

Aspects of Dynamic Remembering and Constructing in Psalm 145: A Contribution to the Study of Prayer in Persian and Hellenistic Times

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There is no sense to any political speech, theological innovation and scientific discovery; nor to any part of human dialogue in this world, if it is not understood as a variation of something. A variation of something that is shared by the speaker and his audience, something they have in common and want to preserve and perpetuate, but as a variation that leads into a new future.¹

1. Introduction

“Talk to God as if humans would listen” is a well-known maxim ascribed to Seneca, one of the locals of Cordoba. His remark contains an apparently obvious insight: prayer talks not only to and about God but also to and about humans. This may be the reason why the topic of prayer is experiencing an upswing in all theological subject areas. Discussion of prayer has the potential to bring together people with different perspectives on theology, gather them around a table, and generate new questions together. Many publications in the field of biblical studies and related sciences dem-

1. Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, *Die Sprache des Menschengeschlechts: Eine leibhaftige Grammatik in vier Teilen; Erster und zweiter Teil*, vol. 1 of *Die Sprache des Menschengeschlechts: Eine leibhaftige Grammatik in vier Teilen* (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1963), 318, my translation (original: “Keine Parteireden, keine theologische Neuerung, keine wissenschaftliche Entdeckung, kein Teil eines Zwiegesprächs in dieser Welt ist sinnvoll, wenn es nicht verstanden wird als eine Variation von etwas, das der Sprecher und seine Zuhörerschaft gemeinsam haben und bewahren, aber als eine Variation, durch die der Sprecher in eine neue Zukunft führt.”).

onstrate the potential of prayer texts to illuminate ancient theologies and anthropologies anew. These poetic and hymnal texts may be understood as testimonies that aim to create a relationship between God and humans, to paint a picture of reality—or even desired reality—and in that way shape the cultural memory of a certain community.² For a large number of these texts, the categories of *remembering* and *constructing* may be characterized as their own specific method: they remember traditional materials by gathering, reviving, and sharpening them, and they construct new entities, especially through new contextualization, as they speak into consistently changing realities. Thus texts of this kind involve their recipients in theological reasoning and its identity-shaping effects.

But what difference does it make if theological and anthropological insights are offered in the form of prayers? And what role do the Persian and Hellenistic periods as a time of remembering and constructing in literary production play in this? By examining a late text of the Hebrew Psalter, Ps 145, we will arrive at possible answers to these questions.

After giving a translation and an overview of the psalm's structure as well as examining hints to its possible origin in (late) Persian / (early) Hellenistic times, this essay aims to shed light on the question of which specific features characterize Ps 145 as a text of prayer. Special attention is given to its superscription, which is unique in the Psalter but has not received the scholarly consideration it deserves. Does it mark the text as a special type of prayer and what implications does it have for the understanding of the psalm as a whole within its context? Furthermore, we will trace aspects of dynamic remembering and constructing in Ps 145 by examining its images of God and humans, which are put into relationship throughout the entire text. Afterward, we will also analyze the text with respect to Israelite identity. Because of the text's universal character, two questions arise: To what extent does Ps 145 construct *Israelite* identity? What roles do different types of contextualization play in the history of the text. A short conclusion completes this study by positioning it within the wider context of this volume.

2. As an example, for the examination of prayer texts referring to a (relatively) distinct group, see Qumran studies such as Carol Ann Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Qumran*, STDJ 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Bilhah Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry*, trans. Jonathan Chipman, STDJ 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

1.1. Text and Structure of Psalm 145³

(1) A Davidic praise	תהלה לדוד
I will exalt you, my God the king / O king! and I will bless your name for all times and further.	ארוממך אלוהי המלך ואברכה שמך לעולם ועד:
(2) Every day I will bless you, and I will praise your name for all times and further.	בכל־יום אברכך ואהללה שמך לעולם ועד:
(3) Great is YHWH and very praiseworthy, and to his greatness there is no limit ("in research").	גדול יהוה ומהלל מאד ולגדלתו אין חקר:
(4) One generation to the other will glorify your works, and your mighty deeds they will make known.	דור לדור ישבח מעשיך וגבורתיך יגידו:
(5) On the splendor of the glory of your majesty, and on the words / events of your wonders I will meditate.	הדר כבוד הודך ודברי נפלאותיך אשיחה:
(6) And the power of your awesome deeds they will tell, and your greatness I will recount.	ועוזו נוראתיך יאמרו וגדולתיך [ו] [גדולתך] אספרנה:
(7) The memory of your abundant goodness they will pass on, and of your righteousness they will sing.	זכר רב־טובך יביעו וצדקתך ירננו:
(8) Gracious and compassionate is YHWH, slow to anger and great of faithfulness.	חנון ורחום יהוה ארך אפים וגדל־חסד:
(9) Good is YHWH to all, and his compassions are over all his works.	טוב־יהוה לכל ורחמיו על־כל־מעשיו:
(10) They will give thanks to you, YHWH, all your works, and your faithful ones will bless you.	יודוך יהוה כל־מעשיך וחסידיך יברוכה:
(11) The glory of your kingdom they will tell, and of your mighty deeds they will speak,	כבוד מלכותך יאמרו וגבורתיך ידברו:
(12) to make known to the children of humanity his mighty deeds, and the glory of the splendor of his kingdom.	להודיע לבני האדם גבורתי וכבוד הדר מלכותו:

3. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical translations are mine.

