

Levels of Contextual Synergy in the Korah Psalms: the Example of Psalm 86

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ABSTRACT

The essay is based on two observations: First, a single psalm of David (Ps 86) finds itself in the middle of four Korah Psalms, which generates the question as to the meaning of the contextual relationship between one part of a whole and another part of the same whole. Second, a certain form-critical symmetry exists within the group centring on Psalm 86, which generates a further contextual dimension, notably that of genre-related intertextuality. The symmetry and aspects of cohesion within the Korah group as well as the form-critical organisation of the group are considered and conclusions drawn as to several kinds of synergy generated by these relationships, both regarding the individual psalm and its relationships to surrounding collections as well as the Psalter as a whole.

A INTRODUCTION

Where hermeneutics is occupied with understanding the Bible from the vantage point of a position between text and context, the concepts of “text” and “context” do not necessarily have to be seen as contrary to one another, for example written text as opposed to extra-textual context. During the heyday of historical criticism this was the normal view, according to which things that themselves are not taken to be text¹ are considered “together with” (= “con-”) the text. This seemed especially evident as archaeology continued to reveal the historical context for the interpretation of biblical texts.² Therefore it is not only possible, but also usual to take the motto “text in context” to mean that elements of the non-literary environment (should) illuminate the literary text towards being better understood. But that is only one of several kinds of contextuality, notably the extratextual type. The relationship of “text” and “context”

¹ “Text” is here understood as a sequence of expressions in writing (cf. Mechthild Habermann, “Text”, *LB*, 582) and not as non-linguistic complexes (cf. Bernd Auerochs, “Text. Literaturwissenschaftlich”, *RGG*⁴ Vol. 8, 2005, 195-196) or in the all-embracing sense of Derrida (“Il n’y a pas de hors-Texte”), cf. Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967), 158-159.

² This notion remains valid and its hermeneutical relevance therefore not only substantiates the existence of biblical archaeology in a theological faculty (cf. James A. Loader, “Text and Co-text in the Sphere of Theologising with the Old Testament. On the status of Biblical Archaeology in Theology”, *OTE* 18/3 [2005]: 703-721), but also the use of historical dimensions on the social, cultural and religious levels in the handling of biblical texts.

does not necessarily mean that they – while remaining mutually excluding entities – relate to each other in this way. Taking the con-text into account does not necessarily entail that non-textual but relevant elements from without the written text are consulted “with” the text in order to better understand the latter. That is to say that the interrelatedness of text and context is not to be limited to the *extratextual* type of context. The con-text itself can also be written text, which in turn can be one of several types:

- *Intratextual context.* The “text” can be a segment of a larger text (as a psalm is part of a larger text), which is considered in terms of its relation to another segment or segments of the larger text (e.g. a group of psalms within the Psalter).
- *Intertextual context.* The text or text-segment (e.g. the Psalter or one psalm) can also be considered in relation to other texts or parts of text (e.g. poetic genres or collections).
- *Infratextual context.* Part of a text can be considered with a view to its relation to the complete text containing it (e.g. a psalm or group of psalms in relation to the whole anthology called “Psalter”).³

I propose to illustrate the levels of synergy generated by the interplay of these contextual types – and therefore the significance of their consideration in exegesis – by taking Psalm 86 as an example. Due to the specific example, especially the first two types of context will be highlighted.

B TWO OBSERVATIONS, TWO QUESTIONS

Two observations on Korah collection⁴ in the Psalter raise two research questions:

First, it is conspicuous that a single psalm of David (Ps 86) finds itself in the middle of four psalms of Korah (Pss 84-85 and 87-88). This is a contextual observation, namely of the intratextual type, since it concerns one part of the Psalter (Ps 86) and another part of the same anthology (Pss 84-85 and 87-88). This observation provokes the natural question why the Korah psalms are interrupted in this way. It is a question as to the significance of a contextual phenomenon, which becomes the more striking when an analogous case of intratextual context in the preceding collection of Korah psalms is drawn into the

³ On the terminology (intra-, inter-, infra- and extratextual context) and their use, cf. Lutz Danneberg, “Kontext”, RDLW Vol. 2, 333-334.

