumu*) was similar in certain respects, but much more magical in its implication and application, that is, according to traditional African religious beliefs.

wearing of perfumed robes (v. 9), fine gold that originates in ‘Ophir’ (v. 10b),<sup>76</sup> or the significance of the merchant city of ‘Tyre’ (v. 13, which has nothing to do with today’s ubiquitous vehicle ‘tyres’!).

In all of these cases of potential ambiguity or obscurity then, the necessary cognitive framework for understanding the text can normally be provided, at least in part, through explicatory and descriptive footnotes, supplemented when and where possible by an occasional illustration, diagram, or photograph, for example, of the ‘stringed instruments’ (מִנְיָן) of v. 9b.<sup>77</sup> The process of effective footnoting cannot be taken for granted, however, and often requires just as much scholarly, coupled with solicited community reflection and input as the translation itself (Wendland 2004:370–379). Furthermore, just as in the case of the translation, these auxiliary materials need to be composed with an ‘ear’ to how they will sound aloud. Such an audio-oriented procedure will help to ensure that the text does not become too complicated for the intended audience to mentally ‘process’, and it may also serve as the basis for an actual oral rendition of the translation (via CD, MP3, radio, etc.)—that is, the vernacular version supplemented in some discrete way by oralized paratextual helps (e.g., through vocally distinct ‘asides’).

#### 4.6 ‘Semantic density’

To a certain degree, this poetic feature overlaps with the preceding one (contextual reference) in terms of the way it might be handled in a modern translation. Thus, several possible areas of ‘semantic density’ were pointed out in Psalm 45 in the earlier discussion of this topic, most of them having to do with some potential divine implication, whether in reference to God and Israel, or to the promised Messiah and the NT people of God. Since this has been such a prominent aspect of this psalm in the history of the text’s interpretation, it is only fair that readers and hearers today, in whatever language, are

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<sup>76</sup> It is quite possible that the ‘gold of Ophir’ (בְּכֶתֶם אוֹפִיר) has both a literal as well as a figurative reference here. It is ‘no doubt decorative, but again the poet has taken the visual element of gold and applied it, by implication, to the inner worth of the princess’ (Craigie 1983:340).

<sup>77</sup> Some familiar local ‘stringed instrument’ might well be depicted, especially here where ‘[i]t is not clear what sort of instrument [the Hebrew term, emended from *minni* to *minnim*, cf. Ps. 150:4] refers to except as a generic term for strings’ (Walton et. al. 2000:528).



made a part of the ongoing hermeneutical conversation leading to locally contextualized homiletical insights, theological reflections, and contemporary moral-ethical applications.

Most ‘ordinary’ lay listeners, however, will not discern this interpretive option in the vernacular texts available to them, whether the older or more recent versions. For this reason an annotated ‘study Bible’ is being prepared by the Bible Society of Malawi in order to serve this purpose—first in written form, but with the ear of a future audience also in mind. Perhaps the greatest need in Psalm 45 is for the three references to ‘God’ to be clarified in verses 7–8, first of all, in terms of the overt meaning of the text as it reads (and is heard), and then also with reference to a possible ‘second meaning’ (as C.S. Lewis has termed it, in Craigie 1983:340; Van Gemeren 1991:45). Such additional theological significance, for example, applied to praising ‘your name’ (שְׁמֶךָ) in v. 18 (the king > God), cannot justifiably be incorporated within the translation, or even asserted in a note as being actually intended by the original court poet, but only as a transferred sense that has accumulated for this psalm by virtue of thematic ‘attraction’ from related passages in the Psalter (e.g., Ps. 89:26–29) and other books of the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., 2 Sam. 7:14–16, 20:8; Isa. 9:6, 11:4–5).

#### **4.7 Pervasive intertextuality**

The preceding discussion brings up once again the importance of careful cross-referencing as a supplementary device to aid in the interpretation of any contemporary translation. The aim is to suggest how one text relates to, or depends upon another for its ultimate canonical understanding, both within a given pericope like Psalm 45 and within the sacred corpus of Scripture as a whole, for example, Hebrews 1:8–9 as developed from Ps. 45:7–8. Especially prominent correspondences like that of v. 8 will probably require more extensive explanation in a footnote—namely, the conjoining of ‘loving righteousness’ (אַהֲבַת צְדָקָה) and ‘God’s anointing you’ (מְשַׁחֲךָ אֱלֹהִים), i.e., his royal

‘son’ (Ps. 2:2, 7; cf. Pss. 1:6; 72:1-3;<sup>78</sup> Isa. 61:1-3).<sup>79</sup> Another potential Messianic allusion is discernable in vv. 4-6, which depicts the conquering king riding forth to victory over enemies from all ‘nations’—a text that is undoubtedly echoed at multiple points in John’s apocalyptic vision of the glorious ‘King of Kings’ (Rev. 19:11-16).<sup>80</sup>

A ‘careful’, selective, or discriminating referencing procedure is needed, however, so that the paratext is not overburdened with passages, many of which have only a tenuous semantic relationship with the text under scrutiny, for example, the topic of ‘blessing’ (v. 3), ‘majesty’ (v. 4), ‘right hand’ (v. 5), or ‘the nations’ (v. 6). Too many minimal ‘clues’ and referential ‘red herrings’ will only result in an overly diffuse, perhaps even misleading interpretation, or they may simply discourage readers from using the cross-reference system at all.

Again, the issue of implementing such intertextual orientation in a non-print, audio version of the Scriptures may be considered. Various potential solutions are available, however, for incorporating such meaningful verbal resonances aurally in a manner that is not disruptive or distracting in relation to a particular verse of the translation. In fact, this supplementary resource may even be easier to include in a purely vocal version due to the flexible signaling value of different features of sound—from distinctive human voices to the use of music, song, or other acoustic indicators (e.g., a gong, chime, cymbal, drum beat, etc.). In an audio-visual presentation of course, even more options are accessible for revealing semantic ‘relevance’ and the conceptually echoing, richly intertextual nature of the current biblical text.

