

Psalm 45 and the Achaemenid View of the Ideal King

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Introduction

Psalm 45 stands out as one of the most extensively examined Psalms within the book.¹ Already in the 19th century, scholars classified it as a royal psalm due to its notable recurrence of references to the king.² The psalm is characterized by two evident divisions. The first focuses on the king, employing exclusively second-person masculine pronouns in vv. 3–10 and 17–18. The second revolves around a woman coming to the king's palace, articulated through feminine pronouns in vv. 11–16.³

Although scholars concur that the king occupies a central position within the psalm, they diverge in their opinions regarding other pertinent aspects, including its *Sitz im Leben*. Is it a depiction of a wedding ceremony (*epithalamion*) or the coronation of a king?⁴ Does it focus on a specific monarch or queen? If so, who are these individuals? Another aspect that has garnered scholarly attention is the vocabulary employed, which undoubtedly contributes to the psalm's distinctiveness within the Psalter.⁵ For instance, v. 7_a has been,

¹ See the research review in Diederik Blankenstijn, "Singing for a King: The Message of Psalm 45," *JHS* 21 (2021): 1–15.

² These references led scholars in the early 19th century to characterize the psalm as secular-royal, see Wilhelm M.L. de Wette, *Commentar über die Psalmen* (Heidelberg: Nabu, 1856), 3. Gunkel also classified the psalm as royal. See Herman Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Eugene: Mercer University, 1998), 99. See also Scott R.A. Starbuck, *Court Oracles in the Psalms: The So-Called Royal Psalms in their Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1999), 67–102. But see Theodor H. Gaster, "Psalm 45," *JBL* 74 (1955): 239–251, who believes that despite the repetition of the royal motif, the terminology in this psalm can also be applied to weddings between spouses who are not necessarily in royal status.

³ This division was also proposed by Patterson, although he includes in the second part vv. 17 and 18. See: Richard D. Patterson, "A Multiplex Approach to Psalm 45," *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (1985): 29–48. In my opinion, these verses, at least according to the pronouns they contain, are unrelated to the second part. Some scholars add v. 2 to the first part, although I believe that the verse serves as part of the preamble. See, e.g., Adam K. Copenhaver, *The Royal Bride as Historical Eggshells? Bruce Waltke's Canonical-Process Approach Applied to Psalm 45* (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 2009), 18.

⁴ Most scholars believe this is a wedding ceremony; some believe this is a king's coronation. See James M. Trotter, "The Genre and Setting of Psalm 45," *ABR* 57 (2009): 34–46.

⁵ Dahood sought to attribute part of this vocabulary to the Phoenician or North Canaanite. See Mitchell D. Dahood, *Psalms*, Vol. 1: 1–50, AB (Garden City: Word, 1966), 275. Patterson expands his idea and finds other lucrative words and phrases in the psalm. See Patterson, *A Multiplex Approach*, 34. Mulder also dealt with the vocabulary and concluded that much of it belonged to the Neo-Assyrian period. See Jan S.M. Mulder, *Studies on Psalm 45* (Ph.D. Dissertation; Offsetdrukkerij Witsiers, 1972), 148–152.

and continues to be, a focal point of extensive debate. In this verse, the psalmist allegedly characterizes the king's throne as the throne of God: כִּסֵּאֲךָ אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם (כִּסֵּאֲךָ is genitival).⁶ From what source does the notion of equating the king's throne to that of God originate? Can traces of this concept be discerned in extrabiblical contexts, or is it firmly entrenched within the biblical tradition itself—for instance, in other psalms or in later biblical literature such as the Book of Chronicles? What is the connection between the two sections of the psalm? The first section pertains to the coronation of the king, while the second section addresses the marriage and the queen's arrival at the palace.

In this article, I intend to address these questions. I will present two parallel approaches: the first seeks to demonstrate how this chapter is, in fact, a product of a later literary stage, most likely from the Persian period, in which elements of Persian royal ideology—as reflected in the texts and iconographies found at Persepolis—were deliberately incorporated. The second attempts to identify the background for this conception within the biblical corpus itself; for this purpose, I will compare Psalm 45 with the royal ideology evident in the Book of Chronicles.

Dating the psalm

Scholars sought to establish a chronological framework for Psalm 45, correlating it with the reign of the king and queen to whom it alludes. These efforts have resulted in some scholars dating the psalm to the period between David and Josiah (10th–6th B.C.E.).⁷ An alternative interpretation posits that the psalm may

⁶ On the attempts to explain this characterization, see Murray J. Harris, "The Translation of Elohim in Psalm 45:7–8," *TynBul* 35 (1984): 65–89; Jacob Hoftijzer, "Remarks on Psalm 45:7a," *Eretz-Israel: Frank Moore Cross Volume* (1999): *78–*83; Misook Lim, *Königskritik und Königsideologie in Ps 44–46: Eine exegetische Untersuchung zum theologischen Sinn in den kompositorischen "Unterbrechungen" der Psalmen-Trias, gelesen in lectio continua, gedeutet nach dem Prinzip der concatenation* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2017), 172–174. In the LXX, אֱלֹהִים is a vocative: ὁ θρόνος σου, ὁ Θεός, εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος. See Joachim Schaper, *Eschatology in the Greek Psalter* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 80–81. See also the Targum: בְּיִסְדֵּי יְקָרְךָ יְיָ קִיּוּם לְעַלְמֵי עֲלָמִין.