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|---|---|
| (13) Your kingdom is a kingdom for all times,
and your dominion from one generation to the
other. | מלכותך מלכות כל-עלמים
וממשלתך בכל-דור ודור: |
| (14) A supporter is YHWH to all who are falling,
and one who lifts up all who are bent down. | סומך יהוה לכל-הנפלים
וזוקף לכל-הכפופים: |
| (15) The eyes of all, to you they look,
and you are the one who gives them their food
in its time, | עיני-כל אליך ישברו
ואתה נותן-להם את-אכלם
בעתו: |
| (16) opening your hand
and satisfying every living being with desire. | פותח את-ידיך
ומשביע לכל-חי רצון: |
| (17) Righteous is YHWH in all his ways,
and faithful in all his works. | צדיק יהוה בכל-דרכיו
וחסיד בכל-מעשיו: |
| (18) Near is YHWH to all who cry out to him,
to all who cry out to him in truth. | קרוב יהוה לכל-קראיו
לכל אשר יקראהו באמת: |
| (19) The desire of the ones who fear him he fulfills,
and their cry for help he hears and saves them. | רצון-יראיו יעשה
ואת-שועתם ישמע ויושיעם: |
| (20) A guardian is YHWH over all who love him,
but all the evildoers he will destroy. | שומר יהוה את-כל-אהביו
ואת כל-הרשעים ישמיד: |
| (21) The praise of YHWH my mouth will speak,
and all flesh will bless the name of his holiness
for all times and further. | תהלת יהוה ידבר-פי
ויברך כל-בשר שם קדשו
לעולם ועד: |

Considering the structure of Ps 145, different solutions are arguably plausible, depending on the criteria being used to identify different sections of the text.⁴ For the purpose of this study, a concentric structure proves helpful to enhance the understanding of the text's different dynamics.⁵

4. For an overview of different suggestions considering the structures of Ps 145 and the difficulty of deciding on the one with the most promising heuristic potential, see Friederike Neumann, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen: Gestalt, Theologie und Intention der Psalmen 145 und 146–150*, BZAW 491 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 43.

5. Concentric structures for Ps 145 may also be found in the work of Weber, *Die Psalmen 73–150*, vol. 2 of *Werkbuch Psalmen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 367–68; Bernd Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott: Eine Anthropologie der Psalmen*, 4th ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2013), 370–72.

Superscription

Framework with characterizations: the praying subject (I) as always praising, the king (God) as the one who is always praised (vv. 1–2)

Part 1: YHWH's greatness as the content of the orator's praise / YHWH's deeds as theme of the proclamation of all generations (vv. 3–7)

Part 2: YHWH's goodness as the content of the praise of all his works (vv. 8–9)

Center: the universality of YHWH's kingdom (vv. 10–13)

Part 3: YHWH's care brought into focus—support and supply for all the living (vv. 14–17)

Part 4: YHWH's care brought into focus—his addressability and comprehensive action for mankind (vv. 18–20)

Framework: The praising subject (I) / the universality of praise (v. 21)

Other principles of construction, however, should be kept in mind, such as the alphabetical acrostic, with its rhetorical function and reader-leading indications. This most distinctive surface structure, which creates the basic frame for the message of the text, has often been neglected or was at least not evaluated as an important part of the psalm. Psalm 145 is one in a long history of acrostics—and, more specifically, abecedary compositions—that in a strikingly large number of cases appear with prayers, in both hymns of praise and laments.⁶ This form has inspired a variety of different interpretations. One very important aspect for Ps 145 may be summarized with a quote by Adele Berlin: “The entire alphabet, the source of all words, is marshalled in praise of God. One cannot actually use all of the words in a language, but by using the alphabet, one uses all potential words. So, the form is made to serve the message.”⁷ Furthermore, the linear structure from א to ת underlines the notional path of prayer on which the praying subject may be shadowed by the reader through the text. Thus it adds a perspective that may supplement the concentric reading.

6. Besides other psalms of the Hebrew Bible, examples are the Apostrophe to Zion from Qumran, the long history of piyyutim in rabbinic literature, early Christian hymns, hymns from the Middle Ages, and many more.

7. Adele Berlin, “The Rhetoric of Psalm 145,” in *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry*, ed. Ann Kort and Scott Morschauer (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 17–22, quote at 18.

Researchers of Ps 145 have made various attempts to date the text, ranging from the time of the Davidic kingdom well into Hellenistic times. Nonetheless, since the nineteenth century, a broad consensus has formed among biblical scholars that the text has a postexilic origin, probably in late Persian / early Hellenistic times. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld writes in his commentary on Ps 145:

The final psalm of the last Davidic Psalter is, with a broad consensus in exegetical scholarship, a late postexilic psalm. Aspects in favor of this dating are the Aramaizing language (see, e.g., שָׁבַח, “to praise,” and מַלְכוּת, “kingdom”), the anthological style, the acrostic that points to wisdom literature, the concentration on God’s kingdom and the distinctive universalism. As a possible temporal classification, the fourth century BCE may be considered, rather toward the end of the Persian era.⁸

In terms of composition/redaction history, Ps 145 is most likely part of the final redaction of the book of Psalms in its manifestation as the Hebrew Psalter. Its role as a hinge between the last Davidic Psalter and the final *hallel* may even point to the conclusion that the text was originally designed for this position as the finale of the Psalter.⁹ The Persian and Hellenistic eras, which were the context for the collection and formative redaction of the Psalter, can be considered as times with a special need for remembering and constructing, as may be seen in texts like Ps 145. Religious wisdom is gathered, sorted, recorded, and transformed; theological geography has to be reexamined; and political as well as religious concepts, such as questions of empire and power, have to be discussed against the background of changing realities. In all that, new concepts, such as the notion of God’s kingdom,

8. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalmen 101–50*, HThKAT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2008), 789–807, here 796: “Der Schlusspsalm des fünften Davidpsalters ist mit breitem Konsens unter den Exegeten ein später nachexilischer Psalm. Dafür sprechen seine aramaisierende Sprache (vgl. שָׁבַח ‘rühmen’ und מַלְכוּת ‘Königtum’), der anthologische Stil, die weisheitliche Form des Akrostichons, die Konzentration auf das Königtums JHWHs und der spezifische Universalismus. Möglich für eine zeitliche Einordnung erscheint das 4. Jh. v. Chr., eher gegen Ende der persischen Epoche.”

9. I am not able to elaborate here on the exact relationship between the final groups of the Psalter, their internal coherence and possible development, and the place of Ps 145 in this composition. On the ongoing discussion, see, e.g., Neumann, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 429–49.

emerged.¹⁰ This, however, is only one of several homes for Ps 145.¹¹ Its history encompasses a number of contexts, in antiquity and later on, that are equally interesting for generating different possibilities for understanding the psalm itself. The following aspects that illustrate the psalm's method of remembering and constructing may also prove helpful for analyzing the long history of Ps 145 and its central motif, God's kingdom.