## 5. Conclusion

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<sup>78</sup> In Ps. 72:1 the verb is ‘give’ (תָּן) (to) ‘the king...royal son’ (בֶּן-מֶלֶךְ...מֶלֶךְ) instead of ‘anoint’ (מָשַׁח) him as in Ps. 45:8, but the sense and significance is the same. In any case, the key verb ‘anoint’ (מָשַׁח) in such contexts (God/YHWH—king) always has Messianic significance in the Psalter (Craghan 1985:91).

<sup>79</sup> Note also the ‘mighty one/warrior’ (גִּבּוֹר) of v. 4b), cf. Isaiah 9:6.

<sup>80</sup> This may be coupled with a corresponding passage that depicts the ‘all-glorious’ (כָּל-כְּבוֹדָהּ) appearance of the well-dressed royal bride on her wedding day (vv. 14-16), which also bears several interesting similarities with Revelation 19 and the beloved ‘Bride’ of the Messianic Lamb (19:6-9; cf. 21:2).

‘In Psalm 45, the poet likens the composition and oral performance of this song (his “tongue”) to the “pen” of a skillful scribe, a song of beauty befitting the occasion of the king’s wedding’ (Hilber 2009:357). That is construing this lyrical piece more or less on its literal, ‘face’ (or ‘ear’!) value in relation to its original ANE extralinguistic setting. But as many subsequent commentators have observed, ‘in the postmonarchical period this “good saying” for a king’s wedding was read by some as a messianic text,’ while ‘others likely found in it an allegory of the relation between God and the people of God’ (Mays 1994:181–182; cf. Hos. 1—3 , Jer. 2, Ezek. 16, Is. 62:1–5). By the time of the later NT writings (e.g., Heb. 1:8–9) it is clear that the divine-human allegorical reference has been narrowed through intertextual reflection to embrace the relationship between Christ and his Church (Calvin 1949:173; Craigie 1983:341; cf. Whybray 1996:91–92). Attridge (2004:202) notes:

Heb. 1:8 derives from [a] royal psalm (45:7-8), a celebration of a royal marriage. . . . Psalm 45 at the very least offers evidence of the superiority of the addressee, anointed with the ‘oil of gladness beyond your fellows’. . . . The most significant contribution rests on syntactic ambiguity in its reference to God [45:7b]. The nominative form *ho theos* could be used as a vocative, as in frequent in the LXX and New Testament. In fact, there is evidence in Jewish tradition [i.e., the targum on this psalm, Attridge 1989:58, n. 93] that the reference to God was so construed.

The text thus develops a ‘typological significance’ (VanGemeren 1991:343) regarding the Messiah’s royal sovereignty and also his loving ‘truth, humility, and righteousness’ (v. 4, NIV).<sup>81</sup> Even in the realm of purely human interpersonal relationships, Psalm 45 held great import for the people of Israel: ‘Not only the king’s

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<sup>81</sup> We note here that the key terms ‘humility’ and ‘righteousness’ are actually two nouns in apposition with each other, or in a construct relationship, as indicated by the conjoining hyphen (*maqṣēf*) (Harman 2011:367). ‘[The people of Israel] understood that that glory of the throne of Israel reflected the glory of God to the world. In this time God’s glory does not depend on any earthly throne. However, it is reflected directly in the glory of the messianic throne to which this psalm implicitly and explicitly (in verse 6) refers. The glory of the Messiah is the very glory of God himself, and to praise the Messiah is to praise God. This is what takes place here [in Psalm 45]’ – (<http://www.sonsofkorah.com/> > Music > Commentaries; website accessed on June 30, 2013). The challenge of accomplishing this goal in a corresponding musical translation awaits all ‘sons (and daughters) of Korah’ (בְּנֵי־קֹרַח) today (e.g., the Australian CCM band that goes by this name).

prosperity and well-being, but his character and spiritual privileges as well were to be shared by all the community of believers' (Patterson 1985:46).

Perhaps the conceptual linguistic approach known as 'mental-space theory' might lend some support to our reading more theological 'meaning' into Psalm 45 than the literal surface of the text and its assumed context would allow. I cannot go into detail here on this methodology (cf. Wendland 2011:367-376), but the following is a brief description of its essential components (ibid.:368; cf. de Bruyn 2013:193-194; Grady 2007:190-192, 198-201; Fauconnier 2007:351-354).<sup>82</sup>

The prototypical cognitive network is composed of four *mental spaces*...There is one space for each of two 'input' domains: The *source* (or base) is 'given,' or already known information, while the *target* (or focus) is the topic currently being referred to in a verbal text—one that 'triggers' an accessing of the source domain. A third, *generic*, space assimilates all of the abstract notions and components of meaning that are common to both source and target domains and conceptually available, or 'accessible,' in a particular communicative context. Most important is the blend—a 'virtual' domain in which the mind selectively 'activates,' incorporates, and integrates salient information (perceptually relevant cognitive elements and relations) that originated from the two initial input spaces.

Based on the prior analysis of Psalm 45 then, it is possible to identify two major socioreligious 'target' domains, or 'frames of reference' (Wendland 2008:2-16), that fuel and influence the text's overall content. Both of these involve the conceptual, [human] body-oriented metaphor of SPACE (i.e., AUTHORITY IS UP) as superimposed upon the interrelated sociocultural frames of *kingship* and *marriage*. The latter involves an ANE royal wedding with the focal participants being an Israelite/Judean king (higher) and his bride (lower); the other conceptual frame involves the king (a 'son', lower) and his God, Yahweh (i.e., 'father', higher). The 'source' domain, or mental 'space' may be construed (limited, for the purpose of this exercise) as embracing two books, the Psalter

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<sup>82</sup> Analogous to 'intertextuality' (cf. 3.7), we might term this 'interconceptuality'.

and Isaiah (this can be expanded later to the entire Hebrew Bible as well as to extant ANE royal poetry).<sup>83</sup>