⁷ Mitchell states: "This psalm is a royal epithalamion, almost certainly from Israel's monarchic period." See David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Program in the Book of Psalms* (Sheffield: Create Space, 1997), 245. See also Nancy L. de Claisse-Walford, Rolf Jacobson and Beth Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 416. Names such as Solomon, Jehoram, Josiah, and Ahab were mentioned. See Ratmond J. Tournay, "Les affinités du PS. XLV avec le cantique des cantiques et leur interprétation messianique," in *Congress Volume: Bonn 1962* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 169. See also Patterson, *A Multiplex Approach*. He asserts that the king in question is Jehoram, and the queen is Athaliah. Mulder, *Studies on Psalm 45*, 158 asserts that the king is Josiah.

serve as a depiction of a future Messianic king rather than a specific historical figure.⁸ A middle ground perspective posits that the psalm initially addressed a particular king but underwent revisions, likely during the Persian period, to project a vision of the future ideal king.⁹

Assigning a specific date to the psalm by linking it to a particular king or queen may not be the most reliable method, as it often leads to circular arguments. Instead, I suggest evaluating the psalm using two key indicators. First, analyzing its style could provide insights into a potential time frame. Second, and more crucially, one must examine the ideology it presents and compare it to parallel ideologies in the Ancient Near Eastern world and with other biblical texts that share a common ideological framework.

It is plausible that the psalm originated during the monarchal era, possibly intended for a specific king. However, considering its ideological content and the late linguistic features present, it is more likely that the psalm was edited or compiled during the Persian period. This period was characterized by aspirations for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy, symbolized through a royal wedding narrative that emphasizes the monarchy's continuity.

I will first outline the linguistic components within the psalm that indicate its later composition or redaction.

1. Late Biblical Hebrew - The psalm contains several phrases that can be attributed to LBH. a) The suffix ות in the female form, or in a form that usually has a suffix ות but can also be written in the suffix ות, such as the word ידידת;¹⁰ b) the word מלכותך rather than ממלכתך;¹¹ c) The word בְּיָקְרוֹתֶיךָ probably means 'your possessions,' as also indicated in the

⁸ See Seth T. Postel, "Psalm 45: The Messiah as a Bridegroom," in *The Moody Dictionary of Messianic Prophecy*, eds. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody, 2020), 573–589. Some allusion to the Messianic characterization of this psalm appears in Hebrews 1:8–9, which cites verses 6–7. On the affinities between these two sources, see Gert J. Steyn, "The Template of Psalm 45:6–7 (44:7–8) in Hebrews 1:8–9," *Reformed Theological Studies* 60 (2004): 1084–1103; Jocelyn McWhirter, *The Bridegroom Messiah and the People of God: Marriage in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 108.

⁹ See Hans Ausloos, *Psalm 45*, "Messianism and the Septuagint," in *The Septuagint and Messianism*, ed. Michael A. Knibb (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006), 239–251. See also Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academy Press, 1982), 130–135. He believes that the psalm was composed first on the marriage of Ahab and Isabel. However, after the exile, it became a canonical psalm sung on festive occasions.

¹⁰ See Christine R. Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1–9 and 31:10–31* (Berlin, de Gruyter, 2001), 30.

¹¹ See the discussion at Avi Hurvitz, *A Concise Lexicon of Late Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Innovations in the Writings of the Second Temple Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 165–170.

Book of Esther: וְאֵת יְקָר תַּפְאֶרֶת גְּדוּלָּתוֹ (Es 1:4); d) The phrase that closes the psalm: בְּכֹל דֶּר וָדָר.¹²

2. סִפֵּר מְהִיר - The psalm begins with the phrase סִפֵּר מְהִיר (2). This phrase occurs only in Ezra: וְהוּא סִפֵּר מְהִיר (7:3).
3. שָׁמֶן שָׁשׂוֹן - The phrase שָׁמֶן שָׁשׂוֹן (8) occurs only in Trito-Isaiah: שָׁמֶן שָׁשׂוֹן תַּחַת אֶבֶל (61:3).¹³
4. שִׁגְלָה - The term שִׁגְלָה (10) as an epithet for the queen (or mistress) occurs only in Daniel (5:2, 23) and Nehemiah (2:6). The origin of the word is probably from *išši ekalli / šegallu*.¹⁴ It should be noted that the verse in Nehemiah וְהַשִּׁגְלָה יוֹשֶׁבֶת אֶצְלוֹ is thematically similar to נִצְבָּה שִׁגְלָה לְיָמִינָךְ. In both cases, the queen is described as next to the king.
5. אֲנִי - pronoun in the short form אֲנִי (2), as opposed to the longer אֲנֹכִי. As Hornkohl has shown, in the post-exilic books like Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles, the short form's usage increases over that of the long one, and the ratio between אֲנִי and אֲנֹכִי is 3:76.¹⁵

Having highlighted the late linguistic features present in the psalm, we now turn our attention to the ideas it conveys. One such idea, encountered above, is the notion that the royal throne is in effect transformed into the throne of God. In addition to this concept, the psalm contains other motifs, such as the motif of divine election and the motif of granting gifts to the king as an expression of his exaltation. I will first examine these ideas within Persian literature, particularly the inscriptions from Persepolis and Naqsh-e Rostam, and subsequently compare these motifs with those found in later biblical books such as the Book of Chronicles. This comparison is primarily thematic rather than linguistic, focusing on conceptual correspondences between the texts, on the assumption that the psalmist sought to articulate these ideas according to his own

¹² See Avi Hurvitz, *Between Language and Language: A History of the Bible during the Second Temple Period* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1972), 73 (Hebrew). On the *quivis* construction (אִישׁ אִישׁ, יוֹם יוֹם) see also Nili Samet and Emmanuel Mastey, “The *Quivis* Construction in Biblical Hebrew: History of a Syntactic Change,” *JAOS* 143 (2023):767–784. According to their analysis, this construction originated from an asyndeton in Classical Biblical Hebrew (e.g., אִישׁ אִישׁ, דּוֹר דּוֹר) and evolved into a syndeton in Late Biblical Hebrew (אִישׁ וְאִישׁ, דּוֹר וְדּוֹר).