2. Psalm 145: Prayer

Interestingly, the prayer aspects of Ps 145 are commonly underestimated in commentaries and studies on the text. This is a fate it shares with other hymnal texts of the Second Temple period that, at first sight, present theological reflection rather than communication between God and humans. A main point of the attraction of this literature, however, may precisely have been the combination of both aspects: theological reasoning and existential communication. In analyzing these texts, we should stay attentive to the questions we normally address to prayer texts, such as: Who is praying? Who is addressed? How may the relation between "I" and the community be characterized? Is there a possible liturgical setting? Texts like Ps 145 do reflect, in their particular ways, the situation of mankind *coram Deo*.¹² The dialogic structure of such texts refer to the relationship not only between God and humankind but also between the different members of creation. This feature of prayer texts points to the special role they play in the history of theological and anthropological insights.

2.1. Individual Prayer and Community

Already in verse 1 we encounter the two protagonists of prayer: the praising subject, as praying man or woman, and the praised, blessed God,

10. "New," of course, has a problematic notion here. As we will see later on, it is all about remembering "old(er)" traditions, gathering them in new forms of compilations, transforming them, and bringing them to a point in terms like מלכות יהוה.

11. For the idea of biblical texts as "nomadic" texts that, "wherever we encounter them, ... are not quite at home," see Brennan W. Breed, *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), here 202.

12. See Janowski, "Konfliktgespräche," 11: "In der Situation 'vor Gott' (*coram Deo*) ereignet sich also nach alttestamentlichem Zeugnis die Menschwerdung des Menschen."

imagined as king and represented by his name in the second part of the verse. Subsequently, the prayer, the song of praise, is not restricted to the action of reciting a certain text, an action taking place between the individual and his or her God at a certain time and place. It is rather claimed as a way of life (see יח, v. 21) for all humankind, corresponding to the kingdom of God by its ability to encompass both time and space. In a more narrow sense, Ps 145 is a prayer of praise, which, like many others, weighs fundamental questions about God, man and the world. As such, it is not unanimous but polyphonic in itself, pervaded by changes in the direction of speech, confessional insertions, and/or meditations.¹³

By examining the different perspectives on God and the world in Ps 145, we encounter important dynamics that also have led to simplifying divisions of the psalm into two parts: the first one focusing on the praying individual(s) and the second one pointing to God in action.¹⁴ In addition to the fact that the subject of the psalm does not change, the manifold perspectives and the plurivalent motifs preclude such a strict distinction. The perception of Ps 145 as a prayer leads to the recognition of a more complex, purposeful composition of the text. The development from the praying subject ("I") to the praying/praising collective of "all flesh" does not eliminate the individual but keeps it until the end as "my mouth." The prayer is directed to God but spoken by humanity on earth, and in time it appears as an explicitly social phenomenon. As such, it affects the individuals in their community, but it also transcends the group of actually present living beings, as it points both back into the past and also to the future of humanity. By paying attention to these social dimensions of the text, the prayer more comprehensively shows its theological potential. It raises hope and commitment for God's kingdom, but it also raises awareness of realities that fundamentally contradict the psalm's notion of God's kingdom.¹⁵ Both may lead not only to a change in

13. A short definition of prayer that especially points to the diversity of voices can be found in Thomas Staubli and Silvia Schroer, *Menschenbilder der Bibel* (Ostfildern: Patmos, 2014), 541–51.

14. See, e.g., David Blumenthal, "Psalm 145: A Liturgical Reading," in *Hesed ve-emet: Studies in Honor of Ernest S. Frerichs*, ed. Jodi Magness and Seymour Gitin, BJS 320 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 17–18, 21. This view is rightly challenged also by Neumann, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 44.

15. On that, see Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 3.

the dynamics of identity shaping within a certain community but also to action, as the psalm itself illustrates.

2.2. Praise and Lament

Another dynamic tied to the prayer form of Ps 145 is the Psalter-enveloping dynamic of human action in praise and lament. In Ps 145, the prayer emanates from praise but does not exclude lament, which surfaces primarily in the second half of the text with the roots קרא and שוע. The experience of need and deprivation lingers under the immediate surface of the text and materializes in the various textual and historical contexts that the text may point to. Rather than focusing on the dangers of reality and strategies for coping with them, a prayer like Ps 145 may serve as a means to temporarily step into a world not yet in existence but reasonably hoped for. Steps of this kind may even reestablish a sense of life and inspire praise when the reader or subject experiences turmoil. This proleptic character links different (hymnal) prayers throughout the centuries of dialogue between God and humans, and it is an important point of comparison between Ps 145 and other (antique) Jewish and Christian attempts to describe God in the image of kingship. Moreover, it also shares a critical potential: the world is not (yet) as it should be. Prayer, including one that excessively and joyously praises God, may at the same time admonish him to show up as the God he is already praised as: the righteous and compassionate king.

In prayer, reasoning—or to use the text's Hebrew term, “research” (v. 3: חקר)—on God may be reflected in hymnal form. This mode of hymnal theology is decisive for the time- and culture-comprising history of prayer to the point of modern reasoning on the function of prayer texts in liturgical contexts and interreligious dialogue. In the way that Ps 145 is poetically designed as a text of theological meditation, it especially points to the later history of Jewish praying that in many cases put together new prayers from scribal tradition.¹⁶ Thus it contributes not only to the audio-visual character of liturgy but also to liturgy as an intellectual experience. This art of constructing prayer texts through remembering—that is, through recomposition—by no means represents a reduction of artistry but rather raises a claim of its own.

16. For Ps 145 and the final *hallel* as “scribal hymns,” see Neumann, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 481–83.