The ‘generic’ space then encompasses all of the texts in these books that reference or allude to a ‘king’, ‘kingship/rule’, ‘wedding/marriage’, ‘king/God’ (‘father/son’), ‘worship/praise’, and ‘Zion’ (the sacred place as well as the people who assemble there).<sup>84</sup> Within this limited corpus we find a number of cognitively ‘active’ passages, which would form close intertextual connections potentially linking propositions such as these (*the following representative sample of seven principles is listed merely for the purpose of illustration*):

- God/Father installs/anoints his son/Son as king (Pss. 2:2, 6-7; 45:3, 7; 72:1, 18-19; 110:1).
- This kingship is potentially universal in time (Pss. 45:7; 72:5, 17; 110:4) and space, a rule over all earthly nations (Pss. 2:8; 45:6; 72:8-11; 110:6).
- The divinely-appointed/installed king must rule righteously, with perfect covenantal ‘faithfulness’ and ‘justice’ (Pss. 45:5, 7-8; 72:1-4, 7, 12-14; Isa. 9:6-7, 11:1-5).

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<sup>83</sup> With regard to interpreting the latter corpus, there may be some controversy. For example, one opinion is that ‘Psalms directed *to the king rather than to the deity* are common in the ancient Near East...’ (Walton et. al. 2000:528, added italics). On the other hand, one wonders whether this distinction was actually made: ‘While *other ancient Near Eastern cultures viewed the king as divine*, and while Israel certainly accorded the king special relatedness to God (see Ps 2:7), it is not likely that Israelite or Judean kings were viewed as divine...’ (McCann 1996:862, added italics). A mediating position might be this: ‘[A]lthough Mesopotamians occasionally depicted their king as a deity, they tended to construe him as a divine representative’ (*Archaeological Study Bible* 2005:839). In Israel, however, ‘Yahweh...placed numerous constraints and moral requirements upon the king, and this is quite different from what we see elsewhere in the ancient Near East’ (ibid.:loc. cit.).

<sup>84</sup> ‘Zion’ (צִיּוֹן) is featured in Psalm 48, another royal praise ‘song’ by ‘the sons of Korah’, one that features a number of key lexical-semantic items in common with Psalm 45 (exact matches and synonyms): universal ‘praise’ for the king/God (45:18/48:1), ‘king/King’ (45:2/48:2), his ‘beautiful’ [bride/Zion] (45:12/48:2), everyone filled with ‘joy’ (45:15/48:2), enemies destroyed (45:6/48:4-7), God has blessed [the king] forever (45:3)/God makes [Zion] secure forever (48:8), ‘righteousness [in king’s/God’s] right hand’ (45:5/48:10), king’s/God’s throne/rule will last forever (45:7/48:14).

- Yahweh's chosen king/King will defeat all enemies and deliver his people to live in his upright, peace-filled Kingdom (Pss. **45:5-6**; 2:8-12; 46:9, 11; 47:3, 8; 48:4-7; Isa. 2:4; 4:5-6; 9:6-7; 11:4-5; 26:2-3; 49:8-10; 52:7-12).
- God/YHWH chooses faithful people to be his holy 'bride' (Ps. **45:10, 15** [implied]; Isa. 41:8-10, 60:7-11); like their Lord, they will serve him faithfully and righteously on earth (Ps. **45:11, 14** [implied]; Isa. 44:1-5, 21-22; 54:1-17; 60:10-11,).
- God/YHWH appoints both the royal son/Son as well as his bride to 'serve' vicariously as divine agents to bring justice to/on earth, for all peoples (Ps. **45:5, 7-8, 17-18**; Isa. 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 52:13-15; 53:11-12 + 54:1-10\*).
- This faithful, covenant-keeping God—Father, Son, Messiah, King—is surely worthy of our most excellent words of praise! (Pss. **45:2, 7, 17**; 47:1-2, 6; 48:1-2; 19:1-4, 14;<sup>85</sup> Isa. 12:1-6; 25:1, 9; 26:1-8; 49:13).

Within the 'blended' conceptual space that emerges from the preceding generic mix, some novel propositions would emerge in perceptive minds (i.e., those guided by an active *canonical* consciousness, or 'frame of reference') and in certain *contextual* (e.g., a Second Temple Jewish worship setting) as well as *cotextual* environments (augmented as more, conceptually relevant Scripture texts are accessed, both verbally and by way of memory):

- God's son, the king, is no ordinary human being, that is, in passages which describe his rule as clearly transcending the earthly and mundane; in such cases, this person may be viewed as the Lord's specially chosen Son-King-Servant—the *Messiah*.
- Yahweh's metaphorical 'wife', his holy people of Zion then, by divine association, may be identified as the Messiah's bride.
- Both entities, in turn, will be distinguished by their 'righteous' character and their 'just' behavior—in relation both to each other and also to the world at large within which they 'serve'.

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<sup>85</sup> Note the connection between 'tongue' (45:2) and 'mouth' (19:14) as metonymic instruments of the poet's words of praise to Yahweh.



- The appropriate faith-response of God’s people to the just and merciful rule of his anointed King is to ‘glorify’ (praise) him—*enthusiastically!*—in/with their hearts, speech, and lives.

Of course, it is only fair to acknowledge that such a mentally blended, secondary (symbolic) understanding is derived (or ‘downloaded’) in accordance with a certain ‘hermeneutical expectation’ that is based on one’s resident theological ‘world-view’ which influences one’s interpretation of key thematically related texts in the Psalter (e.g., Pss. 1-2, 72, 87, 110-111)<sup>86</sup> as well as in the Hebrew canon at large (e.g., Isaiah 2:3-4, 4:2-6, 46:12-13, 51:1-8, 52:7-10, 59:18-20, 62:1-12\*).