¹³ The division of prophecies known as “Trito-Isaiah” (56–66) dates, in the opinion of most scholars, to the post-exilic period. See, for example, Izaak J. de Hulster, *Iconographic Exegesis and Third Isaiah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 125–126. For different opinions regarding the dating of Isa 61, see Brooks Schramm, *The Opponents of Third Isaiah: Reconstructing the Cultic History of the Restoration* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academy Press, 1995), 16–20.

¹⁴ See Simo Parpola, “The Neo-Assyrian Word for ‘Queen’,” *SAAB* 2 (1998): 73–76.

¹⁵ See Aaron D. Hornkohl, *Ancient Hebrew Periodization and the Language of the Book of Jeremiah: The Case for a Sixth-Century Date of Composition* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 108.

understanding, regardless of whether or not there was a direct influence from external or internal sources.

The King and the Monarchy in the Inscriptions and Reliefs of Darius I

For many scholars, the Bisotun inscription (DB), located in Persepolis, along with two additional inscriptions found in Naqsh-e Rostam: DNa (Darius Naqsh-e Rostam inscription 'a') and DNb (Darius Naqsh-e Rostam inscription 'b'), serve as a manifestation of the foundational ideology of the Achaemenid monarchy.

The inscriptions begin with a declaration of the magnificence of the great God Ahura Mazda, the creator of the universe and humanity, responsible for the joy in the world.¹⁶ Subsequent to these initial statements, Darius asserts that his ascension to kingship was solely a consequence of Ahura Mazda's divine will to bestow upon him royal authority.¹⁷

In DNb, Darius emphasizes that his nomination as king by the great god was not coincidental. Ahura Mazda's deliberate choice stems from Darius's possession of all the requisite qualities to fulfill Ahura Mazda's desires. Darius is singled out due to his heroism, adeptness as a warrior, and embodiment of justice and truth. His alignment with justice, as opposed to falsehood, is evident, and he safeguards those who engage in virtuous deeds while ensuring retribution for those who perpetrate evil.¹⁸

The designation of kingship to Darius was deliberately meant to restore order to a world that had endured significant turmoil (as noted in DNa II 1–3). Empowered by the authority bestowed upon him by the great god, Darius undertakes to quell the insurgents who seek to disrupt the established world order with lies (*drauga* in Old Persian).¹⁹

¹⁶ See Albert de Jong, "Ahura Mazda the Creator," in *The World of Achaemenid Persia: History, Art and Society in Iran and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John Curtis and St. John Simpson (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 85–89.

¹⁷ See Rüdiger Schmitt, *The Old Persian Inscriptions of Naqsh-e Rostam and Persepolis* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 2000), 50.

¹⁸ DNb 33–49.

¹⁹ The term 'drauga' signifies a lie, and it surfaces in Achaemenian inscriptions as the cause for the world's turmoil. Scholars have not entirely elucidated the symbolic meaning of this lie, as stated by Lincoln: "Was the Lie theorized as a personified entity or an abstract force? [...] Further: How does the Lie operate? Who is vulnerable to it? Does it exist apart from the act of lying? Or is it always embedded in the practice of certain deceitful humans?" See Bruce Lincoln, "Representing the Lie in Achaemenian Persia," in *"Happiness for mankind": Achaemenian Religion and the Imperial Project*, *Acta Iranica* 53 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 217.

The dynamics between the king and Ahura Mazda are accentuated by terminology typically associated with divine attributes. In this context, Darius uses the term *kamā* (in Old Persian), signifying a strong desire or will. Notably, Darius uses this term solely in his inscriptions when referring to both the god and himself as the king.²⁰ This links the great god's profound desires and the monarch's aspirations: to reinstate joy (*šiyāti*) for humanity.²¹ Thus, it becomes imperative to hold accountable those who refuse to acknowledge the king's authority, since their rebellion contradicts and undermines the divine will. The restoration of joy, as desired by the great god, hinges upon the king's dedication to this cause, and his effectiveness in executing this mission depends on the authority granted by Ahura Mazda.²²

The association between the king and the divine is by no means new to the Achaemenid kings. Assyrian rulers viewed themselves as taking shelter under the protective mantle of gods. They frequently portrayed their actions as emulating divine deeds, particularly those related to upholding justice and truth, aversion to malevolence and injustice, and defending the vulnerable and oppressed.²³ They even depicted themselves as nurtured by the very arms of the god.²⁴ However, as Aljuboori stressed, “There is no evidence of the worship of the Assyrian king or his image. He was effectively the shadow of the god; he may be called LUGAL ^dUTU ša UN.MEŠ ‘The king is the sun of the people’ and his statue was set up next to the god in temple.”²⁵

This approach, it appears, underwent a transformation in Achaemenid thought. The rhetoric of the Achaemenid kings remains consistent with that of the Assyrians. However, as convincingly shown by Margaret Root

visual imagery across a range of Achaemenid monuments reinforced
divine aspects of the king's nature in relation to abstract principles of

²⁰ See David Janzen, *The End of History and the Last King: Achaemenid Ideology and Community Identity in Ezra-Nehemiah* (London: T & T Clark, 2021), 95–96.

²¹ Ibid., 91–92.

²² See Prods O. Skjærvø, “The Achaemenid and the *Avesta*,” in *Birth of the Persian Empire*, Vol. 1, eds. Vesta S. Curtis and Sarah Stewart (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 57–58.

²³ See RIMA, vol. 3, 195.

²⁴ See SAA 3:13 (Assurbanipal's Hymn to the Wars of Nineveh and Arbel). See also at the closure of this hymn (14): “The Lady of Nineveh, the mother who bore me, endowed me with unparalleled kingship; the Lady of Arbela, my creator, ordered everlasting life (for me).” See also SAA 11:15.