2.3. The Superscription

Psalm 145 may be seen as a piece of art, a description of God's action that is seemingly totally self-contained, starting with \aleph ending with η . The designation of the psalm, which was given to it during the history of its composition and integration into the known corpus of Psalms, is easily overlooked, even though it marks the text as a special type of prayer. A short look at the *Forschungsgeschichte* emphasizes this fact. In some commentaries, the superscription is not even displayed as part of the text, and only a few attend to its content and meaning for the psalm and the special position it has in the Psalter.¹⁷ The annotators looking for an explanation widely agree that the superscription was inspired by the use of תהלה in verse 21, the η -verse, and attributed to the text secondarily. The effect, achieved by this connection of keywords, would be the enhancement of the *inclusio* framing the psalm.¹⁸ Even though this observation is undoubtedly persuasive, the designation of Ps 145 as תהלה may be further deciphered and clarified.¹⁹ The designation תהלה occurs only once in the superscriptions of the (biblical) psalms, which raises the questions of why exactly this otherwise commonly used term is employed here, together with לדוד, and whether that might tell us something about the pragmatics and the understanding of the text as a whole.²⁰

17. In more recent commentaries, one can often find short remarks considering the superscription; for example, Hossfeld and Zenger also offer a short analysis of the vocabulary of praise within the psalm in *Psalmen 101–50*, 789–807. The latest study that includes an analysis of Ps 145 draws attention to the superscription and emphasizes the change in the picture of David that may be deduced from 145:1–21; see Neumann, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 54–55.

18. See Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–50*, 797.

19. A first step in this direction is made by Thijs Booij in “Psalm CXLV: David's Song of Praise,” *VT* 58 (2008): 633–37. In a short note on Ps 145, he especially points to the connection between the Chronicles and Ps 145 and comes to the conclusion that the superscription of Ps 145 was not ascribed to the text by the hand of a redactor but rather can be traced back to the hand of the author. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that the superscription, whether original or already a piece of reception, is tightly connected to the text. This may be further illustrated by a careful examination of the term תהלה.

20. On the importance of the superscriptions of the biblical psalms, see now Bernd Janowski, “‘Die Hindin der Morgenröte’ (Ps 22,1): Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der Psalmenüberschriften,” in *Psalmen und Chronik: Aspekte ihres Verhältnisses*, ed. Friedhelm Hartenstein and Thomas Willi, *FAT* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming).

The term תהלה is part of a rich vocabulary of praise in the Hebrew Bible. Occurrences of the verbal root הלל, typically with reference to God, and the noun form תהלה are concentrated in the Psalter.²¹ The evidence is spread throughout the whole book of תהלים, whereupon the group of psalms Pss 146–150, the final *hallel*, holds a special position. The verb הלל is here, as is well known, *the* leading verb, and the noun תהלה also appears repeatedly. Thus the actual superscription tightly connects Ps 145 with the following group of psalms that conclude the Hebrew Psalter in its present form.

In order to understand the special character of the superscription, we should take a closer look at the range of meanings of תהלה as it is used in Ps 145 and elsewhere. The verbal form of הלל, together with the derived noun, is one of the most common terms of praise, even outside the Psalter. Unsurprisingly, תהלה often appears in parallel to other words expressing the praise of God—for example, in Ps 100:4 (תהלה // תודה) or in Neh 9:5 (ברכה // תהלה), but see also Neh 12:46 and 2 Chr 20:22. In Ps 145, similarly, הלל and its parallels ידה and ברך are the leading verbs of praise. Furthermore, they play an important role for the last third of the Psalter as a whole.²²

The noun תהלה, however, not only marks a mode of speaking but also has a very significant meaning. God and his engagement with man and the world are, with a few exceptions, the content of תהלה. The יהוה תהלה is expressed in the Psalms; it is narrated, declared, acclaimed, and remembered.²³ The practical embodiment, the praise one can hear, and its foundation and content are closely connected, so that God may be called “God of my תהלה” (Ps 109:1) or even “my תהלה” (Deut 10:21). In Exod 15:11, the תהלות are directly referring to the deeds of the “wonderworker” (עשה פלא) YHWH. This is similar to Isa 63:7, where the deeds of God’s חסד are the content of remembrance and praise.

To further characterize the תהלה, spatial and temporal descriptions are used, ascribing a special realm of action to it. It is supposed to be heard from “the ends of the earth” (Isa 42:10; compare also Ps 48:11) and be declared “on the islands” (Isa 42:12). It “fills the earth” (Hab 3:3), but it also directly refers to Zion and Jerusalem in some places (Ps 65:2; Isa 62:7) and serves as a description for the people of Israel in others (Deut 26:19; Jer 13:11;

21. For more details on the different occurrences, see Helmer Ringgren, “הלל I and II,” *ThWAT* 2:434–41.

22. See Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen 101–50*, 794–95.

23. Ringgren, “הלל I and II,” 2:433–41.

33:9; Zeph 3:19). Here it is often used as a counterpart to facing destruction, expulsion, and suppression and thus contains a hint of promise and expectation. Even the widely traveled camels from Saba are carrying not only gold and silver but also the account of the תהלת יהוה (Isa 60:6). Alongside the promising aspect, which points to the expected implementation of the תהלה in the future, we have a number of descriptions characterizing its temporal dimension as “everlasting, perpetual.” So, for example, in Pss 34:2; 35:28; 71:8, 14; 79:13, it is often combined with an aspect that is important as well for Ps 145: the praise, תהלה, is passed on from one generation to another. In addition, and more subtle, there are connections of תהלה with the steadfast character of God in his actions, expressed through the parallelization or the close linking of תהלה with God’s name (Exod 15:11; Isa 42:8; 63:7; and, of course, Ps 145). Together, the passages mentioned form the background for the use of תהלה as a superscription in Ps 145. They show that תהלה inseparably connects a hymnal form and its content. Furthermore, there are often universal descriptions referring to space and time directly linked to it. Thus the superscription of Ps 145, a text aiming to sing the praise of YHWH “from א to ת,” already strikes a thematic note. The noun תהלה is, overall, a term that comprises temporal aspects and thus connects generations and establishes identity. Communicated by proclaimed audible—as well as legible—praise, it guarantees that the content of praise stays alive. Ben Sira 44:1, 11b–15 points that out by referring to special role models in the history of faith: “Let us praise [הלל] the famous man and our fathers, one by one ... their generation stays/endures forever and their praise [תהלה] will not fade. They are buried in peace, but their name is forever. Humanity speaks of their wisdom and the congregation narrates/chronicles/records [ספר] their praise [תהלה].”

