

Rebwar Audish Basa

The Hallel, a Song of Love and Freedom

A Structural, Rhetorical and Theological Analysis
of Psalms 113–118 as a Canonical Unit



Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament

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a Song of Love
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אָנא יְהוָה הוֹשִׁיעָה נָא
אָנא יְהוָה הַצְלִיחָה נָא:
Ps 118,25

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Foreword

I am very happy to accept the invitation to give a brief presentation of the book of my former pupil, R. A. Basa. I have accompanied the lengthy development of his doctoral dissertation which required a good ten years of work not least because, alongside his studies, Father Basa, was carrying out intense pastoral activity as a priest of the Chaldean Church, first in Italy, then in Germany. As is well known, the Chaldean Church has endured a period of persecution on account of Islamic fundamentalism. Many Christians have had to emigrate; some have witnessed to their faith with their blood. That is why, first of all, I must offer my warmest congratulations to Father Basa for having managed to get to the end of this research on a text so relevant to the situation of his church. Permit me a personal memory in this connection. When I was ordained priest, in far-off 1972, I found myself in Brazil as a missionary. Those were the years of liberation theology, and I chose as the motto for my priestly ordination a passage from the Egyptian Hallel: “You have broken my bonds: I will offer you a sacrifice of praise” (Ps 116,16–17). As the title of Basa’s book suggests, the Hallel is first and foremost a song of liberation which recalls the fundamental event in Israel’s history, the liberation from Egyptian slavery. A song to which Jesus has given a profound dimension, singing it, like every pious Jew, on Passover night, before his passion and resurrection (cf. Mt 26,30; Mk 14,26).

I already knew that the Hallel is a song of liberation. It surprised me that, alongside liberation, the author has placed “love”. I had to read the various psalms of the Hallel and look for where love is spoken of, and I saw that this is true. The Hallel is a song of love. From Ps 115, all the following psalms indicate it until Ps 118 where the expression לְאַהֲבָתוֹ, “his love”, is repeated a good five times. “To your name give glory, *for your love* (לְאַהֲבָתוֹ), for your faithfulness” (Ps 115,1); “I *love* (אֶהְבֶּה) YHWH because he listens to my cry” (116,1); “Because strong is *his love* (לְאַהֲבָתוֹ) for us, and the faithfulness of YHWH endures for ever” (117,2); “Give thanks to YHWH for he is good, for *his love* (לְאַהֲבָתוֹ) is for ever” (118,1, cf. 2.3.4.29). In this context, it is worth the trouble to recall the reprise of the “formula of mercy” (Ex 34,6–7) in Ps 116,5–6, in which love is revealed in the forgiveness of sins. Yes, as always in the Bible, in the Hallel too, liberation is a work of love.

The subtitle of the book (*A Structural, Rhetorical and Theological Analysis of Pss 113–118 as a Canonical Unit*) sets the study primarily within the sphere of «canonical exegesis» which, from thirty years ago or so until now, has characterised the study of the psalms. Even if the group of Pss 113–118 is a privileged place for grasping, beyond the study of the individual psalms,

the criteria which led the authors of the Psalter to group as a unit this collection of psalms, until now there has been no “canonical” monograph on the text of the Egyptian Hallel. Even the recent book of J. Gärtner, devoted to the Hallel¹, does not study systematically the links that unite the individual psalms. In this way, Basa is opening up a road, and we fervently hope that he is not the last in this line: the discourse has just begun, and it is worth the trouble to go into it more deeply.

Basa explores systematically the links which unite each psalm with the previous one. Naturally, Ps 113 is an exception, being the first of the group. In exchange, the author studies the position of the Hallel in its immediate context (the acrostic Pss 111–112 and 119) as well as in the fifth book as a whole. According to Basa, Ps 118, placed at the end of the Hallel, represents its climax towards which the five preceding psalms are tending. That is why he devotes a whole chapter to exploring the relations of Ps 118 with the preceding psalms.

In working on six psalms, the study of the individual poems could not be exhaustive: the author has explored some aspects especially. First of all, he has made a choice from the linguistic point of view: he has followed the Hebrew text giving it preference over the Greek which differs from the MT both in the titles and in the division of the psalms. For example, Pss 114–115 MT correspond to 113 LXX, and, *vice versa*, Ps 116 MT corresponds to the two psalms 114–115 LXX. Moreover, since his mother tongue is Aramaic, Basa has been able to exploit his own knowledge of Syriac for textual criticism. Even for this alone, his study represents a precious novelty.

Secondly, the investigation takes place on the synchronic level without enquiring into the evolution of the individual psalms according to the criteria of literary and tradition criticism. Object of the study is the canonical text transmitted by tradition. Basa indicates its poetic quality with an analysis of a rhetorical type, pointing out the various literary phenomena. Precious is the thorough study of the structure both of each psalm as a coherent whole and of the individual units into which each psalm is divided. In this connection, we should praise the numerous tables which help the reader to grasp the poem’s logic intuitively.