²⁵ Ali Y. Aljuboori, “The Relationship Between the Assyrian Kings and Their Gods,” *Athar Alrafedain* 1 (2002): 3–19 [7].

belief, in relation to the cosmos, and in relation to earthly practice within the society of humankind.²⁶

Thus, a distinct disparity emerges between the language employed by the Achaemenid rulers in their inscriptions and the tangible actions portrayed in Achaemenid iconography. Illustrating this, Root points out the relief discovered in the Apadana at Persepolis. This relief portrays conquered groups presenting themselves before the king, accompanied by a Persian nobleman who guides a representative from each group by hand. While these depictions resemble Mesopotamian reliefs, there is nonetheless a key distinction: in the Mesopotamian reliefs, the groups are of worshipers approaching the deity, while in the relief from Persepolis, the groups are approaching the king.²⁷ Janzen has added more pieces of evidence that corroborate Root's viewpoint:

1. Ritual ceremonies occurred in the tombs of kings and in front of the statue of Darius.
2. The marked resemblance between Darius' image and the Ahura Mazda's image.
3. The illustration of the king standing upon animals that carry him, akin to how gods are often portrayed in Mesopotamian artwork.
4. Coins with the king's head replacing the customary depiction of a god's head.

Although the Achaemenid inscriptions themselves don't claim a clear parity between the kings and the god, the iconographies in Persepolis unequivocally illustrate the Achaemenid kings' deliberate efforts to shape their public image as a god. These depictions aimed not only to convey that the kings represented the mighty god but also to assert the idea that they had transcended mortal status and attained divinity themselves.²⁸

Thus, the reliefs from Apadana articulate an ideology that differs from those present in reliefs from the Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian periods. Brent Strawn encapsulated it in the following manner: "The Apadana reliefs... portray

²⁶ See Margaret C. Root, "Defining the Divine in Achaemenid Persian Kingship: The View from Bisitun," in *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, ed. Lynette Mitchell and Charles Melville (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 28–29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

²⁸ Janzen, *The End of History*, 106–108.

the Persians as semidivine, with the king as fully—perhaps even supremely—divine.”²⁹

The overlap between Ahura Mazda and the king exerts a significant influence about the kingdom. This awareness leads subjects to understand that assisting the king in restoring peace to the world is, in essence, assisting the god.³⁰ The king is entrusted with unveiling the veil of deception and reinstating happiness among the people, fulfilling the deep-seated *kamā* of the great god, which effectively transforms into his *kamā*.

The king’s divine status carries certain implications, most notably the idea that his throne essentially becomes the throne of the divine. In the reliefs of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods, numerous depictions showcase either the king or the divine figure seated upon their thrones. These artistic representations emphasize the significance and authority of the seated figure, whether mortal or divine.³¹ However, within the context of the Achaemenid Empire, there is a notable absence of any reliefs that depict Ahura Mazda seated upon the royal throne. The representation of Ahura Mazda is confined to the winged disk.³² Hence, according to the Achaemenid perspective, when the king

²⁹ Brent A. Strawn, “‘A World Under Control’: Isaiah 60 and the Apadana Reliefs from Persepolis,” in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*, ed. Jon L. Berquist (Atlanta: SBL, 2007), 98.

³⁰ According to Michael Chan, another contrast between Neo-Assyrian and Persian iconography is found in human collaboration with the king. In Neo-Assyrian depictions, humans work with the king out of fear. In contrast, Persian iconography illustrates cooperation emerging from a sense of reverence for the king, who is seen as the representative and even as a divine figure. See Michael J. Chan, *The Wealth of Nations: A Tradition-Historical Study* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 172.

³¹ E.g., the stone tablet from Sippar (Tell Abu Habbah) depicts the sun God Šamaš on his throne within his shrine. The tablet is available for consultation through the CDLI (Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative). See <https://cdli.earth/artifacts/472680>.

³² Scholars still debate whether this winged disk symbolizes either the god or the king. See Margaret C. Root, *The King, and Kingship in Achaemenid Art: Essays on the Creation of Empire* (Minutes Iranica 19; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 169–176; Alireza S. Shahbazi, “An Achaemenid Symbol, II. Farnah (God-Given) Fortune Symbolized,” *Archaeological Messages From Iran* 9 (1980): 119–147; Klaus Koch, “World Order and Reichsidee in Old Iran and her Effects on the Province Jehud,” in *Reichsidee and Reichsorganisation in Perserreich*, eds. Peter Frei and Klaus Koch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 105–107; Ursula Seidl, “A Monument Darius’ I from Babylon,” *ZA* 89 (1999): 101–114; Amélie Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Empire* (London: Routledge, 2007), 556. If this disk is symbolic of the god, it introduces a certain complication to the notion that describes the king as god, as articulated in Strawn’s statement: “Indeed, in light of the iconographical (semi)divinization of the king, perhaps we should be surprised by the inclusion of the sun-disk in the first place.” See Strawn “Isaiah 60 and the Apadana Reliefs from Persepolis,” 98 n. 13.

sits on his throne, he is essentially occupying the god's throne, being regarded as equal to him.