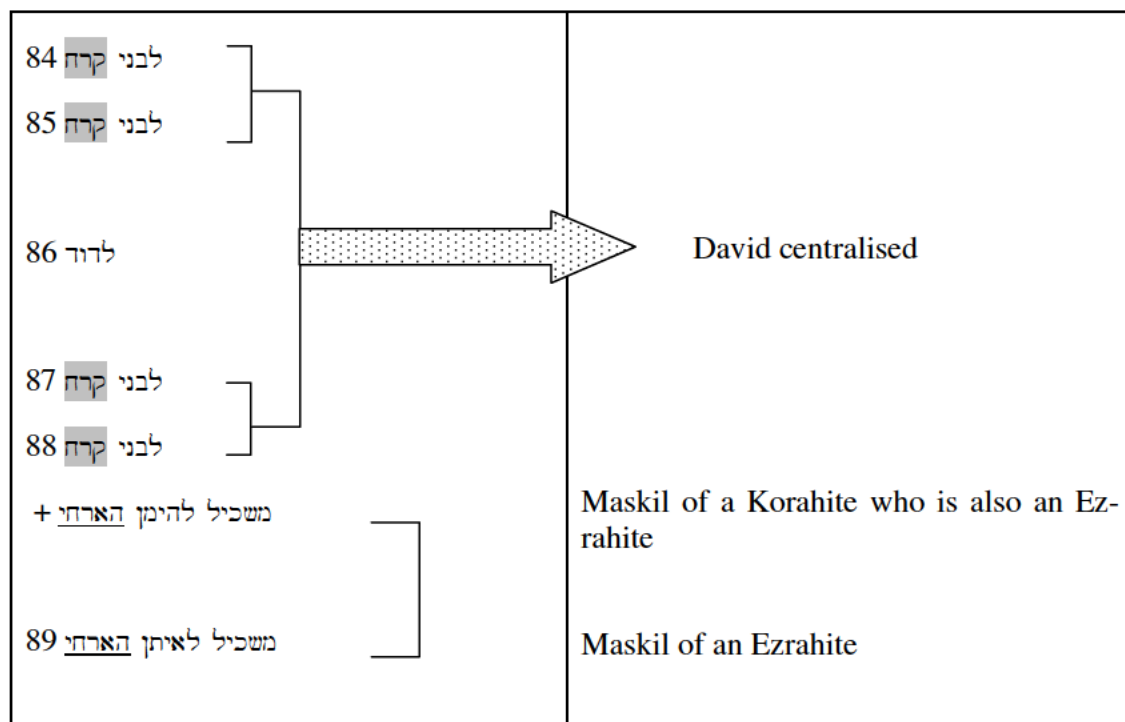
⁴ Normally, this group is indicated as Pss 84-85 and 87-88 – psalms explicitly attributed to “the Sons of Korah” (לְבָנֵי קֹרַח) in their superscriptions. In what follows, I would however like to point out intratextual aspects indicating such an explicit connection that Pss 84-89 can be called a text with cohesion (cf. Auerochs, “Text”, 8: 196).

equation: the first Korah collection (Pss 42-49) is separated from the following group of psalms of David (Pss 51-71) by a single psalm of Asaph (Ps 50). Although the two complexes are not identical as far as the identification of authorship is concerned, the question posed concerning Psalm 86 becomes even more pronounced in this way.

The second observation concerns a measure of genre symmetry in the group centring on Psalm 86. The lament of David in the middle is proportionally flanked by a song of praise (individual) and a lament (collective) on the one side (Pss 84; 85), and a song of praise (individual) and a lament (individual) on the other side (Pss 87; 88). That is not only an *intratextual* observation, it is also an *intertextual* observation, since now not only the connections between parts of the Psalter among themselves are considered, but also those between the literary genres before us and other exemplars of the same genres, irrespective of whether they occur in the Psalter or not. Moreover, this also suggests the obvious question of why it is patterned as it is – is the organisation of the genre pattern significant in its own right? Whereas this question clearly also has an intratextual dimension (since textual units are related to each other as parts of a common larger text complex), it is first and foremost a question about the intertextual context because it concerns the meaning of the text at hand with reference to literary genres generally, supported as it is by content-related observations.

C THE PSALM OF DAVID BETWEEN THE KORAH PSALMS

The cohesion within the group of psalms can be illustrated as follows from the perspective of redaction criticism to summarise the authorship captions:



1 The symmetry of the quintet

The flanking of one psalm of David by two Korah Psalms on each side is clearly visible in the sketch. The pattern 2+1+2 obviously focuses on Psalm 86 by virtue of centring the group on it.

2 The cohesion with Psalm 89 through the superscriptions

The group is not only organised symmetrically, it is also provided with an appendix in Psalm 89. A series of techniques interlock Psalms 88 and 89:⁵

- (i) The first is the fact that both Heman and Ethan are denoted as Ezrahites, and Heman also as the author of a Korah Psalm. From the perspective of the redaction this can mean that Heman is the poet and the Korahites are the composers, that Heman wrote a *משכיל*-poem for the Korahites or that the Korahites took over a *משכיל*-Heman, but also that Heman was one of the Korahites. In any event, he is associated with the Korahites through psalmodic activity.⁶ As far as the formal function of the captions is concerned, all details about the persons themselves and the information available in the Book of Chronicles⁷ are not relevant.
- (ii) Secondly however, if one Ezrahite belongs to the Korahites or is closely associated with them, then that must also go for the other. So Ethan, the poet of Psalm 89, is linked with the Korahites to the same degree as Heman.
- (iii) Third, the alliteration and assonance in the names of the authors of Psalms 88 and 89 (*לְהִימָן* und *לְאֵיתָן*), have the effect that they, and therefore the psalms attributed to them, are also aesthetically bracketed together closely.