Finally, consideration of the Hallel as an inspired text is part of canonical analysis. Therefore, the theological aspect plays a fundamental role. As the author himself expresses it, at the book’s conclusion, “the drama of the slavery, idolatry, social injustice, wars, oppression, persecutions, discrimination, poverty, falsity, sins, death, and Sheol of our world are just as they were

1 J. GÄRTNER, *Das Ägyptische Hallel: eine Untersuchung zur Theologie und Komposition der Psalmen 113–118* (BThSt 193; Göttingen 2023).

before, if not even more brutal!”. Hence the need to continue to return to these texts of liberation and love to feed hope, despite everything. May Basa’s work strengthen and comfort the Church, and, in particular, the persecuted Chaldean church to believe in the Paschal victory of its Lord.

Gianni Barbiero

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מִהֶאָשִׁיב לַיהוָה כָּל־תְּנוּמוֹלוֹהִי עָלַי:
כּוֹס־יְשׁוּעוֹת אֶשָּׂא וּבִשְׁם יְהוָה אֶקְרָא

Ps 116,12–13

With slight modifications and additions, this monograph reproduces my doctoral dissertation defended on June 14, 2023, at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome.

My academic journey into the study of the Psalms began with a seminar on Ps 93 conducted by Rev. Prof. Gianni Barbiero, S.D.B. This inspired me to write my licentiate thesis on Ps 97 under his supervision. When I commenced my doctoral studies on the Psalter, I suggested several topics to Prof. Barbiero, but none convinced him. Instead, he recommended that I study the Hallel (Pss 113–118). Consequently, I chose Ps 118 for my *Lectio Coram* thesis and, after its acceptance, I embarked on writing my doctoral dissertation, resulting in the book you are now reading.

I am immensely grateful to Prof. Barbiero who instilled in me a profound passion for the meticulous and scientific study of the Holy Bible. His excellent pedagogy, immense patience, and boundless encouragement guided my doctoral dissertation. It is a great blessing and honour to be not only one of his many students but also the last doctoral student he supervised prior to his retirement. I dedicate this monograph to him as a token of my appreciation and gratitude.

I also extend my heartfelt thanks to the second reader, the Rev. Prof. Joseph Sievers, for his valuable advice, careful guidance, and constructive scientific criticism all of which had a profoundly positive impact on my journey of research. I appreciate his continued post-defence support as it was he who put me in touch with Prof. Johannes Schnocks and Prof. Martin Leuenberger for the publication of this book in the *Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament* series. My special thanks go to both Prof. Schnocks and Prof. Leuenberger for accepting this manuscript for publication in the WMANT series and to Dr. Izaak de Hulster, Mr. Christoph Spill, Ms. Laura Röthele and Ms. Renate Rehkopf for their efforts and support regarding the publication of this monograph.

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Finally, I express my deepest gratitude to my family, and especially to my mother, Hane, and my father, Audish. May they both rest in eternal peace.

Above all, I thank God for all His grace and blessings.

Introduction

Rabbi Hillel says: “What is hateful to you,
do not do to your fellow neighbour:
this is the whole Torah,
while the rest is the commentary
thereof; go and learn it.”

The Babylonian Talmud,
*Seder Mo‘ed – Ta’anith, on Shabbath, 31a*¹

Canonical exegesis firmly believes that the Psalter² has a specific order – like any other book – and that it follows a certain progression of themes and thoughts which are interrelated³. As a book, the Psalter has a particular theological message – or, better, messages – for its readers. Obviously, on this point, there is consensus among the scholars who apply canonical exegesis to the Psalter, but, when it comes to the details, there are different theories, criteria and points of view, which, in the end, enrich this important exegetical approach to biblical studies, one that is both old and new. It is old, since the Jewish liturgy as well as Jewish and Christian interpretations take into consideration the canonical order of the Psalter. It is new, as this canonical

1 I. EPSTEIN (ed.), *The Babylonian Talmud. Seder Mo‘ed – Ta’anith* (London 1938). On Shabbath, 31a.

2 For the current state of research of the canonical exegesis of the Psalter, cfr. M. PAVAN, “The Psalter as a Book? A Critical Evaluation of the recent Research on the Psalter”, *The Formation of the Hebrew Psalter. The Book of Psalms between Ancient Versions, Material Transmission and Canonical Exegesis* (eds. G. BARBIERO – M. PAVAN – J. SCHNOCKS) (FAT 151; Tübingen 2021) 11–82. Cfr. also, D. SCAIOLA, *Una cosa ha detto Dio, due ne ho udite*. Fenomeni di composizione appaiata nel salterio Masoretico (Studia Urbaniana 47; Roma 2002) 17–32; N. L. DE-CLAISSÉ-WALFORD (ed.), *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms. The Current State of Scholarship* (SBLAIL 20; Atlanta, GA 2014); E. BONS – A. PASSARO, (edd.), *Dai Salmi al Salterio*. Orientamenti per le letture nuove (Scripturae 4; Trapani 2014).