Before concluding this brief review, I would like to highlight an additional point regarding gift-giving practices in the Ancient Near Eastern context, particularly within the Achaemenid empire, where the nature of presenting gifts to the king appears to have transformed. Offering gifts to the king, whether as an act of submission or as a gesture of respect, was a widespread custom in the ancient Near East. Many iconographies spanning various periods depict scenes where the king receives delegations presenting gifts.³³ Regarding the reliefs from the Achaemenid period at Persepolis, there is a dispute among scholars. Some believe that these reliefs reflect the celebrations for the new year that were accompanied by the giving of gifts to the king, and some believe that these reliefs do not reflect celebrations, in general, but are, instead, a concrete representation in which the king receives gifts because the matter highlights and glorifies his majesty.³⁴

Kistler arrives at a similar conclusion. According to him, the shift in the dynamics of gift-giving during the Achaemenid period primarily revolves around the image of the king. Typically, presenting gifts to the king was a reciprocal act, where both parties aimed to reinforce their bonds or, at times, to pay homage to the king. Per Kistler, during the Achaemenid era, gifts served a singular purpose: to affirm the authority and supremacy of the king. The act of giving gifts wasn't merely a display of respect; rather, it symbolized the acknowledgment of the king and his formidable position.³⁵ Of course, the pertinent question is whether the authors of the psalm were in any way aware of this Achaemenid ideology. In this question, I wish to follow Granerød, who posited that, although no royal Persian inscriptions have been discovered within

³³ See Chan, *The Wealth of Nations*, 96–149.

³⁴ See Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, trans. by P.T. Daniels (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 185–186: “Persepolitan art is not a simple, quasi-photographic reflection of reality. Though it does capture reality, it does so in order to transform it and make it sublime; it relates less to a scenic scenario than to an ideological discourse on royalty and imperial might organized around themes particularly evocative of the power of the Great King.”

³⁵ See Erich Kistler, “Achämenidische ‘Becher’ und die Logik kommensaler Politik im Reich der Achämeniden,” in *Der Achämenidenhof*, eds. Bruno Jacobs and Robert Rollinger (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 418.

the territory of ancient Israel, there is nevertheless reason to assume that Persian propaganda reached this region and was absorbed by the social elites of Yehud.³⁶

The King and the Monarchy in the Book of Chronicles

An alternative possibility is an intertextual influence on the psalm's author. In such a culturally confined environment as Yehud during the Persian period, one might reasonably anticipate a mutual interchange of literary styles and worldviews. In this context, it is plausible that the author of Psalm 45 was influenced by authors who themselves were subject, either directly or indirectly, to Persian ideological currents. It is also possible that both texts drew from a third source—in this case, Achaemenid ideology—resulting in the observed similarity.³⁷ Naturally, such hypotheses are inherently difficult to substantiate. We possess no direct evidence allowing us to trace the precise direction of influence, and the data available to us remain elusive. As noted above, among the biblical books, especially the later ones, ideas similar to those found in Psalm 45 are indeed attested in the Book of Chronicles. Chronicles, certainly in comparison with its *Vorlage*, presents the most radical stance within the historiographical literature, according to which the king's throne is in fact the throne of God, and the kingship of God is effectively manifest in human monarchy. This idea appears in several passages in the book, particularly in the narratives of Solomon's reign, which scholars, most notably Sara Japhet, have examined in detail. Japhet argues that the kingship, in its essence, represents "the kingship of God over Israel," which is manifest in the practical life of the king. In essence, the king serves as a divine representative. The monarchy is not regarded as an end, but rather as a means through which the Chronicler constructs a theocratic worldview. Consequently, the king does not sit on his own throne, but rather on God's throne. Human kingdom and the kingdom of God no longer exist as parallel, independent realms; the human kingdom is the

³⁶ See Gard Granerød, "By the Favour of Ahuramazda I Am King': On the Promulgation of a Persian Propaganda Text among Babylonians and Judaeans," *JSJ* 44 (2013): 479: "To be sure, no Judaeon version of DB has ever been found. Nevertheless, in light of the positive evidence it is, I believe, likely that the kind of propaganda texts that DB represents was also known in the Persian province of Yehud. Although it cannot be proved, it is reasonable that (leading groups among) the Judaeans in the Persian period were exposed to similar royal Achaemenid influence."

³⁷ This conclusion is likewise reached by Hartenstein in his comparison between Psalm 2:6_a and the royal ideology presented in Chronicles. See Friedhelm Hartenstein, "The King on the Throne of God: The Concept of World Dominion in Chronicles and Psalm 2," in *Psalmen und Chronik*, eds. Friedhelm Hartenstein and Thomas Willi (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. 2019), 277–296.

kingdom of God. This perspective is most prominently underscored during the reign of Solomon: four of the five verses explicitly addressing this theological subject matter specifically pertain to Solomon.³⁸

When compared with their *Vorlage*, it should be noted that three of the five verses appear without a parallel and were most likely composed by the Chronicler himself:

<i>Vorlage</i>	Chronicles
וְנֶאֱמַן בֵּיתָךְ וּמִמְלַכְתְּךָ עַד עוֹלָם לְפָנֶיךָ בְּסֶאֱדָה יְהִיָּה נֶבֶן עַד עוֹלָם (2 Sam 7:16)	וְהָעֲמֻדָּתִיהוּ בְּבֵיתִי וּבְמִלְכוּתִי עַד הָעוֹלָם וְכִסְאוֹ יְהִיָּה נֶבֶן עַד עוֹלָם (1 Chr 17:14)
-----	מִכָּל בְּנֵי כִי רַבִּים בָּנִים נָתַן לִי יְהוָה וַיִּבְחַר בְּשָׁלֹמֹה בְּנִי לְשֹׁבֵת עַל <u>בֵּסֵא מַלְכוּת יְהוָה</u> עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל (28:5)
-----	וַיָּשֶׁב שְׁלֹמֹה עַל <u>בֵּסֵא יְהוָה</u> לְמֶלֶךְ תַּחַת דָּוִיד אָבִיו וַיִּצְלַח וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֵלָיו כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל (29:23)
יְהִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ אֲשֶׁר חָפֵץ בָּךְ לְתַתֶּךָ עַל בֵּסֵא יִשְׂרָאֵל (1 Kgs 10:9)	יְהִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּרוּךְ אֲשֶׁר חָפֵץ בָּךְ לְתַתֶּךָ עַל <u>בֵּסֵאוֹ</u> לְמֶלֶךְ לִיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ (2 Chr 9:8)
-----	וַעֲתָה אַתֶּם אֹמְרִים לְהַתְחַזֵּק לִפְנֵי מַמְלַכַת יְהוָה בְּיַד בְּנֵי דָוִיד (13:8)

These verses, those composed directly by the Chronicler and those deliberately modified by him in comparison with their *Vorlage*, demonstrate that, in the Chronicler's view, the kingship of God is realized through the monarchy of the House of David. Consequently, the king's throne is, in effect, the throne of God. This identification, of course, also bears upon Psalm 45:7_a, which effectively presents a comparable perspective.