Whether the preceding ‘messianic’ and ‘ecclesiastical’ interpretation is accepted or not, it is clear that the long history of Jewish and Christian interpretation has plainly answered the ‘crucial question’: ‘Why was this seemingly secular psalm included in the book of Psalms?’ (McCann 1996:861; cf. Terrien 2003:367). Moreover, as we have seen, the text itself literally demands a more dynamic, memorable articulation and rendering, whether in the original or another language (cf. 45:2, 18). Therefore, it also behooves all Bible translators to give this composition the keen attention it deserves and hence to render its message accordingly—that is, not only *poetically* in terms of an artistic style, and *rhetorically* with regard to its prominent pragmatic implications, but also *oratorically*, maybe even *musically*, in view of how this ‘song’ was originally intended to be verbally expressed and publicly transmitted.

In conclusion: the text of Psalm 45—a ‘good word’ (טוֹב דְּבָר; LXX: λόγον ἀγαθόν) in the widest hermeneutical sense—deserves to be re-created in translation *regally*, as befitting both its central royal personage and its marriage theme involving a lovely (‘lily-

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<sup>86</sup> Note in these psalms the focal Father/God—Son/King relationship in/with the ‘joyful’ people of ‘Zion’, coupled with the notion of victory over enemies and an emphasis on ‘righteous’ behavior: 45:5, 7-8, 16 > Pss. 1:6; 2:5-9; 72 [‘for/of Solomon’]:1-17; 87:5-7; 110:1-4, 5-6; 111:3, 7-9.

like’!) ‘song of loves’ (שִׁיר יְדִידָת).<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, such a grand, emotively moving<sup>88</sup> pericope is undoubtedly meant to be rendered so that it may be communally proclaimed (declaimed, chanted, recited, sung)—perhaps even chorally performed—as would have been the case in the initial event. The goal for today’s translator ‘scribes’ would be to joyfully celebrate the marriage of a magnificent, majestic king (or *the* King!) (vv. 3-5) ‘with speech pouring forth grace’ (הוֹצֵק חֵן בְּשִׁפְתוֹתָיִךְ)—that is, by means of beautiful *sound* to complement the bountifully beneficent *sense* of the biblical text (see two contemporary efforts toward this end below). This tangible (language-based), poetic (artistic-rhetorical) dimension too undoubtedly derives from its original divine inspiration (v. 1)!<sup>89</sup>

לְמַדְנִי | לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹנֶךָ כִּי-אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי  
רוּחֲךָ טוֹבָה תַּנְחִינִי בְּאַרְץ מִשְׁוֹר:  
(Psalm 143:10)

רוּחִי אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיךָ וּדְבָרֵי אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַתִּי בְּפִיךָ  
לֹא-יִמְּוֹשׁוּ מִפִּיךָ וּמִפִּי זֶרַעְךָ  
(Isaiah 59:21)

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<sup>87</sup> According to the Victorian novelist, critic, and translator George Eliot, ‘The power required in the translation varies with the power exhibited in the original work’; the considerable semantic and artistic potency manifested in a poem such as Psalm 45 (and most others in the Psalter) therefore requires a corresponding ‘exceptional faculty and exceptional knowledge’ in those who would render it accurately as well as with equivalent effect and artistry in the TL (from Eliot’s ‘Translations and Translators’ [1855], cited in Weissbort and Eysteinnsson 2006:217).

<sup>88</sup> On the importance of discerning the language of emotions in the biblical text and rendering this effectively in translation, see Bailey 2013. “One of the most celebrated characteristics of artistic communication is its capacity to express and evoke emotion” (Schrag 2013:169).

<sup>89</sup> ‘[T]he canonical Scriptures bear evidence of their divine origin by their beauty, excellence, and perfection. . . . Obviously, part of the beauty and excellency of a book can be its harmony and unity or even its power and efficacy’ (Kruger 2012:127).

## 6. Appendix: Psalm 45 in *The Voice* and a Metrical Version

“Today's translations often present the Bible as a reference book filled with facts. *The Voice* expresses Scripture as a narrative with engaging conversations, passionate poetry, and beautiful literature. *The Voice* brings literary art to the Bible. This Bible lends itself to dramatic readings; first, because of the beauty of the language, and second, because of the unique acting-script format. It is the Good Book that reads like a good book. . . .

“By expressing the inspired text in the unique voices of the original biblical authors with all their personality, passion, grit, humor, and beauty, *The Voice* begins to recapture how the first readers would have encountered the Scripture. This results in an amplification of the voice of God so it is more clearly heard by today's readers - almost as clearly as when He first revealed His truth” (from *The Voice* website, <http://www.hearthevoice.com/about-the-translation> ).

Although ostensibly orally-oriented for public proclamation, in my opinion *The Voice* translation<sup>90</sup> might be still further improved in this specific acoustic respect (*its exegesis aside!*). On the next page a few of my suggestions are indicated, that is, shown side by side in a parallel chart with the original published version given for comparison. My main modification was an attempt to re-construct more rhythmic, cohesive, aurally-sensitive, and poetic-sounding lines and line-sets (formally ‘verses’; vocally ‘utterances’), which I would regard as a distinctive feature for poetry in English and many other languages. Readers (Listeners!) are welcome to improve upon these revisions and to propose their own. Note that *The Voice* italicizes words that are contextually implied; I have not followed this convention. However, putative strophic units are indicated by inserted line breaks. Following this chart I have reproduced a metrical version of Psalm 45 composed by Fred Anderson (*Singing God's Psalms*, Eerdmans, 2016, 69-71), which provides yet another vocal, now contextualized perspective on how the “noble theme” of the psalmist might be expressed in English.