3 J.-M. AUWERS, *La composition littéraire du Psautier*. Un état de la question (CRB 46; Paris 2000) 5, writes: “Le Psautier n’était pas un simple amalgame de poèmes accumulés au cours des siècles, mais un ‘livre’, au plein sens du terme, dont la forme même est porteuse d’une intention théologique qui rejaillit sur la signification des pièces individuelles”. Cfr. R. L. COLE, *Psalms 1–2*. Gateway to the Psalter (Sheffield 2012) 164; R. L. COLE, “An Integrated Reading of Psalms 1 and 2”, *JSOT* 98 (2002) 75–88; E. ZENGER, “Was wird anders bei kanonischer Psalmenauslegung?”, *Ein Gott, Eine Offenbarung*. Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese, Theologie und Spiritualität. FS N. Füglistner (ed. F. V. REITERER) (Würzburg 1991) 397–413; W. BRUEGGEMANN, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise: the Psalms as Canon”, *JSOT* 50 (1991) 63–92.

exegesis began only recently in the academic world⁴. This fact opens many doors to interesting discussions and prospects which need more attentive studies.

In this monograph, we focus on a group of Psalms (113–118) which is traditionally known as a unit called “the Hallel” and is used in the major Jewish liturgical feasts, especially on the pilgrimage feasts (*Pesach*, *Shavuot* and *Sukkot*), joyous feasts in which these psalms are recited in sequence⁵. This group is called “Hallel” because its first psalm begins and ends with the words הלל־יהוה (Ps 113,1.9), and this expression is repeated in the other psalms of the same group (cfr. Pss 115,18; 116,19; 117,1.2). This is sometimes called the “Egyptian Hallel” because the word מִצְרַיִם occurs in 114,1. It is also called the “Pesach Hallel” both for its content which has to do with the theme of the Jewish Passover and for its recitation at the Passover feast. Moreover, it is to be distinguished from the “Great Hallel”, Psalm 136, and the so-called “Little Hallel” or “Concluding Hallel”, Pss 146–150⁶. However, in this monograph, for the sake of simplification, we use the term “Hallel” to refer to Pss 113–118.

So, the starting point of this research is the Jewish tradition⁷ which considers these psalms as a unitary group within Book V of the Psalter. But do

4 Among the founders and developers of this approach, it is noteworthy to mention: B. S. CHILDS, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London 1979); G. H. WILSON, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBL.DS 76; Chico, CA 1985); J. A. SANDERS, “Canon”, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* I (1992) 847–851; N. LOHFINK, “Psalmengebet und Psalterredaktion”, *ALW* 34/1–2 (1992) 1–22; G. BARBIERO, *Das erste Psalmenbuch als Einheit. Eine synchrone Analyse von Ps 1–41* (ÖBS 16; Frankfurt a. M. 1999); F.-L. HOSSFELD – E. ZENGER, *Psalms 3. A Commentary on Psalms 101–150* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN 2011). Of course, there are voices against this canonical exegesis, see. e.g., H. SPIECKERMANN, “From the Psalter back to the Psalms: Observations and Suggestions”, *ZAW* (132/1–2020) 1–22.

5 In this regard, G. BARBIERO, *Salmi scelti dal V libro del Salterio* (Manoscritto ad uso degli studenti, PIB; Roma 2011) 87, writes: “Nella tradizione ebraica i Sal 113–118 costituiscono un gruppo particolare di salmi, chiamato Hallel egiziano, o semplicemente Hallel, che si recita, oltre che nella festa di Pasqua, anche nelle feste di Pentecoste, delle Capanne e della Dedica-zione”. Cfr. L. FINKELSTEIN, “The Origin of the Hallel”, *HUCA* 23 (1950) 319–337; U. NERI, *Alleluia. Interpretazione ebraiche dell’Hallel di Pasqua. Salmi 113–118* (Roma 1981); L. MAYS, *Psalms* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY 1994) 378. For more on this discussion, cfr. S. GILLING-HAM, “The Egyptian Hallel. Narrative and Liturgy, and the Formation of the Hebrew Psalter”, *The Formation of the Hebrew Psalter, The Book of Psalms between Ancient Versions, Material Transmission and Canonical Exegesis* (eds. G. BARBIERO – M. PAVAN – J. SCHNOCKS) (FAT 151; Tübingen 2021) 347–366.

6 Cfr. HOSSFELD – ZENGER, *Psalms 3*, 179.

7 M. MILLARD, *Die Komposition des Psalters* (FAT 9; Tübingen 1994) 30, writes on this theme: “Diese Psalmen [Ps 113–118] sind in der Zeit vor 70 n. Chr. als Teil der Liturgie beim Schlachten der Pessachlämmer im Tempel und beim häuslichen Pessachmahl belegt. In diesem Zusammenhang treten sie auch im Neuen Testament auf”.

the Hallel psalms really form a unit with intrinsic coherence and cohesion? Or is the unity completely accidental, almost as if it were a casual collection of psalms of praise which nonetheless echo similar themes?