One consequence of the functional equation between the king's throne and the throne of God, is that the throne attracts both individuals and foreign rulers who come to present gifts to the monarch. This phenomenon is particularly prominent in the account of Solomon in Chronicles, but it also

³⁸ See Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought*, BEATAJ 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), 308–320.

occurs in the narratives of other kings, such as Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17:5), Jotham (27:5), and Hezekiah (32:27). According to Matthew Lynch the king's receipt of gifts is a symbol of God's power and superiority. The king, residing in Jerusalem, becomes the focal point of the world; receiving tributes from other kings. Lynch argues that these gifts exemplify the offerings that people are expected to give to God, as emphasized in 1 Chr 16:28-29. Bringing wealth to the king, the foreign rulers acknowledge the supremacy of God over all other deities.³⁹

This ideology manifests itself in three distinct aspects: the perceived identification between the king and God; the divine selection of the king; and the presentation of gifts to the king, who effectively represents God.

As noted, within the culturally confined context of Yehud during the Persian period, one cannot rule out mutual influences among authors; yet neither can one dismiss the possibility of parallel influences stemming from Achaemenid ideology, which, in my view, most likely reached Yehud in one form or another.

Psalm 45

Considering the discussion above, I wish to propose an additional interpretation of Psalm 45. This interpretation posits that the psalm's author was either directly or indirectly influenced by Achaemenid ideology, through intermediaries who were themselves shaped by this ideology. It is quite possible that the psalm, as preserved, is not a wholly Persian-period composition. Rather, it may rely on earlier fragments that originally extolled the king. Following the destruction of the Temple and the monarchy, the psalm was likely revised to confer renewed significance, not to a specific, contemporary king, but to an idealized future monarch who would eventually ascend to the throne. The psalm presents an idealized depiction of a king, enumerating his virtues and accomplishments in both military and moral realms. It symbolizes the king's throne as a representation of God's throne, emphasizing the king's divine connection. Additionally, it highlights the king's exclusive selection from among his fellow citizens, underscoring his unique status. The psalm presents the offering made to the king, symbolized through a woman sent for marriage. Lastly, the psalm

³⁹ Matthew Lynch, *Monotheism and Institutions in the Book of Chronicles* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 72–132.

concludes with an aspiration to perpetuate the king's lineage. This broadly outlines the content of the psalm.

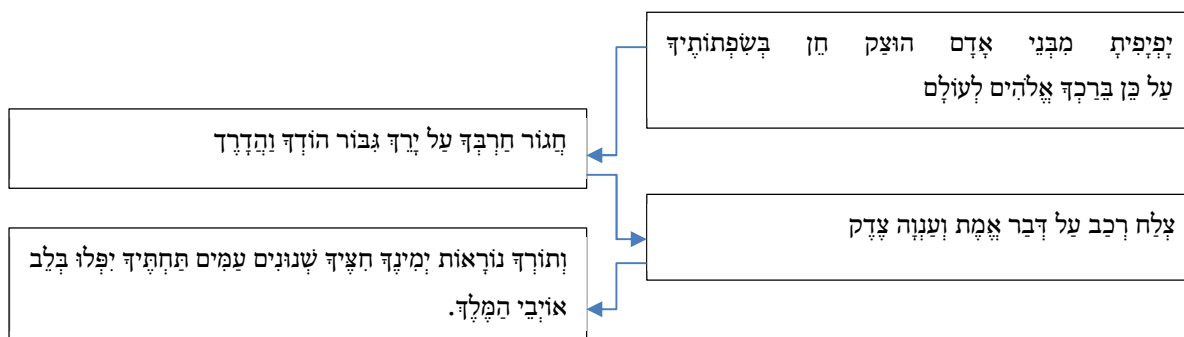
In the subsequent discussion, I will examine the psalm's two parts. In the first part, my focus will be on detailing the description of the king. In the second part, I will focus on the designated queen and the ceremonial aspects of her arrival at the palace.

The King (vv. 3–10; 17–18)

As noted above, the psalm is divided into two sections. The first focuses entirely on the king, whereas the second centers on the queen as she approaches the palace. Supporting this division is the formula *על כן . . . אלהים לעולם ועד*, which recurs exclusively at the beginning, middle, and conclusion of the first division, and thereby accentuates the delineation of this unit. When adding the omitted elements, the extended formula within the first division takes on the following structure:⁴⁰

v.3 – על כן	ברכך	אלהים	לעולם [ועד]
v.7 – [על כן]	כסאך	אלהים	[ל]עולם ועד
v.8 – על כן	משחד	אלהים	[לעולם ועד]
v.18 – על כן	עמים יהודוך	[אלהים]	לעולם ועד

The psalm begins with a solemn prelude that firmly directs the reader's attention to the king: *רַחֵם לְבִי דְבַר טוֹב אֶמֶר אֲנִי מַעֲשֵׂי לְמֶלֶךְ* (v. 2). Following this initial declaration, the psalmist outlines a characterization of the king (vv. 3–6). This portrayal amalgamates commendation of the king's physical attributes, ethical attributes, and prowess as a valiant warrior. These aspects are interwoven in an alternating fashion: physical appearance – valor on the battlefield – moral virtues – valor on the battlefield.