Obviously striking, in connection with the superscription of Ps 145, is the pslam’s version at Qumran, which uses תפלה instead of the word we have discussed thus far: תהלה.²⁴ Ulrich Dahmen noticed that this completely runs against a tendency—described, for example, by Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer—of avoiding cultic terminology in Qumranic/Essenic texts

24. For a discussion of the version of Psalm 145 in 11Q5, see Reinhard Kratz, “‘Blessed Be the Lord and Blessed Be His Name Forever’: Psalm 145 in the Hebrew Bible and in the Psalms Scroll 11Q5,” in *Prayer and Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature: Essays in Honor of Eileen Schuller on the Occasion of Her 65th Birthday*, ed. Jeremy Penner, Ken M. Penner, and Cecilia Wassen, STDJ 98 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 229–43. Kratz does not, however, respond to the changed superscription.

and thus using תהלה for תפלה.²⁵ The reason for a deliberate change in the Qumran version is a matter for discussion elsewhere. Nonetheless, Dahmen interprets the change as a liturgization of the text, which changes the “merely profane תהלה” to תפלה, a term with the character of “liturgical prayer.”²⁶ While the description of תהלה as profane is disputable, especially in the light of the foregoing analysis of this term in the Hebrew Bible, it may well be imaginable that the terms תהלה and תפלה became increasingly exchangeable and that תפלה was used more frequently than תהלה for liturgical prayers.²⁷ It should be mentioned, however, that the contextualization of the psalm at Qumran not only creates a new superscription and thus destroys the inclusion of the text, but it also establishes a completely new frame of the text by adding a *subscriptio* and framing the psalm with other texts than the ones in the MT.

To these, quite speculative, remarks one could add an observation on possible dynamics between תהלה and תפלה in the Psalter and beyond. These dynamics, which also crystallize in the character of David, are reflected by the second part of the superscription. David is both the one who is moaning, thronged, and in need of rescue and also the servant of YHWH and the paradigmatic singer of praise (see Neh 12:46). Focusing on Ps 145 in its context, Ps 144:9 praises YHWH, who “rescued David, his servant,” while Ps 145:1 lets this very David utter the overall תהלה of the God and king YHWH. This connection is supported by the parallel drawn between being rescued by God and uttering his praise in other texts (Isa 60:18; Jer 17:14; Ps 9:5; Ps 106:47 // 1 Chr 16:35). Situations concerning life and thus prayer from נ to ת are connected to David and held up for identification in all generations to come (see Ps 145). Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher writes, “The reading of the Psalms in light of generally acknowledged texts and the recollection of David and his life assures the readers of their own way and raises their hopes.”²⁸

25. See Ulrich Dahmen, *Psalmen- und Psalter-Rezeption im Frühjudentum: Rekonstruktion, Textbestand, Struktur und Pragmatik der Psalmenrolle 11QPsa aus Qumran*, STDJ 49 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 197.

26. Kratz, “Blessed Be the Lord,” 197.

27. See Eileen Schuller, *Non-canonical Psalms from Qumran: A Pseudepigraphic Collection*, HSS 28 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 27.

28. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, “The Psalm Headings. A Canonical Relecture of the Psalms,” in *The Biblical Canons*, ed. J.-M. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge, BETL 163 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 253–54.

The superscription *תהלה*, similar to the superscription *ספר תהלים* for the whole Psalter, reveals a perspective focused on praise, but at the same time lament is not suppressed, as is shown by Ps 145 and its location in the Psalter. The ups and downs of Israel's history, David's biography, and the struggle of every single praying man and woman between lament and praise determine the dynamics of the Psalter (and its ability to connect with people to this very day), dynamics that reach a climax in the *תהלה לדוד*.²⁹

3. Remembering and Constructing God and Humans in Psalm 145

The investigation of the psalm's superscription leads us to consider dynamic aspects of the description of God and humans in Ps 145 in light of God's *מלכות*.

The formation of the Hebrew Psalter as we understand it today is characterized by several acts of remembering and constructing, the superscriptions of the psalms being only one element worthy of note. Likewise, in the analysis of individual psalms, the aforementioned categories can be helpful tools for understanding what is actually going on *in* these texts and in elaborating Old Testament theology/anthropology *with* these texts. That Ps 145 remembers—for example, in its use of quotations from other biblical books—and constructs—for example, in its use of an acrostic structure—has been noted in different ways by various commentators. Yet, this has rarely lead to appreciative evaluations of the text as a piece of art.³⁰ In the following, I assume instead that Ps 145 purposefully applies resummptions from other texts as well as new semantic and poetic constructions to make fundamental statements about God and humans and their relationship, assembled under the letters of the Hebrew alphabet within a manageable text.³¹ The categories of remembering and constructing thus appear as methods used, respectively, by the authors of the text and by its recipients to, for example, recontextualize the psalm. Filled with all

29. See Bernd Janowski, "Ein Tempel aus Worten: Zur theologischen Architektur des Psalters," in *Der nahe und der ferne Gott*, BThAT 5 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2014), 287–314, esp. 298–99.

30. See, e.g., Bernhard Duhm's assessment of Ps 145 in his commentary on Psalms (Duhm, *Die Psalmen*, 2nd ed., KHC 14 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1922]).

31. Neumann, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, is the newest example of a lucid, comprehensive analysis of Ps 145 and its intertexts that enhances its understanding as a theologically dense text.

its theological and anthropological compactness, Ps 145 resembles an essence, a poetic digest.³² Its originality lies above all in the arrangement of its contents, in the way different motifs and traditions are assembled to illustrate the center of the text, God's kingdom and its effect on human action. Some selected examples may illustrate my point.