According to the scholars who follow diachronic methods, not only the Hallel psalms but the whole Psalter is somehow a collection of psalms put together without a prior intention or a specific plan, but, rather, in a way that was accidental! Actually, what is most important for the scholars who apply the historical-critical method, like Gunkel⁸ and Mowinckel⁹, is the study of a single psalm and the history of its formation, its *Gattung* and its *Sitz im Leben*. Consequently, the order of psalms in the Psalter is considered irrelevant¹⁰. To see an example of this interpretative position, it is enough to take a look at the index of Castellino's commentary¹¹ which follows this line. In fact, it is noted that the psalms in this commentary have been regrouped according to their literary genres, ignoring their order in the Psalter. Thus, we see that the Hallel psalms are separated from one another and placed in a new order, as follows: Pss 113; 114; 117 are placed in the category of hymns; Ps 115 in the category of the liturgy of YHWH's faithfulness; and Pss 116; 118 in the category of thanksgiving songs.

There are some scholars who follow the historical-critical method, consequently they are not convinced by the canonical approach. Nevertheless, they admit the existence of some groups of psalms in the Psalter which are

In addition, specifically in b. *Pesah* 118a, the Jewish tradition detects in this group of psalms more than five reasons for which one should thank YHWH; see *Sefaria*. A Living Library of Torah; <https://www.sefaria.org/texts>. On this issue, R. HAMMER, "Hallel: A Liturgical Composition Celebrating the Exodus", *The Experience of Jewish Liturgy*. Studies Dedicated to Menahem Schmelzer (ed. D. R. BLANK) (BRLJ 31; Leiden – Boston 2011) 103, writes: "The sages too were aware that these psalms had not been randomly selected and sought to identify the topics that made these particular psalms appropriate for recitation on the pilgrimage festivals. Thus they asked: 'Why do we recite these Hallel psalms?' Because they mention five things: the Exodus from Egypt ('When Israel left the land of Egypt,' 114:1); the dividing of the sea ('The sea retreated at the sight,' 114:3); the giving of the Torah ('mountains romped like rams,' 114:4); the resurrection of the dead ('I shall walk before Adonai in the land of the living,' 116:9); and the pangs of the Messiah ('Not for us, Adonai, not for us,' 115:1). More importantly – and more accurately – they called this composition הלל מצרי (the Egyptian Hallel), a most apt description, as will become apparent". Cfr. MILLARD, *Die Komposition*, 31; G. BARBIERO, *Salmi scelti dal V libro del Salterio* (Manoscritto ad uso degli studenti, PIB; Roma 2012) 46.

8 H. GUNKEL – J. BEGRICH, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*. Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels (HK; Göttingen 1933; H. GUNKEL, *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen⁶ 1986).

9 S. MOWINCKEL, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (Oxford 1962).

10 G. BARBIERO, *Il regno di JHWH e del suo Messia* (Roma 2008) 13–14.

11 G. R. CASTELLINO, *Libro dei Salmi* (Torino 1955) IX–X.724–727.

put together not in an arbitrary way, but with a specific intention and message. The Hallel is one of these groups¹².

The scholars who apply the canonical approach to the Psalter, trying to discover a unity in the sequence of Pss 113–118 or at least in its context, immediately run into the problem of its delimitation. Here, it must be recognized that not even among the leaders of the canonical approach is there absolute consensus as regards the delimitation of the group, not to mention other issues. Wilson, for example, thinks that the group actually begins with Ps 111 and ends with Ps 117. He considers this whole group, that is, Pss 111–117, as a Hallel group because most of the psalms begin with הַלְלוּ־יְיָ. Consequently, he excludes Ps 118 from the Hallel group, considering it an introduction placed at the centre of the fifth book¹³. Grant also excludes Ps 118 from the composition of Hallel¹⁴. Conversely, other scholars consider Ps 118 as the conclusion of the Hallel¹⁵.

Among authors who consider Ps 113–118 as a single group and demonstrate it in a detailed way and from different perspectives, we would like to

12 Cfr. J.-L. SKA, *L'Antico Testamento spiegato a chi ne sa poco o niente* (Milano 2011) 68, who writes: “Questa partizione del Salterio rimane ad ogni modo piuttosto artificiale e non corrisponde a una classificazione basata, ad esempio, sul contenuto o sul genere letterario dei salmi. Occorre menzionare anche due raccolte tradizionali di salmi, i cosiddetti Hallel o inni di lode. In ebraico Hallel significa «loda». Da lì la parola alleluia che significa «lodate il Signore (Yah[weh])». Si distinguono due serie di Hallel: il piccolo Hallel (Sal 113–118) e il grande Hallel (Sal 119–136)”. Actually, as we have mentioned above, there are three Hallel groups, as follows: the Egyptian Hallel, Pss 113–118, the so-called “Great Hallel”, Ps 136, and the so called “Little Hallel” or “Concluding Hallel”, Pss 146–150.