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<sup>90</sup> *The Voice Bible*, Copyright © 2012 Thomas Nelson, Inc. The Voice™ translation © 2012 Ecclesia Bible Society. All rights reserved.  
<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm%2045&version=VOICE>

| <i>The Voice</i>                                                                                                                                                                                            | <i>A more vocalized 'Voice'</i>                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><i>For the worship leader. A contemplative song<sup>[a]</sup> of the sons of Korah to the tune "The Lilies."<sup>[b]</sup> A love song.</i></b>                                                          | <b><i>For the worship leader. A meditative song, by Korah's composers, set to the tune of "The Lilies." A love song.</i></b>                           |
| <sup>1</sup> My heart is bursting with a new song;<br>lyrics to my king <i>erupt like a spring</i><br>for my king, to my king;<br>my tongue is the pen of a poet, ready<br>and willing.                     | My heart is stirred with a sweet song—<br>lovely lyrics spring forth for my king;<br>my tongue is the skilled pen of a poet.                           |
| <sup>2</sup> Better by far are you than all others, <i>my king</i> ;<br>gracious words flow from your lips;<br>indeed, God has blessed you forever.                                                         | More handsome than all are you, my king.<br>Most eloquent are your words as well.<br>Clearly, our God has blessed you forever!                         |
| <sup>3</sup> With your sword at your side,<br>you are glorious, majestic,<br>a mighty warrior.                                                                                                              | Strap your sword to your side, mighty Warrior!<br>Let your glorious royal majesty appear.                                                              |
| <sup>4</sup> Ride on in splendor; ride into battle<br>victorious,<br>for the sake of truth, humility, and<br>justice.<br><i>Perform</i> awesome acts, trained by your<br><i>powerful</i> right hand.        | Ride forth majestically—to victory in battle!<br>Your great cause is truth, humility, justice.<br>May your power be seen in awesome deeds.             |
| <sup>5</sup> Razor-sharp arrows <i>leap from your bow</i><br>to pierce the heart of the king's foes;<br>they lie, defeated, before you. <sup>91</sup>                                                       | Sharp arrows spring from your bow;<br>they pierce the hearts of your enemies.<br>Look! They lie—fallen—at your feet!                                   |
| <sup>6</sup> O God, Your throne is eternal;<br>You will rule your kingdom with a<br>scepter of justice.                                                                                                     | O God, your royal throne is everlasting;<br>You rule your kingdom rightly—<br>your scepter is absolute integrity.                                      |
| <sup>7</sup> You have loved what is right and hated<br>what is evil.<br><br>That is why God, your God, has anointed you<br>with the oil of gladness and lifted you above<br>your companions. <sup>[c]</sup> | You love justice; all wickedness you hate.<br><br>That's why God has anointed you with joy.<br>Your God has raised you above all rivals. <sup>92</sup> |

<sup>91</sup> 'The choppy style reflects the poet's excitement' (NET note at v. 5).

<sup>92</sup> The 'oil' of line 2 is left implicit in 'anointed'. Hebrew 'companions' in line 3 is taken to refer to other kings; 'this king is distinguished from them by the fact that his character is different' (Harman 2011:368). Other exegetical options can be footnoted, e.g., 'all of your people' or 'wedding guests'.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><sup>8</sup> All of your clothing <i>is drenched in the rich scent of myrrh, aloes, and cassia</i>;<br/> In palaces decked out with ivory, <i>beautiful</i> stringed instruments play for your pleasure.</p> | <p>Your robes are perfumed with fragrant oils;<br/> your palaces are decked with precious ivory;<br/> stringed instruments play for your pleasure.</p>                                     |
| <p><sup>9</sup> <i>At a royal wedding</i> with the daughters of kings among the guests of honor,<br/> your bride-queen stands at your right,<br/> adorned in gold from Ophir.</p>                               | <p>Princesses are among your guests of honor,<br/> your bride stands at your royal right hand;<br/> she's a queen adorned in the purest gold.</p>                                          |
| <p><sup>10</sup> Hear this, daughter; pay close attention to what I am about to say:<br/> <i>you must</i> forget your people and <i>even</i> your father's house.</p>                                           | <p>Listen carefully now, my honored Queen—<br/> pay close attention to what I have to say:<br/> you must forget your people, your home.</p>                                                |
| <p><sup>11</sup> Because the king yearns for your beauty,<br/> humble yourself before him, for he is <i>now</i> your lord.</p>                                                                                  | <p>Let the king be captivated by your beauty;<br/> respect him, for he alone is now your lord.</p>                                                                                         |
| <p><sup>12</sup> The daughter of Tyre arrives with a gift;<br/> the wealthy will <i>bow and</i> plead for your favor.</p>                                                                                       | <p>The wealthy of Tyre arrive with rich gifts;<br/> they seek your favor with their offerings.</p>                                                                                         |
| <p><sup>13</sup> A stunning bride, the king's daughter waits within;<br/> her clothing is <i>skillfully</i> woven with gold.</p>                                                                                | <p>Royal princess, you look so glorious—<br/> adorned with pearls and clothed in gold.</p>                                                                                                 |
| <p><sup>14</sup> She, in her richly embroidered gown, is carried to the king,<br/> her virgin companions following <i>close behind</i>.</p>                                                                     | <p>In queenly robes they escort you to the king;<br/> your select maids of honor follow closely after.</p>                                                                                 |
| <p><sup>15</sup> They walk in a spirit of celebration <i>and gratefulness</i>.<br/> In delight, they enter the palace of the king.</p>                                                                          | <p>They walk along with the greatest of joy<br/> and accompany you into the king's palace.</p>                                                                                             |
| <p><sup>16</sup> O king, in this place where your ancestors <i>reigned</i>, you will have sons;<br/> you will make them princes throughout all the land.</p>                                                    | <p>May your sons, O king, reign like your fathers;<br/> may they rule as princes throughout the land!</p>                                                                                  |
| <p><sup>17</sup> I will make sure your name is remembered by all <i>future</i> generations<br/> so that the people will offer you thanks and praise <i>now and</i> forever.</p>                                 | <p>As for me, I will ensure that your name is ever remembered;<br/> future generations will always thank and praise you;<br/> with these lyric lines of mine, they will do so forever!</p> |
| <p><b>Footnotes:</b><br/><br/> a) <u>45:title</u> Hebrew, <i>maskil</i></p>                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                            |

|                                                                                                                                                               |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| b) <u>45:title</u> Hebrew, <i>shoshannim</i> , white lily-like flowers, perhaps the melody to which the song is sung<br>c) <u>45:6-7</u> <u>Hebrews 1:8-9</u> |  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|

## Psalm 45

(Verses 1-2, 6-9: CMD, Kingsfold, Ellacombe)

My heart is filled with God's own thoughts,  
    A good and wholesome theme,  
About the King, God's chosen one,  
    Anointed and esteemed.  
My tongue is ready, like a pen,  
    A listening, ready scribe,  
To speak the words God speaks through me,  
    To bless and to ascribe.