The path of prayer Ps 145 describes is shaded by striking constructions of time.³³ The temporal terms are eye-catching: they characterize the praise of humanity as perennial and everlasting, and they draw attention to the center of the psalm and its depiction of the everlasting kingdom of YHWH. The close contact between *בכל יום* and *לעולם ועד* within a single verse (v. 2) is unique in the Hebrew Bible, as singular as the enhancement of perpetuity in verse 13 with *כל עולמים*. The activities of God and human are thus already connected to one another on a temporal level. Psalm 145 unfurls along the lines established by *עולם ועד*, comprising the daily prayer of man as well as the everlasting kingdom of God. In the framework of *עולם ועד* (vv. 1–2 and v. 21) we find the chain of generations passing on the knowledge of God and his deeds (v. 4) and at the same time appearing as the sphere of action in which God's kingdom is manifested (v. 13). The same holds true for God's works as subjects of praise (v. 10) and as beneficiaries of God's mercy (v. 9). Together with the overall quantifier *כל*, used seventeen times in twenty-one verses, the temporal aspects of Ps 145 construct universality, global importance, and stability. These are topics that appear in many more texts within the tradition of prayer, connecting different times and religions.³⁴ This recurrent theme of tradition itself may be interpreted as a response to the experience of permanent threats to human life through integrative, universal figuration of perpetual stability. The threat, however, is not suppressed but is constantly resonating—as in the case of Ps 145, where it broaches the issue of the elimination of enemies.³⁵ In addition, Ps 144:3 asks (as the last ques-

32. This is enhanced by constructing it as an acrostic, as pointed out earlier.

33. These temporal aspects often led interpreters to construct a connection to the theological topos of eschatology. See, e.g., the commentary on Ps 145 from Peter Schegg, *Achtundsechzigster bis hundertundfünfzigster Psalm*, vol. 2 of *Die Psalmen: Übersetzt und erklärt für Verständnis und Betrachtung* (München: Lentner, 1847), 704–13.

34. On the visual and audible manifestations of the notion of universality in Ps 145, see Reuven Kimelman, "Psalm 145: Theme, Structure, and Impact," in *JBL* 113 (1994): 37–58, esp. 47 and 51.

35. Strikingly, this is in the mode of *yaqtol*, whereas God's action is otherwise continually described with participle constructions.

tion of the Psalter!) the fundamental question of anthropology: what is man? (see Ps 8:5).

With its overall construction, Ps 145 advises us to reflect on this very question and on what could be described as a fundamental anthropological question: Who is God? The questions are entwined, or at least closely tied together.³⁶

The human being is, according to Ps 145, first of all characterized by the ability to communicate on several levels. First, as a praising individual, it stands at the beginning of the psalm, it appears as part of humanity, as part of the whole of God's creation; the human being speaks about God and the world to others and to God as a personal God, imagined as king. Second, the human being is constituted by his or her neediness, expressed vividly in the second half of the psalm. Psalm 145 therefore features resonant fundamental insights into the essence of humanity, found throughout the Psalter, and closely ties these instances together with its notion of God. Aside from the framework of the psalm, which describes God as king, accessible through his name, every verse of the text contains numerous characterizations of God.³⁷ I will concentrate on some selected aspects. Among the epithets that Ps 145 attributes to God, his kingdom/kingship, מַלְכוּת, undoubtedly holds the central position. Exactly where the missing J-line catches the eye, the initials of each verse form the root מֶלֶךְ, read from the bottom up, which was already introduced in verse 1. Some commentaries praise this stylistic element as a skillful poetic device; others modify its importance as an inevitable result of the Hebrew alphabet.³⁸ Without appealing to any argument regarding the true intention of the author(s) of Ps 145, one may assume that the close connection between form and content of these verses would have

36. Interestingly, questions of anthropology are often underrepresented in the discussion of Ps 145. For the understanding of the text, its concept of God's kingdom, and its relevance for the history of the picture of God as king, this human side of the coin is, however, very important.

37. For an overview with a strong theological accent, see Neumann, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 49–94. Hossfeld and Zenger also point to important aspects of the text and its semantic and poetic specialties, as well as to further reading (*Psalmen 101–50*, 789–807).

38. For example, Kimelman carves out the reverse acrostic and points to the strategy of addressing poems by means of such a play with letters in Babylonian acrostics (*Psalm 145*, 45).

been noticed.³⁹ Moreover, the possibility of going one letter further and reading מלכי, “my king,” has not to my knowledge yet been considered, but it is a reading that has interesting implications for interpretation. The address of the text from verse 1 is resumed as a quasi-dedication of the psalm to God, “my king” or “the king par excellence.” Simultaneously, the superscription operates as a signature of the psalm by the praying “I,” the human king par excellence, King David. This deliberate poetic construction emphasizes one important metaphor for God in the history of prayer in the whole of its ambiguity. Psalm 145 remembers the connection of David and his God and at the same time constructs a new image of God’s universal reign that comprises all generations and reveals all human power, all human kingship, in a different light. The picture of kingship drawn from the living environment of people continued to connect God and humans also in later times, as the texts of the New Testament show. Furthermore, the process of remembering and constructing continues, as times and thus perceptions of kingdom and power are changing.

From the center of the psalm—effectively, gazing from the kingdom of God—the eyes of the reader are drawn in two different directions: up toward a respectable collection of words and word combinations describing God’s action, and down toward an ensemble of apparently more concrete pictures, illustrating how God’s action ideally shows.

In the upper part, the accumulation of attributes that are brought into relation with God via possessive suffixes attracts attention. How can the relationship between the different attributes be described, and is there any possibility of bringing some organization to the accumulation of terms? They construct a semantic field of God’s remembered and hoped-for deeds or actions. Among them, first and foremost, the term נפלאות requires explanation. Forms of the roots גדל and גבר, as well as the passive participle of ירא, are often found in parallel with the root פלא, being essential for the discourse on the topic of miracles/wonders in the Hebrew Bible, which could be further explored on the basis of Ps 145.⁴⁰ It seems to be about a theology that tries to describe God through his actions, portrayed as

39. See also Neumann, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 47–48.

40. On the often-unattended topic of miracle/wonder in the Hebrew Bible, see now the stimulating analysis of Friedhelm Hartenstein, “Wunder im Alten Testament: Zur theologischen Begrifflichkeit für das Außerordentliche in der Hebräischen Bibel (pl’, pälä’ und nifla’ot),” in *Wunder*, ed. Elisabeth Gräß-Schmidt and Reiner Preul, MJT 28 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), 1–30.

special in more than one way. Accounts of these actions are to be found in narratives, to be assumed in the background of so-called abstract nouns as well as in (often poetic) texts with confessional character. These different facets meet in Ps 145 and are both especially important for a differentiated characterization of the biblical account of wonders/miracles. In this very play on words that we often simply check off as abstract nouns, we can instead examine theological reasoning as a work of remembering and constructing. It reshapes the past in tying together God's sameness in his actions in different realms (e.g., history and creation) and situations. Thus entire narratives such as that of the exodus are literally "brought to a term." These abstract nouns have the potential to be again unfolded into (new) narratives in the life of the praying community.