13 WILSON, *The Editing*, 222–223. For more on this discussion, see G. T. M. PRINSLOO, “Unit Delimitation in the Egyptian Hallel (Psalms 113–118). An Evaluation of Different Traditions”, *Unit Delimitation in Biblical Hebrew and Northwest Semitic Literature* (eds. M. C. A. KÖRPEL – J. M. OESCH) (Assen 2003) 232–263.

14 J. A. GRANT, *The King as Exemplar. The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms* (SBLAB 17; Leiden – Boston 2004) 123–124.

15 Cfr., e.g., T. LORENZIN, *I Salmi* (I Libri Biblici. Primo Testamento 14; Milano 2000) 447: “Nel Salterio ebraico il Sal 118 chiude lo Hallel (Sal 113–118) che gli ebrei recitavano nei giorni di festa, in particolare in occasione della cena pasquale”. Along the same lines also, BARBIERO, *Salmi scelti* (2011, 90, writes: “Uno ricava l'impressione che il Sal 118 sia stato composto redazionalmente come conclusione dell'Hallel”.

mention: Raffl¹⁶, Hayes¹⁷, Lorenzin¹⁸, Prinsloo¹⁹, Zenger²⁰, Trublet²¹, Zakovitch²², Barbiero²³, Avars²⁴, Sander²⁵, and Gärtner²⁶.

Another important issue in studying the Hallel is the delimitation of each psalm inside the same composition, as there are variations in divisions of these psalms, especially between MT and LXX²⁷. Actually, Pss 114–115 are considered one psalm in LXX (Ps 113) while Ps 116 is considered two psalms in LXX (Pss 114–115)²⁸. In addition, in some Hebrew manuscripts, Ps 117

16 F. RAFFL, *Die Psalmen*. Nach dem Urtexte übersetzt und erklärt, III Psalm 107–150 (Freiburg im Breisgau 1892) 52–97.

17 E. HAYES, “The Unity of the Egyptian Hallel: Psalms 113–118”, *BBR* 9 (1999) 145–156.

18 LORENZIN, *I Salmi*, 435–450.

19 G. T. M. PRINSLOO, “A Contextual and Intertextual Reading of Psalm 118”, *OTE* 16/2 (2003) 401–421; G. T. M. PRINSLOO, “*Še’öl* → *Yerūšalayim* ← *Šamayim*: Spatial Orientation in the Egyptian Hallel (Psalms 113–118)”, *OTE* 19/2 (2006) 739–760.

20 HOSSFELD – ZENGER, *Psalms* 3, 178–249.

21 J. TRUBLET, “Approche canonique des psalmes du Hallel”, *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* (ed. E. ZENGER) (BETHL 238; Leuven 2010) 339–376; D. B. SLOAN, “The Unity of the Hallel and Its Use of the OT Predictive Prophecy”, *Caring for Creation*. 64th Annual Meeting of ETS, November 14–16 (Milwaukee, WI 2012) 1–10.

22 Y. ZAKOVITCH, “The Interpretative Significance of the Sequence of Psalms 111–112.113–118.119”, *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* (ed. E. ZENGER) 215–227.

23 BARBIERO, *Salmi scelti* (2011); BARBIERO, *Salmi scelti* (2012); BARBIERO, “Il Salmo 117, o della necessità di un’esegesi canonica dei Salmi”, *Ricerche la sapienza di tutti gli antichi* (Sir 39,1). Miscellanea in onore di Gian Luigi Prato (edd. M. MILANI – M. ZAPPELLA) (SRivBib 56; Bologna 2013) 215–226.

24 M. I. AVARS, *The Shape of Hebrew Poetry*. Exploring the Discourse Function of Linguistic Parallelism in the Egyptian Hallel (Leiden 2018).

25 P. J. SANDER, *Alternate Delimitations in the Hebrew and Greek Psalters*. A Theological Analysis (FAT II.117; Tübingen 2020).

26 GÄRTNER, *Das ägyptische Hallel*.

27 See, e.g., SANDER, *Alternate Delimitations*, 82–189, who presents alternate delimitations of the Hallel psalms, by giving preference to the LXX text over MT. GÄRTNER, *Das ägyptische Hallel*, 14, from her side, describes Ps 114 as a fragment, without beginning and without end. She writes: “Psalm 114 fällt bereits in formaler Hinsicht auf. Den bei diesem Psalm handelt es sich eigentlich um ein Fragment ohne Anfang und ohne Schluss”.