O King, you are God's own choice,  
    The handsomest of men.  
Your mouth is filled with words of grace;  
    Your lips are free from sin.  
Take up your sword, O mighty one,  
    Now gird it on your thigh.  
Your glory and your majesty  
    Are gifts from the Most High.

Your throne, O King, is God's own throne,  
    Your scepter God's own rod.  
Your rule is one of equity,  
    The righteousness of God.  
Your rule shall be an endless reign;  
    Unceasing are its days.  
You love the right and hate the wrong,  
    So just are all your ways.

The oil of gladness you set forth  
    As God's anointed one.  
Glad songs of praise surround your throne,  
    For you are God's own son.  
How fragrant is your presence here,  
    How lovely is your face.  
Your church like queens adorned in gold,  
    We seek you in this place.

(Verses 10-17: 7.6.7.6 D, Boundless Mercy)

Hear, O daughter, and reflect;



Give your ear to hear me.  
Put away your parent's house  
And your people's mem'ry.  
Then the king with all his power  
Shall desire your beauty.  
Since he is your sovereign lord,  
Bow to him completely.

Tyre's own will seek your help,  
Hoping for your favor,  
Bring you gifts of every kind,  
Treasures you will savor  
From the richest of the land,  
Their wealth to you bringing,  
Giv'n to purchase your goodwill,  
Your friendship seeking.

Gloriously you are brought forth  
From your bridal chamber,  
Clothed in robes with golden thread,  
For the king's own favor.  
Joined by virgins, all your friends,  
You go forth rejoicing,  
Joy and gladness on your lips,  
For this royal wedding.

For your fam'ly left behind,  
Great shall be your offspring,  
Each one ruling in the land,  
Royal in their being.  
I will make your mem'ry great,  
Blest by generations,  
Praised forever without end,  
In true veneration.

What is your critical conclusion then—with regard to my effort, Anderson's, that of *The Voice*, or indeed, a particular translation that you may have already worked with, or are laboring on now: Given an acceptable rendering of the biblical text's semantic content, how 'sharp' has your stylus been (or any one of these) in the additional effort to shape the translated text in terms of impact and persuasiveness (*rhetoric*)—how 'sweet' with respect to sonic beauty and appeal (*artistry*)? In short, *how poetically*—even *melodically*!—has your tongue/voice/text been singing these divine-human songs to or for the King?

## 7. Bible Study – Psalm 45

This study was prepared by Rev. Bob Utley, who seeks to support his interpretation from the biblical text in one of six ways: (1) literary context; (2) historical setting of the biblical author; (3) word studies; (4) grammatical relationships; (5) parallel biblical passages; and (6) literary genres (<https://bible.org/users/bob-utley> ).

### STROPHE DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

| NASB                                                                                                                                                  | NKJV                                     | NRSV                       | TEV                  | NJB           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| A Song Celebrating the King's Marriage<br>MT Intro<br>For the choir director; according to Shoshannim, A Maskil of the sons of Korah. A Song of Love. | The Glories of the Messiah and His Bride | An Ode For a Royal Wedding | A Royal Wedding Song | Royal Wedding |
| 45:1-2                                                                                                                                                | 45:1-5                                   | 45:1                       | 45:1                 | 45:1          |
|                                                                                                                                                       |                                          | 45:2-3                     | 45:2-3               | 45:2          |
| 45:3-5                                                                                                                                                |                                          |                            |                      | 45:3a-4a      |
|                                                                                                                                                       |                                          | 45:4-5                     | 45:4-5               | 45:4b-5       |
| 45:6-9                                                                                                                                                | 45:6-9                                   | 45:6-9                     | 45:6-9               | 45:6-7a       |
|                                                                                                                                                       |                                          |                            |                      | 45:7b-8a      |
|                                                                                                                                                       |                                          |                            |                      | 45:8b-9       |
| 45:10-12                                                                                                                                              | 45:10-12                                 | 45:10-13a                  | 45:10-12             | 45:10-13a     |

|          |          |           |          |           |
|----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| 45:13-15 | 45:13-17 | 45:13b-15 | 45:13-15 | 45:13b-16 |
| 45:16-17 |          | 45:16-17  | 45:16-17 |           |
|          |          |           |          | 45:17     |

#### *FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL*

This is a study guide commentary which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator. Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3). Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

1. First paragraph
2. Second paragraph
3. Third paragraph
4. Etc.

#### CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

A. This Psalm is praising an Israeli King.

1. probably Solomon at the time of one of his marriages (NASB margin)
2. Ahab and his marriage to Jezebel (Jewish Study Bible, p. 1332)
3. David (Ibn Ezra)
4. Messiah (Ibn Ezra's second choice and the Church Fathers)

B. This Psalm has been viewed by some as Messianic (notice the capitalized pronouns) but only in a typological sense. Historically it fits:

1. the hyperbolic royal language of the ANE

2. a marriage of Solomon would have been attended by the people groups his empire controlled

C. All Israeli Kings were meant to represent YHWH (cf. 1 Sam. 8:6-7). He is the King of the Universe and they are to lead His people (by example) in His law.

D. The NASB Study Bible (p. 784) assumes the author was a Levitical singer and that as such his song was considered as coming from the temple (i.e., from God Himself). This is how the fluidity of terminology between God and the King is to be explained.

E. The Psalm has:

1. a related opening (Ps. 45:1-2) and close (Ps. 45:16-17)
2. an address to the king, Ps. 45:3-9
3. an address to the bride, Ps. 45:10-15

#### WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: **PSALM 45:1-2**

<sup>1</sup>My heart overflows with a good theme;  
I address my verses to the King;  
My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.  
<sup>2</sup>You are fairer than the sons of men;  
Grace is poured upon Your lips;  
Therefore God has blessed You forever.