⁴⁰ See also Mulder, *Studies on Psalm 45*, 12.

The attributes of the king extend beyond his physical beauty and grandeur to encompass his virtues, which include truth, humility, and justice. Concurrently, his valor is vividly portrayed. With his mighty right hand, he skillfully directs his arrows to strike at the hearts of his adversaries. His sword is readily sheathed on his thigh, poised for immediate action.⁴¹ What distinguishes these characterizations is not solely the narration of the king's heroism and morality, a theme commonly shared among various ancient Near Eastern empires. What sets them apart is the incorporation of expressions that elevate the king beyond mere heroism and morality, transforming him into a divine figure. This elevation is achieved through the strategic use of components typically reserved for divine entities. For example, the phrase הוֹדֶךָ וְהַדָּרְךָ (“your majesty and splendor”), which, within the Psalter, is ascribed exclusively to the divine (Ps 104:1). Mulder identified three additional phrases, conventionally attributed to God in the Psalter, but here attributed to the king: נוֹרְאוֹת, פְּנִיךָ יְחַלּוּ, and the *Hiphil* form of the root יד/ה (יהודוֹךָ).⁴² These expressions reach their peak in verse 7, which depicts the king seated upon the throne of God: כְּסֵאֶךָ אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד. With Mettinger, I concur that this imagery of the king “reflects the king's dominion on earth as a mirror image of God's cosmic supremacy.”⁴³ Synthesizing these concepts, particularly the portrayal of the king seated on the throne of God, imparts a new dimension to the king. The king described in the psalm is exceptional, possessing qualities that not only raise him to divine status but also grant him the privilege of sitting on the divine throne.

Later, the psalmist underscores how God has selected and anointed the king (v. 8), who has emerged from among his contemporaries. Notably, the verse is constructed as a causal clause: אֲהַבְתָּ צֶדֶק וַתִּשְׁנֵא רִשְׁעָהּ עַל כֵּן מָשַׁחְךָ אֱלֹהִים שָׁמֶן שְׁשׁוֹן מִחֲבֵרֶךָ. The king's anointment is attributed to his devotion to justice and aversion to evil. This depiction of the king aligns with the Achaemenid perspective discussed earlier. The choice of a king based on his moral and physical virtues resonates with Darius's assertion of being selected by Ahura Mazda, a decision influenced by his valor and moral attributes. The question arises: while the election of a king is a recurring theme in various ancient Near

⁴¹ I cannot agree with Goldingay that the war described here is not on the battlefield but for the sake of justice. See John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Vol. 2: *Psalms 42–89*, BCOT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 57.

⁴² Mulder, *Studies on Psalm 45*, 146.

⁴³ See Trygve N.D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (Lund: Coronet Books, 1976), 263.

Eastern empires, what sets apart this selection that attributes it to the Achaemenid ideology?

The selection of kings recurs across various empires,⁴⁴ but in the case of both Darius and the king described in v. 8, the choice rests not only on heroism but also on moral virtues and his capacity to discern between good and evil, an aspect notably lacking in Assyrian nor Babylonian inscriptions. The Achaemenid perspective, influenced by Zoroastrian principles, highlights the dualistic nature of the world, emphasizing the perpetual struggle between good and evil. Darius has demonstrated himself to be an ally to truth-tellers and an opponent to those who propagate falsehoods.⁴⁵ This differentiation has played a pivotal role in Darius being chosen as the king, and it also serves as the underlying principle for selecting the king from within his circle of friends in v. 8.

The second part of the psalm presents a diplomatic wedding ceremony. In this marital arrangement, the daughter of a foreign king is sent to marry the reigning monarch. While diplomatic marriages were relatively common in the ancient Near East, they appear to hold a distinct significance in Psalm 45. The purpose of this union does not revolve around forging alliances between two kings of equal standing. The psalmist's choice of language, specifically instructing the queen to abandon her origins and regard the king as her master, suggests that this marriage does not originate from longstanding connections between these two rulers. On the contrary, following Kistler's observation mentioned earlier, it embodies a unilateral concept in which a ruler sends his daughter to the king to strengthen his realm.

This part can be further divided into two distinct segments. The first outlines the prerequisites expected of the bride prior to the wedding. The second narrates the ceremonial proceedings themselves. This division emphasizes the structured progression of the description and provides insight into the customs and rituals surrounding this diplomatic union. In the subsequent discussion, I will delve into these individual segments to elucidate their nuances and significance.

⁴⁴ See Aljuboori, *The Relationship*, 5–7.

⁴⁵ DNb 5–8.

The Queen (vv. 11–16)

Following an extensive exposition of the king's virtues and attributes, the psalmist narrates a grand wedding ceremony. In this ceremony, the daughter of a local leader arrives at the king's palace. This is a diplomatic marriage, where customary practice stipulates that the local leader presents his daughter to the king for marriage. The portrayal implicitly suggests that this union may have been imposed upon the future queen. The condition for her to forsake her familial ties is significant: וְשָׁכַחְתִּי עַמִּי וּבֵית אָבִי (v. 11). This stipulation appears incongruous with sentiments typically associated with marital unions but can be better understood within the context of a forced marriage, where the bride is coerced to leave behind her origins.

Of note is the instruction: הָטִי שִׁמְעִי בֵּת וִירָאִי וְהָטִי אָזְנוֹךָ (v. 11). The duality שִׁמְעִי/אָזְנוֹךָ underscores a prerequisite for the success of the marriage: the abandonment of her past and the absolute devotion to the king. Her complete submission demonstrates this devotion. The king is referred to as her master: כִּי אֲדֹנָיִךְ, הוא, a term that denotes an authoritative relationship akin to that of a master and a servant. Consequently, her bowing before him, captured in וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִי לוֹ, is not surprising.