28 In this regard, see S. BAZYLIŃSKI, “Il Salmo 116 – due salmi o uno solo?”, *Constantia et Virtute*. Księga jubileuszowa dedykowana o. prof. dr. hab. Zdzisławowi Gogoli OFMConv w 70. rocznicę urodzin (ed. J. WOŁCZAŃSKI) (Biblioteka Historyczna Archiwum Metropolii Lwowskiej Obrządku Łacińskiego w Krakowie, Seria B 13, Wydawnictwo «scriptum»; Kraków 2021) 95–109. The author concludes his article by confirming the unity of Ps 116: “Infine, l’associazione del Sal 116, ora con il Sal 115, ora con il Sal 117, riscontrabile nei manoscritti ebraici tardivi, è probabilmente il risultato dell’uso liturgico dei Sal 113–118 e non incide sull’integrità testuale del Sal 116. In breve, la documentazione manoscritta depone sostanzialmente a favore di un testo unitario anziché a favore di due salmi distinti” BAZYLIŃSKI, “Il Salmo 116”, 14. The results of Bazyliński’s study are different from those of SANDER, *Alternate Delimitations*, 82–189, who

is combined with Ps 116 and, in some other Hebrew manuscripts, combined with Ps 118.

Although there are numerous and varied exegetical interpretations of the Hallel Psalms, many studies tend to focus on one aspect, such as the superscriptions and subscriptions or manuscript analysis while neglecting other essential features. Consequently, there is no comprehensive monograph that examines this group of psalms in detail according to the canonical approach²⁹. Therefore, the need for a thorough investigation to evaluate the unity, function, and message of the Hallel Psalms has motivated us to devote a monographic study to this topic, aiming to fill a gap in exegetical research.

Using the canonical approach, we shall examine the thesis that Pss 113–118 form a well-defined and intentional unity, with Ps 118 not only belonging to it but also being the climax of all the psalms of this group!

This monograph is divided into seven chapters. The method of study³⁰ that we employ follows these steps:

1. At the beginning of each chapter, except for Chapter VII, a translation of each Hallel psalm is provided.

gives a clear preference to the LXX division of psalms, considering Pss 114–115 as one psalm, and Ps 116 as two psalms!

29 Cfr. NERI, *Alleluia*, who devotes this monograph to presenting the Jewish interpretation of the Hallel. A commentary on the significance and historical sources of the Hallel is M. BAMBERGER, *Hallel. Song of Praise and Thanksgiving: Halachah, History, Hashkafah, and Commentary* (Brooklyn, NY 2004). W. GROSECLOSE, *The Egyptian Hallel Psalms. An Exposition of Psalms 113–118* (Scotts Valley, CA 2015), presents a very generic interpretation of the Hallel, and one that is absolutely not according to exegetical criteria in general, and the canonical approach in particular. The same could be said about this book: Ph. S. ROSS, *Anthems for a Dying Lamb. How Six Psalms (113–118) Became a Songbook for the Last Supper and the Age to Come* (Fearn, Ross-shire 2017).

It is worth mentioning the interesting book of GÄRTNER, *Das ägyptische Hallel*, which was published during the phase of this monograph's preparation. However, our work differs from Judith Gärtner's work on the Egyptian Hallel in many points. Actually, she studies Hallel from other perspectives and methods. She follows both diachronic and synchronic methods, while we confine ourselves to the synchronic method! In addition, her monograph is a kind of collection of different articles with special attention given to the psalms which are called "historical psalms". Some of her articles on the Hallel psalms, are already considered in our research.

AVARS, *The Shape of Hebrew Poetry*, who devotes his monograph to the Hallel psalms, also underlines the unity of this composition from other perspectives by exploring the discourse function of linguistic parallelism in it.

30 We follow the maximum lines and the principal criteria of canonical exegesis, such as those illustrated by BARBIERO, *Il regno di JHWH*, 16–21, and applied in his numerous scientific contributions in this field. For a list of many of these contributions, cfr. S. M. "ATTARD – M. PAVAN (ed.), *Canterò in eterno le misericordie del Signore (Sal 89,2)*. Studi in onore del prof. Gianni Barbiero in occasione del suo settantesimo compleanno (GBP; Roma 2015) XII–XXI.

2. The translation is followed by a detailed study of textual criticism. We depend basically on MT without underestimating the ancient versions like LXX, Peshitta, and Vulgate, and also the Qumran Mss and the Targum. In addition, the modern translations of the Bible, exegetical commentaries and studies are considered.
3. An overview on the structure of each of the Hallel psalms is offered. In order to have an overall vision of the topic, we display the opinions of the most prominent scholars; then, we present our own results in this regard. Everything will be clarified and summarized with the use of tables.
4. Starting from the general structure and the subdivision of each individual psalm, a brief structural and exegetical analysis of the different parts and strophes is presented³¹. This will be done not only through consultation with the main modern scientific literature but also by returning to the inspiration and interesting insights of the rabbinic literature³².
5. Then, we consider the connection of the psalm in question with the psalm which precedes it in the same group. This will be done through underlining the shared vocabularies and other possible links.