**45:1** The author describes himself to his readers (only here in the Psalter) in this verse.

1. his heart (i.e., he himself) overflows (BDB 935, KB 1222, *Qal* perfect; LXX has "erupts") with a good theme (i.e., praise for the King of God's people)
2. he writes to praise the King on his marriage
3. his tongue is the pen of a ready writer (i.e., [1] he was eager to praise the King or [2] he was a court poet or scribe, cf. Ezra 7:6)

**45:2** He describes the King in poetic imagery.

1. he is fairer (i.e., "more handsome," cf. NRSV, TEV, NJB; this word [BDB 421, KB 421] is rarely used of men; it is in a rare form — *Pealal* perfect) than other men (lit. "the sons of men")

2. his speech is eloquent (TEV) and gracious (cf. Pro. 22:11; Eccl. 10:12); I think Ps. 45:4c is parallel

3. therefore, God has blessed You forever — two thoughts about this:

a. be cognizant of ANE hyperbolic, royal language

b. be careful of cause and effect logic (i.e., YHWH blessed him because he acted appropriately). There is a tension in Scripture between God's sovereignty and human free will (see Special Topic at Ps. 25:12). Obedience is important but call is crucial. He was not King because he deserved it but by family line.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: **PSALM 45:3-5**

<sup>3</sup>Gird Your sword on *Your* thigh, O Mighty One,

*In* Your splendor and Your majesty!

<sup>4</sup>And in Your majesty ride on victoriously,

For the cause of truth and meekness *and* righteousness;

Let Your right hand teach You awesome things.

<sup>5</sup>Your arrows are sharp;

The peoples fall under You;

*Your arrows are* in the heart of the King's enemies.

**45:3-5** This strophe is poetic imagery about the King's military victories. Notice he represents YHWH as he fights for the cause of (LXX):

1. "truth" (BDB 54)

2. "meekness" (unusual vowel pointing, BDB 776, cf. Pro. 15:33; 18:12; 22:4; Zeph. 2:3) Notice the three imperatives and two jussives which reflect military imagery.

1. "gird Your sword on *Your* thigh" — BDB 291, KB 291, *Qal* imperative, Ps. 45:3, cf. Deut. 1:41; Jdgs. 3:16; 18:11; 1 Sam. 17:39; 25:13

2-3. "ride on victoriously," Ps. 45:4

a. "be successful!" — BDB 852, KB 1026, *Qal* imperative

b. "ride" — BDB 938, KB 1230, *Qal* imperative

4. "let Your right hand teach," Ps. 45:4 — BDB 434, KB 436, *Qal* imperfect used in a jussive sense
5. "let the peoples fall under You," Ps. 45:5— BDB 656, KB 709, *Qal* imperfect used in a jussive sense

**45:3** "Splendor" (BDB 217 I) and "majesty" (BDB 214) are often associated with God (i.e., Ps. 104:1). Notice how NASB capitalizes the pronouns in Ps. 45:2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9. But they are also used of the Israeli King (i.e., Ps. 21:5).

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV "O Mighty One"

TEV "Mighty King"

NJB "Warrior"

JPSOA "O hero"

REB "warrior king"

LXX "O powerful one"

This adjective (BDB 150) basically means "strong," or "mighty." It was used of:

1. human warriors — Gen. 10:9; Ps. 78:65; 120:4; 127:4; Eccl. 9:11; Song of Songs 3:7
2. Messiah — Isa. 9:5 (David as type — Ps. 89:20)
3. YHWH as faithful covenant warrior (i.e., holy war) — Neh. 9:32; Ps. 24:8; Isa. 10:21; Jer. 32:18

In this context it refers to the Davidic King as victorious warrior, empowered by YHWH.

**45:4-5** The pronouns are difficult to identify.

1. some refer to God
2. some to the King

This same confusion is in verses 6-7. The problem is that the author is describing the King as a representative of YHWH Himself. It is obvious how early Christian authors (i.e., Heb. 1:8-9) saw this as a Messianic Psalm. For them the Messiah had come and the OT pointed to Him (i.e., Jesus).

**45:4**

NASB, NKJV "awesome things"

NRSV "dread deeds"

TEV "great victories"



JPSOA, REB "awesome deeds"

LXX "marvelously"

This participle (BDB 431, KB 432, *Niphal* participle) means "awe-inspiring deeds."

1. God Himself — Deut. 1:19; 7:21; 10:20-21

2. His deeds — 2 Sam. 7:23; Ps. 145:6 (splitting the Red Sea, Ps. 106:22)

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: **PSALM 45:6-9**

¶Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;

A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom.

¶You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;

Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You

With the oil of joy above Your fellows.

¶All Your garments are *fragrant with* myrrh and aloes *and* cassia;

Out of ivory palaces stringed instruments have made You glad.

¶Kings' daughters are among Your noble ladies;

At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir.

**45:6-9** Here again is a strophe that addresses both YHWH and His royal representative in a unified way.

**45:6**

NASB, NKJV,

NRSV, LXX "Your throne, O God"

NRSV margin "Your throne is a throne of God"

TEV "The kingdom that God has given you"

NJB "Your throne is from God"

JPSOA, RSV "Your divine throne"

REB "God has enthroned you"

NEB "Your throne is like God's throne"

You can see from the variety of translations that the Hebrew text is uncertain (JPSOA footnote). In a monotheistic (see Special Topic at Ps. 2:7) OT context this cannot be asserting deity to the King, but it is asserting that all the King is and has comes from his relationship to YHWH. The King is YHWH's earthly representative, as is the High Priest (cf. Zechariah 4).

YHWH's throne (cf. 1 Chr. 29:23; Lam. 5:19) is forever (cf. Ps. 93:2; see at Ps. 9:5). The King's throne is for a lifetime. The Messiah is the special coming King (see at Ps. 2:2). This phrase has one connotation in the OT and a fuller one in the NT!

**45:7** One wonders if this is royal hyperbole or this Psalm truly addressed a godly King. If it is addressed to Ahab, it is royal hyperbole; if Solomon, it was true at first but not later; if David it was true at first and at last but not during his sinning period (i.e., Bathsheba, Uriah).