The accumulation of attributes is flanked by three verses combining God's name with a prefixed description, thus forming confession-like phrases. What can only be mentioned here is that with these short descriptions whole traditions are remembered, transformed, and brought together. Verse 3 is a kind of refrain of the psalms of YHWH's kingdom (see Ps 48:2a and Ps 96:4a), now culminating not in Zion but in God's greatness itself. Verse 8, combined with the term *נפלאות* and the crucial role of God's *רחם*, points to the events of the exodus, especially to the passage Exod 32–34 with its description of God's wrath and his benefaction to the people of Israel. A whole library of other memories could be added.⁴¹

Gazing down from the center of the psalm, one faces the tangible connection of the human neediness described earlier and God's acts responding to it. The characteristics and attributes introduced in the upper part are realized in some of God's deeds for the benefit of certain groups of people, which seems to contradict the universal character of the text and has challenged commentators throughout the ages. Especially striking is verse 20b, where the elimination of all evildoers is described, whereas elsewhere enemies, evildoers, or other adversaries of God or the praying individual do not seem to play any role in Ps 145. This passage is additionally highlighted by the use of the one single *yiqtol* form from God's side that the text offers. Once again, the nod to the comprehensive character of the text is important, since it does not allow us to ignore the menacing realities that are also in the background of other verses.

41. For a number of intertextual references, see Neumann, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 49–94.

Already with the reference to גְּדוּלוֹת, נְפִלְאוֹת, גְּבוּרוֹת, and נוֹרָאוֹת, which may also allude to God's acts in creation, and with the mention of God's creatures as מַעֲשֵׂה and כֹּל חַי (see Gen 3:20 with Eve as mother of "everything that is alive"), another vast and important tradition is connected to the psalm and newly embellished: God as creator, the world as creation. This can be seen to be starting with verse 3, where the aforementioned refrain of the psalms of God's kingdom is combined with a description of the inscrutability of God's magnitude. The seldom-used phrase אֵין חֶקֶר occurs, sometimes in parallel with forms of גָּדַל and פָּלֵא, in important statements about and within contexts of creation (Isa 40:28; Job 5:9; 9:10; Prov 25:3). In the second part of the psalm, the topic of creation is recalled both by terms like חַי and בֶּשֶׂר and by the fundamental motif of the divine care for every living being, particularly for endangered life. In the Jewish tradition, this aspect survived in the prominent role of verse 16 in common prayer.⁴² Psalm 104 merits discussion here, being closely connected to Ps 103, which has the one and only other occurrence of מַלְכוּת in the Hebrew Psalter. Psalm 104 has a lot of interesting parallels with Ps 145 in addition to the often-quoted grace (Ps 104:27).⁴³ To simply give a glimpse: Psalm 104 shows the functioning of creation in an all-encompassing, preferentially phenomenological mode with a characteristic style resonant of wisdom. God's action as creator and sustainer of the world may be observed and expressed, according to Pss 104 and 145, even if there are limits to the human capacity. Moreover, Ps 104 inaugurates a series of twenty-four exclamations of "Hallelujah!" in the Psalter, coming to their summit in the final *hallel* psalms, 146–50, and experiencing a special prelude to that in the תְּהִלָּה לַדָּוִד.

Both parts recall known traditions and put them together into a new picture, describing God and humans against the background of God's kingdom and thus giving an interpretation of the image of God as king.

42. Noted, e.g., by Avrohom C. Feuer, *Psalms 73–150*, vol. 2 of *Sefer Tehillim: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources*, ATS (Brooklyn: Mesorah, 1985), 1696.

43. Included among the different temporal aspects are the topics of the elimination of evildoers and the fundamental order of supply for all creatures. Besides, Ps 104 belongs to Pss 101–106, the group of psalms that comprises an "integrative-elementary conception of the מַלְכוּת יְהוָה." See Martin Leuenberger, *Konzeptionen des Königtums Gottes im Psalter: Untersuchungen zu Komposition und Redaktion der theokratischen Bücher IV–V im Psalter*, ATANT 83 (Zürich: TVZ, 2004), 248–60.

This very same מלכות that is found in the center of Ps 145 is in itself an example of remembering and constructing, interestingly showcasing different kinds of identity formation in the Second Temple period and beyond.

In the history of ancient Israel and its literature, a plenitude of concepts of divine and human power, in negative and positive senses, has evolved, sprouting from the root מלך, and growing on a semantic field of which we find significant parts in Ps 145 and the texts surrounding it, in terms of both Psalter composition and theological discourse. With the remembering and constructing of Ps 145, we find ourselves on a special stage in the history of the image of God as king, in which common traditions are reshaped and, together with other texts, important fundamentals are provided for later constructions of theologies and anthropologies relating to God's kingdom. The abstract noun מלכות, which only occurs in late texts of the Hebrew Bible, and even there quite infrequently, holds a central position concerning the formal composition and thus also the content of the psalm. For example, Anna Maria Schwemer, in her exploration of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice from Qumran, was able to show the developing popularity of this term and the connected yet varying concepts tied to it.⁴⁴ One also has to take note of the existence of other interesting texts operating with the term מלכות/βασίλεια—for example, the Wisdom of Solomon, the Psalms of Solomon, and, not least, the continuation of kingship theology in the New Testament. Without being able to get into detail with specific texts, of which a noteworthy group are prayer texts, I want to note how tradition is condensed through one term remembered, through being applied in different contexts—be it through integration into a special constellation of motifs, a specific political situation, or a cosmological description as in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice—may construct new realities and thus new identities. We get deeper into the history of this term if we successfully collocate these different contexts and explore their relationship to one another.