After applying essential steps such as translation, textual criticism, and structural analysis of Ps 118 in Chapter VI, we focus in the final chapter on evaluating the unity of this group of psalms and its theological message. We examine whether Ps 118 could be considered the climax of the Hallel group through indicating the points of contact, the correspondences of terms, the themes shared with the other psalms of the Hallel and all the other aspects which could emerge from a canonical reading of the text, that may justify the position of Ps 118 as the climax of the Hallel.

Throughout our research, we show, among other things, the importance of the significance of this literary sequence, the interrelations between the components of the macrostructure and some important elements that form part of a canonical exegesis of the Hallel. Of course, all that will be done without overlooking the independence and uniqueness of each psalm of the group. In addition, we shall highlight the poetic quality of the Hallel and its various literary phenomena.

31 For the sake of space, we shall present a brief exegetical analysis that may contribute to the development of the main theme of the monograph.

32 In this regard, ZAKOVITCH, "Psalms 111–112.113–118.119", 215, writes: "Rabbinic literature dedicates much attention to the purpose of the juxtaposition of literary units in the Bible. We commonly find there such questions as: 'Why is ... juxtaposed to ...' (e.g. b. Sukkah 2a) or 'What does... have to do with...' (e.g. b. Berachot 15b) – questions whose basis is in the assumption that the very state of textual proximity between different literary units creates an additional level of meaning".

At the conclusion of the monograph, we shall present the results of our research regarding the main thesis of the unity of the Hallel group from the point of view of the canonical approach, as well as its characteristics and its theological meanings and applications.

Chapter I: Psalm 113

“Let thy house be wide open,
and let the poor be members of thy household.”
Mishnah *Pirkei Avot* 1,5¹

1. Text and Translation

הָלְלוּ יְהוָה	1	Hallelujah.
הָלְלוּ עַבְדֵי יְהוָה		Praise, O servants of YHWH,
הָלְלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה:		praise the name of YHWH.
יְהי שֵׁם יְהוָה מְבָרָךְ	2	May the name of YHWH be blessed
מֵעַתָּה וְעַד־עוֹלָם:		from this moment and forever.
מִמָּוֶר־שֶׁמֶשׁ עַד־מָבֹואוֹ	3	From the rising of the sun to its setting
מְהֵלֵל שֵׁם יְהוָה:		(may) the name of YHWH be praised.
רָם עַל־כָּל־גּוֹיִם יְהוָה	4	High above all nations is YHWH,
עַל הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּבוֹדוֹ:		above the heavens is his glory
מִי כִיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ	5	Who is like YHWH our God
הַמְגִבִּיהִי לְשִׁבְתָּ:		the One who is enthroned on high? ²
הַמְשַׁפִּילִי לְרֹאוֹת	6	The One who stoops to look ³
בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ:		on the heavens and on the earth?
מְקִימִי מֵעָפָר דָּל	7	He lifts up from the dust the poor,
מֵאִשָּׁפַת יָרִים אֶבְיּוֹן:		from the rubbish heap raises the needy
לְהוֹשִׁיבִי עִם־נְדִיבִים	8	To make (him) sit with princes ⁴ ,
עִם נְדִיבֵי עַמּוֹ:		with the princes of his people.
מוֹשִׁיבִי עֲקָרַת הַבַּיִת	9	He settles a sterile woman of the house,
אִם־הַבְּנִים שִׂמְחָה		as a happy mother of children ⁵ .
הָלְלוּ־יְהוָה:		Hallelujah.

1 Sefaria. A Living Library. Cfr. C. STERN (ed.), *Pirké Avot*. Wisdom of the Jewish Sages (Hoboken, NJ 1997) 9.

2 Cfr. M. DAHOOD, *Psalms*. Introduction, Translation and Notes (AncB 16, 17, 17A; Garden City, NY 1970) III, 131. C. A. & E. G. BRIGGS, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (ICC; Edinburgh 1907) II, 388, translate this verse as following: “Who is like Yahweh our God? He who exalteth Himself to sit enthroned”.

3 Here we follow the translation of DAHOOD, *Psalms* III, 131.

4 Cfr. Pesh: **גְּבוּרַת הָעָם** “the great of the people”, and LXX: ἀρχόντων λαοῦ αὐτοῦ “the rulers of his people”. Cfr. Ps 46,10; 1 Sam 2,8.

5 Cfr. L. C. ALLEN, *Psalms* 101–150, Revised (WBC 21; Nashville, TN 2002) 113. The literal translation of MT is provided by D. N. FREEDMAN, “Psalm 113 and the Song of Hannah”, *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy*. Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry (Winona Lake, IN 1980) 243–261.60: “Who makes the barren one of the house sit, the mother of sons rejoices”.