Following these conditions, the second part describes of the queen's arrival at the king's palace. At this point, for the first time, the psalmist identifies the queen as בַּת צֹר. Nevertheless, this designation may also be understood more broadly as a collective reference to the Tyrian population, in a manner comparable to its usage in Isa 23:12.

Before she departs from her homeland, the wealthy individuals offer her gifts: בְּמִנְחָה פָּנִיךָ יְחִלּוּ עֲשִׂירֵי עָם (v. 13). She then departs from her family, heading towards the king's palace. The description of her entry into the king's hall is vivid and celebratory. Accompanied by her companions and possessions, she arrives adorned in gold attire that befits her newfound role.

Scholars have proposed various theories to elucidate the psalm's two sections. While the prevailing interpretation, as previously mentioned, posits that it serves as a wedding hymn for a king and queen, a pertinent inquiry arises: Why does the psalmist delve into the king's attributes, such as heroism and moral virtues, or his selection from among his peers? How do these particulars relate to the subsequent description of the impending wedding ceremony?

Due to these questions, some scholars assert that the psalm's first part pertains to the king's coronation rather than his wedding. Consequently, they

posit that the psalm's second part is a later addition.⁴⁶ Approaching the psalm from the that posits a diplomatic wedding, the second part may relate to the recurring motif in Achaemenid reliefs and inscriptions. This motif involves presenting offerings or gifts to the king as a token of acknowledgment and endorsement of his rule. As previously discussed, these gifts often take the form of material goods, such as horses or precious metals and even, in some instances, the grant of a woman for marriage. According to this interpretation, the sequence of the psalm remains intact. The first part details the attributes of the exemplary king: a figure who embodies valor and pursues justice and truth, a king who sits on God's throne, one chosen and anointed by God among his companions. The second part becomes the complementary stage in unveiling the king's grandeur: the acknowledgment and endorsement by the neighboring nations of his eminent status as a king. This recognition prompts them to send offerings. In the case at hand, it is plausible that the daughter of the king of Tyre (?) was sent for a wedding. This description of a wedding in the second part is not isolated. Just prior, in v. 10, the psalmist references other kings' daughters: בנות מלכים בִּיקְרוֹתֶיךָ. As noted, בִּיקְרוֹתֶיךָ probably means 'your possessions,' as also indicated in the Book of Esther: וְאֵת יָקָר תַּפְאָרַת גְּדוּלָּתוֹ (1:4). Meaning these weddings may have transpired as a recurring theme with the daughters of other rulers, making them part of the king's holdings.

This interpretation transforms the psalm into a coherent narrative, wherein the two sections present a comprehensive portrayal of the king, mirroring the Achaemenid tradition of offering and recognition. Given the extensive analysis provided, it becomes evident that Psalm 45 functions as a hymn dedicated to the archetype of the ideal king. Acting as a manifesto for a future king, this psalm is likely inspired by, and potentially directly influenced by, the Achaemenid paradigm concerning kingship. The depiction of the woman's arrival at the palace and her union with the king constitutes a fragment of a broader picture that the psalmist endeavors to convey. Central to this broader picture is not the wedding ceremony itself but rather the virtues and capabilities of the king, both on the battlefield and on the throne of justice. The concluding verses of the psalm align seamlessly with this concept. The invocation of a blessing for an enduring dynasty further emphasizes the central theme of the first part: the divine selection of the king. This chosen ruler, the psalmist envisions,

⁴⁶ See Frank L. Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Die Psalmen I, NEchtB* (Würzburg: Echter, 1993), 278.

will transmit this legacy to his heirs, thereby fortifying the initial election, justifying it, and perpetuating the nation's gratitude towards the founding king.

Before drawing this discussion to a close, it is worth briefly considering the inclusion of Psalm 45 within the canon.⁴⁷ This may be rooted in the preceding psalm, Psalm 44, which also belongs to the *בני קרח* division (Ps 42–49). Without delving into specifics, Psalm 44 addresses the people's lament or protest in the context of exile.⁴⁸ The lamentation in Psalm 44 might find an answer or resolution in Psalm 45.⁴⁹ The psalmist anticipates the cessation of these afflictions with the ascension of the ideal king to the throne. Similar to Ahura Mazda's appointment of Darius to end global turmoil and restore joy to humanity, the psalmist envisions an ideal king who will end the exile, restore justice, and reclaim the lost happiness following destruction. As previously mentioned, it is challenging to envision a socio-historical scenario that anticipates and desires the arrival of a king more than the situation of those who returned to Yehud after Cyrus's declaration, establishing the temple with Darius's assistance. Following the completion of the temple and the apparent removal of ritual aspects from the public agenda, these returnees grappled with a yearning to restore the kingdom that had ceased during the exile.

Conclusions

In this article, I endeavored to elucidate the origins of the concepts and linguistic elements present in Psalm 45. I presented two potential scenarios. The first posits that the author was directly influenced by Achaemenid ideology, as evidenced in inscriptions and iconography from Persepolis, which presumably circulated throughout the empire. An alternative possibility is that the author was indirectly influenced through other biblical texts, such as the Books of Chronicles, whose authors had assimilated this ideology and disseminated it further, given the limited cultural environment of the scribes active in Yehud and Jerusalem. Examining the psalm within an Achaemenid context offers a more comprehensive understanding of the depiction of the king's throne as God's throne and of the two seemingly disparate sections of the psalm.

⁴⁷ See Simon C. Cheung, "'Forget Your People and Your Father's House': The Core Theological Message of Psalm 45 and its Canonical Position in the Hebrew Psalter," *BBR* 26 (2016): 325–340.

⁴⁸ Dalit Rom-Shiloni, "Psalm 44: The Powers of Protest," *CBQ* 70 (2008): 683–698.

⁴⁹ See Lim, *Königskritik und Königsideologie*, 257–260.