We must always be careful of attributing God's blessing based on human performance. God anointed the King for His own purposes of redemption and revelation.

One last thought, verse 7 shows clearly that verse 6 is not attributing deity to an Israeli king. Hebrews 1:8-9 sees it as a Davidic royal typology!

▫ As YHWH loves righteousness (cf. Ps. 11:7; 33:5), so too, should His earthly representative, the Israeli king (i.e., His anointed, cf. Ps. 2:2).

#### **45:8**

NASB, NKJV,  
NRSV "cassia"

TEV, NJB,

REB -omits-

This spice (BDB 893 I) is mentioned only here in the OT. It may refer to a cinnamon fragrance.

**45:9** Does this verse imply that at the current wedding there were already:

1. royal daughters

2. other wives/concubines

3. a Queen (rare word, BDB 993, cf. Neh. 2:6)

#### **NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: PSALM 45:10-12**

<sup>10</sup>Listen, O daughter, give attention and incline your ear:

Forget your people and your father's house;

<sup>11</sup>Then the King will desire your beauty.

Because He is your Lord, bow down to Him.

<sup>12</sup>The daughter of Tyre *will come* with a gift;

The rich among the people will seek your favor.

**45:10-12** This is the strophe that implies the marriage was with a foreign lady, which fits:

1. David — if Bathsheba was not Jewish
2. Solomon — with his many foreign wives (cf. 1 Kgs. 11:1-8)
3. Ahab — marrying Jezebel, a Tyrian princess (note Ps. 45:12)

**45:10** This verse has four imperatives:

1. listen — BDB 1033, KB 1570, *Qal* imperative
2. give attention (lit. "see") — BDB 906, KB 1157, *Qal* imperative
3. incline your ear — BDB 639, KB 692, *Hiphil* imperative, cf. Pro. 22:17
4. forget your people — BDB 1013, KB 1489, *Qal* imperative

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: **PSALM 45:13-15**

<sup>13</sup>The King's daughter is all glorious within;  
Her clothing is interwoven with gold.  
<sup>14</sup>She will be led to the King in embroidered work;  
The virgins, her companions who follow her,  
Will be brought to You.  
<sup>15</sup>They will be led forth with gladness and rejoicing;  
They will enter in to the King's palace.

**45:13-15** This refers to the wedding party from the harem ("virgins"). The other wives (besides the Queen) are called "daughters" (cf. Ps. 45:9,10,12,13).

This strophe was spiritualized by the Church to refer to herself! This was also done with Song of Songs (Canticles).

**45:14**

NASB, NKJV "within"

JPSOA "inside"

The MT has "within" (BDB 819, LXX), but some scholars suppose "pearls", BDB 819, cf. Job. 28:18; Pro. 3:15; 8:11; 31:10; Lam. 4:7).

The UBS Text Project gives the MT an "A" rating.

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: **PSALM 45:16-17**

<sup>16</sup>In place of your fathers will be your sons;  
You shall make them princes in all the earth.

<sup>17</sup>I will cause Your name to be remembered in all generations;  
Therefore the peoples will give You thanks forever and ever.

**45:16-17** The UBS *Handbook*, p. 429, has a good summary.

"The poet concludes by addressing the king, promising him that he will have many sons who will, like his ancestors, also be kings and rule over the whole earth."

Verse 17 is a way of asserting that this Psalm will be around for a long time and keep the memory of the king alive.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. Why is it thought this is a royal wedding song?
2. Does verse 6 refer to the Israeli king?
3. Why is it thought the bride is not from Israel?
4. Explain verses 16-17 in your own words.
5. Define "Your throne, O God" and explain how Hebrews 1:8-9 is using it.
6. Why is this Psalm thought to be Messianic?

Finally, evaluate the following structural outline for Psalm 45 given in *Logos*: How accurate or helpful (or the opposite) is this textual diagram, and in which specific respects? In other words, how accurate are the proposed topical parallels or panels?

<sup>title</sup> To the choirmaster: according to Lilies. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah; a love song.

#### **A** — *I speak*

<sup>1</sup>My heart overflows with a pleasing theme;

I address my verses to the king;

my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.

#### **B** — *You are blessed forever*

<sup>2</sup>You are the most handsome of the sons of men;

grace is poured upon your lips;

therefore God has blessed you forever.

#### **C** — *The glorious groom*

<sup>3</sup>Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one,

in your splendor and majesty!

<sup>4</sup>In your majesty ride out victoriously

for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness;

let your right hand teach you awesome deeds!

<sup>5</sup>Your arrows are sharp  
in the heart of the king's enemies;  
the peoples fall under you.

<sup>6</sup>Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.  
The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness;  
<sup>7</sup>you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.  
Therefore God, your God, has anointed you  
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;  
<sup>8</sup>your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.  
From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad;

**D** — *The king's daughter*

<sup>9</sup>daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor;  
at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

**E** — *Bride to leave*

<sup>10</sup>Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear:  
forget your people and your father's house,

**E'** — *Bride to cleave*

<sup>11</sup>and the king will desire your beauty.  
Since he is your lord, bow to him.

**D'** — *The daughter of Tyre*

<sup>12</sup>The people of Tyre will seek your favor with gifts,  
the richest of the people.

**C'** — *The beautiful bride*

<sup>13</sup>All glorious is the princess in her chamber, with robes interwoven with gold.  
<sup>14</sup>In many-colored robes she is led to the king,  
with her virgin companions following behind her.  
<sup>15</sup>With joy and gladness they are led along  
as they enter the palace of the king.

**B'** — *Your children will rule*

<sup>16</sup>In place of your fathers shall be your sons;  
you will make them princes in all the earth.

**A'** — *I will remind*

<sup>17</sup>I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations;  
therefore nations will praise you forever and ever.



*The King is*  
ENTHRALLED With YOUR beauty  
HONOR HIM  
*For He is your Lord*  
PSALM 45:11

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