2. Textual Criticism

V. 1

יְהִי הַלֵּלוֹ: This opening is attested also in Qumran's Mss but with a slight difference which is the way of writing the expression as one word without a space between יְהִי־הַלֵּלוֹ and יְהִי⁶.

יְהוָה יְעֲבֹדֵי: instead of the genitive יְעֲבֹדֵי of MT⁷, LXX, α', σ', θ', παῖδες and Vg 'servi' have the vocative case, and κύριον, 'Dominum', is considered the object of the verb Αἰνεῖτε⁸. Pesh has *status constructus* יְהוָה יַעֲבֹדֵי like MT.

V. 2

מֵעַתָּה: Pesh reads מֵרֵאשִׁית 'from beginning'⁹.

V. 3

מְהִלָּה: Pesh reads מְהִלָּה 'is great'.

יְעֹל: The apparatus criticus of the BHS indicates that many Hebrew manuscripts and LXX^{ARmin}, α', σ' have יְעֹל instead of יַעֲלֶה. Maybe this is because the previous occurrence of יַעֲלֶה in v. 2b is with י.

V. 4

וְעַל, וְ: Pesh has the conjunction ו at the beginning of v. 4a, וְעַל, and 4b, וְעַל, whereas MT and LXX have no copula. We have the same phenomenon in vv. 6a¹⁰ and 9b.

6 E. ULRICH, et al. (eds.), *Qumran Cave 4. XI. Psalms to Chronicles* (DJD XVI; Oxford 2000) 43; cfr. P. W. FLINT, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms* (Leiden 1997) 128.

7 Pesh also has the genitive.

8 Cfr. BHS; ALLEN, *Psalms*, 133; HOSSFELD – ZENGER, *Psalms* 3, 181.

9 Cfr. BHS.

10 At the beginning of v. 6a, LXX also has the copula like Pesh.

V. 5

הַמִּגְבִּיהִי: The ׀ at the end of הַמִּגְבִּיהִי is problematic. However, it is not the only case in the psalm. Actually, there are three other participles with this ׀ at the end: הַמְשַׁפִּילִי (v. 6), מְקִימִי (v. 7), and מוֹשִׁיבִי (v. 9) in addition to the same ending for the infinitive construct verb לְהוֹשִׁיבִי (v. 8)¹¹. There are different explanations for this phenomenon:

First, it could be considered as the genitive case ending¹².

Second, it could be regarded as an ornamental device¹³.

Third, it could have merely a rhythmic value¹⁴.

It is not easy to decide which is the correct explanation. However, we think the metric and rhythmic reason could be reckoned the most plausible one for this peculiarity. Concerning the rhythm, the use of the ׀ at the end of these participles or infinitive construct forms, makes all the words at the beginning of vv. 5b-9 to end with ׀.

V. 6

בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ: In its apparatus criticus, the *BHS* indicates that the phrase בְּשָׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ is probably to be transposed after v. 5a. Some authors follow this indication and emend the text¹⁵. In our opinion, although there is difficulty in understanding the exact meaning of v. 6a, there is no need to change

11 This phenomenon is already noticed in the Jewish tradition. In A. C. FEUER, *Tehillim. A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (ASTS; Brooklyn, NY 1987) II, 1367, we read: "As we act towards God, so does He react to us ... This explains why five key words in this psalm [הַמִּגְבִּיהִי, הַמְשַׁפִּילִי, מְקִימִי, מוֹשִׁיבִי, לְהוֹשִׁיבִי] bear the seemingly superfluous suffix ׀. The appended ׀ usually means *me*, here implying that all the actions of God, whether He ascends on high or descends below, all these actions are controlled by *me*, [i.e., undertaken in response to my individual behavior] and are done for *me* [i.e., to benefit me]".

12 DAHOOD, *Psalms* III, 130: "This poem is characterized by genitive case endings (vss. 5, 6, 7, 9), third-person suffix -y (vs. 8), and meaningful chiasmus (vss. 2-3, 9)".

13 Cfr. ALLEN, *Psalms*, 133.

14 Cfr. P. JOÜON – T. MURAOKA, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (SubBi 27; Roma 2006) 260-261: who regarding the paragogic vowel ׀, writes: "This ׀ was used in poetry in nouns, adjectives and especially participles, at first to express the construct state in the strict sense or in the loose sense, then as a purely rhythmic vowel. In some particles it has become an integral part of the word ...". However, these two authors see that the paragogic vowel ׀ in vv. 5-6 has only a rhythmic value, in v. 7 as an "extension, in a construction where there is a construct state (before a preposition)", and in v. 8 they consider it incorrect. Cfr. ALLEN, *Psalms*, 133.

15 Cfr., e.g., J. A. LOADER, "A Structural Analysis of Psalm 113", *OTWSA* 19 (1977) 65; H.-J. KRAUS, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary* (Continental Commentaries; Minneapolis, MN 1989) II 366.