44. Anna Maria Schwemer, "Gott als König und seine Königsherrschaft in den Sabbatliedern aus Qumran," in *Königsherrschaft Gottes und himmlischer Kult im Judentum, Urchristentum und in der hellenistischen Welt*, ed. Martin Hengel and Anna M. Schwemer, WUNT 55 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 45-118. Compare with Odo Camponovo's different conclusion, which assumes that the topic of God's kingdom is important but not vivid in Qumran, in *Königtum, Königsherrschaft und Reich Gottes in den frühjüdischen Schriften*, OBO 58 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1984).

4. Psalm 145: Israelite Identity?

In the limited possibilities of this essay, I can only vaguely pose the question of what function Ps 145 had in a *special* time of identity formation—namely, in the rising and changing Judaism of the Persian and Hellenistic periods—and also, therefore, in a special literary context, the Psalter, for which this was the formative period of compilation.

Nowhere in Ps 145 is Israel mentioned—neither Jerusalem, nor Zion, nor the people, nor the temple. In fact, as we have already seen, an eminently universal character distinguishes the text. One must assert, however, that even in a text of such inclusiveness, there still may be construction of identity—not only Israelite identity—albeit in a special way.

This happens first and foremost through every contextualization of a motif such as the מלכות יהוה but also of an individual text, whether in the context of the Masoretic Psalter or the Psalter of the LXX, in manuscripts from Qumran and the Judean Desert, in the Mishnah, or in Christian liturgical books, where there may be new ways of constructing identities. A text such as Ps 145 unfolds its whole theological potential in the synopsis of its different points of contextualization. First and foremost, it does this in the processes of remembering and constructing between these points. Let me turn to the contextualization we normally start with when attempting to write the histories of a psalm and its contexts. The position Ps 145 was given by the formative redaction of the Psalter more closely exemplifies at this point the immediate context of Ps 145.⁴⁵ The last psalms of David begin with the praise of a praying individual in God's sanctuary (היכל קדשך) in Ps 138, then reflect the situation of the human being *coram Deo* in a way that is more concentrated on the individual in Pss 139–144, and end in a beatitude of the people in Ps 144:15. Psalm 145 follows, so that an identification of the collective addressed in Ps 145 with this very people stands to reason. Thereafter, Ps 145 opens the door to the finale of the Psalter, in which we encounter the perspective of universal praise as well as different groups and demarcations. Strikingly prominent is the group of the חסידים, known from Ps 145.⁴⁶ This term, with only thirty-four appearances in the Hebrew Bible, is in need of further explanation, even

45. For the part Ps 145 plays in the formation of the Psalter, see especially Leuenberger, *Konzeptionen*, 367–87.

46. See Neumann's interpretation, which may be complemented by considering the interaction of different groups, God's kingdom, and universal delineations in other

if Ps 148:14 implies a possible identification with the people of God. Concerning Ps 145, it is important that the חסידים, who occasionally appear in combination with ברך, are brought in parallel with “all deeds” and are framed by two occurrences of חסד referring to God and thus again pointing to the crucial correlation of theological and anthropological statements. If we expand our sight a little toward the psalms between the מעלות Psalter and the last Davidic Psalter, the dramatic interplay of individual and collective, of universal and particular predications, becomes even more intense: the twin psalms Pss 135 and 136 praise the deeds of God’s חסד in creation and history and the חסד that seems actually to collide with the situation of political impotence, being theologically reflected in the Song of Zion, Ps 137. A blanket of silence unfurls over the terms *Zion* and *Jerusalem* throughout the whole last David Psalter and plays an important role in this psalm. The silence is not broken until Pss 146 and 147, with their conception of God the King on Mount Zion and the reconstruction of Jerusalem. Psalm 145 is itself part of this silence. It seems to confront the missing identification marks with a new factor, the מלכות יהוה, completed by universal praise by humanity, thus referring to a transmission of the knowledge about God’s sameness in his action throughout history.

5. Conclusion

Looking at Ps 145 from the perspective of the topic of this volume suggests different observations that may at least raise new questions about the text and its history of contextualization. This history is capable of creating ever new constructions of identity. Moreover, the exploration of one individual text may possibly hint, at least, at feasible answers to the main questions of this volume:

- ◆ What difference does it make if theological and anthropological insights are offered in the form of prayers?
- ◆ Which transformations may be traced in the multivocal prayer texts of the Persian and Hellenistic periods?

texts from the Second Temple Period and the interesting reception history of these dynamics (Neumann, *Schriftgelehrte Hymnen*, 70–71).

- ♦ What are the functions of prayer texts like Ps 145 in the viral discourses of times that are significantly marked by dynamics of remembering and constructing?

The main arguments brought forth in this essay show the interconnectedness of these questions with the careful study of a single text, its different contexts, and its multifarious history. Even though only a couple of aspects of Ps 145, with its special stage in the history of the image of God as king, could be elaborated in this essay, it became clear that this prayer is a vivid example of dynamics of remembering and constructing in late texts of the Hebrew Bible. Reflecting on these categories sheds light on the way a text such as Ps 145 provides insights into theology and anthropology. Its theological work consists of the reassessment of well-known traditions that are poetically concentrated into abstract nouns, citations, and dense formulations that hold the potential of being reactivated in new narratives and are open to ever new contextualization. With its intensive use of the noun מַלְכוּת— which is, as we have seen, significantly characterized by the aspects of time the text offers, as well as by the connectedness of divine and human action—Ps 145 constructs a unique picture of God’s kingdom in the Hebrew Psalter. Psalm 145 is a prayer that tries to hold together the dynamics of universality and particularity, of God’s incomprehensible might and human reality, and of the consciousness of tradition and ever-changing circumstances, which shows especially in the long reception history of Ps 145 and its central theme—God’s kingdom.

The better part of what has been said can perhaps be assembled in a simple picture: if we imagine Ps 145 as a kind of literary devotional object, it is per se marked by the fact that it functions like an image incompletely merged with itself. By means of such a devotional object, a concept of God is remembered, envisioned, and constructed and is cast into a small format. It has a personal, individual, but still collective reference and thus reveals something about its bearer. In different contexts, it may attract different associations. Sometimes, the object is even passed on from one generation to another.

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