⁵ On the connections of psalms within the group generally, cf. Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korach* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 9-12. What interests us now is not whether this appendix was only incorporated together with Ps 88 into our cluster in a second redaction (so Christoph Rösel, *Die messianische Redaktion des Psalters. Studien zu Entstehung und Theologie der Sammlung Psalm 2-89*. [Stuttgart: Calwer, 1999], 86-87), but rather the *fact* of the incorporation.

⁶ Claudia Süssenbach, *Der Elohistische Psalter* Tübingen: (Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 378, footnote 102, thinks the function of the second half of the caption of Ps 89 to be that this psalm be linked to the preceding Korah psalms “as closely as possible”, but without claiming that it belongs to this group – which more or less corresponds to my description as an “appendix”.

⁷ According to 1 Chr 2:6 Ethan and Heman were brothers, and grandsons of Judah (in 1 Kgs 5:11 Ethan the Ezrahite and Heman are mentioned in a list of wise men, much akin to the list in 1 Chr 2:6). In the Books of Chronicles Heman is often referred to as a Levite and singer/musician (1 Chr 6:18; 15:17; 25:1ff.; 2 Chr 5:12; 29:14).

- (iv) The fourth associative technique is the description of the overarching text category of both psalms. Although we will only pose the question as to the contextual relevance of the issue of genre below (see D), it is relevant at this point to register the very identity of the two characterisations. Even if no two psalms can be more dissimilar in content, they are both typified as משכיל, “teaching”, and are thereby interlinked.
- (v) All four associative techniques cumulatively also have a common effect, since they sound similar to the point of being almost identical:

משכיל להימן הארחי

משכיל לאיתן הארחי

By this means Psalm 89 is closely associated with the complex of five poems, however without ruining the symmetry of the centring of Psalm 86 between two Korah Psalms at its flanks. On the formal level that means that Psalm 89 participates in a psalm cycle whose centre is the psalm of David. This Davidic centre is however the only psalm in the group not called מזמור, “psalm”, but תפלה, “prayer”.

3 The cohesion of the appended psalm with Psalms 84-88

Let us now compare the cohesion that Psalm 89 acquires through its repeated mentioning of David. The association of Psalm 89 with the group of five in Psalms 84-88 is also clear from the vantage point of the “appendix”. Psalm 89 contains detailed involvement with David:

- (i) First, vv. 4-5 refer to the Prophecy of Nathan,⁸ where David is promised an eternal kingdom. The non-Davidic psalm is thus linked closely to the Davidic theme.
- (ii) In this psalm the expression לדוד does not occur in the caption as a technical identification of a Davidic psalm, but it does occur repeatedly in another function, namely in vv. 4, 36 and 50 to refer to the eternal oath “for David”.
- (iii) One of the four explicit references to David in Psalm 89 (v. 21) stands at the beginning of a long section (vv. 20-38), in which David is spoken of with repeated pronominal reference as חסיד, גבור and בחור (“pious man”, “hero”, “chosen one”).
- (iv) In verses 39ff. “David” is spoken of as “messiah” (משיח) in such a way that the messianic descendants are meant whose crown (נזר, v. 40) was profaned and whose throne (ask, v. 45) was overthrown.⁹ Therefore the

⁸ 2 Sam 7:8-16; 1 Chr 17:3ff.

⁹ Cf. 2 Chr 36:11-21.

pronominal references to “David” in these verses are also to be understood in an extended sense.

- (v) In v. 40 “David” or the Davidic messiah is called Yahweh’s “servant” (עבד). But in v. 51 the plural must indicate a group that was languishing at the time of singing.¹⁰ So in her catastrophe Israel is called his “servants” (עבדים), which broadens the collectivising of the David motif by a second concentric stage: King David → the Davidic line → the languishing people (according to v. 51b even → other peoples as well).

4 Confirmation of the cohesion through the mentioning of the divine

The cohesion of the whole group in Psalms 84-89 is confirmed negatively by the fact that the dominance of the reference to God as “Elohim”, which is maintained up to Psalm 83, is broken off at this point.¹¹ Where the divine name “Yahweh” occurs 39 times Book Three of the Psalter as a whole and the reference to him as “God” occurs 66 times, the ratio is inverted in the group of Psalms 84-89 (25 :: 18). While that by itself does not constitute proof, it does fit the picture that has crystallised so far.

The placing of a Davidic psalm in between Korah psalms has an important intratextual effect: David is placed between the Levitical temple singers. *De facto* he becomes a temple singer and the Korahites are seen to occupy themselves with the same concern as David. That matches the prominence of both these “psalm sources” in the theology of the Chronicler.¹² Since all of this concerns both the centre and the cohesion of the psalm group, it must be considered again in connection with the intertextual dimension of the context.

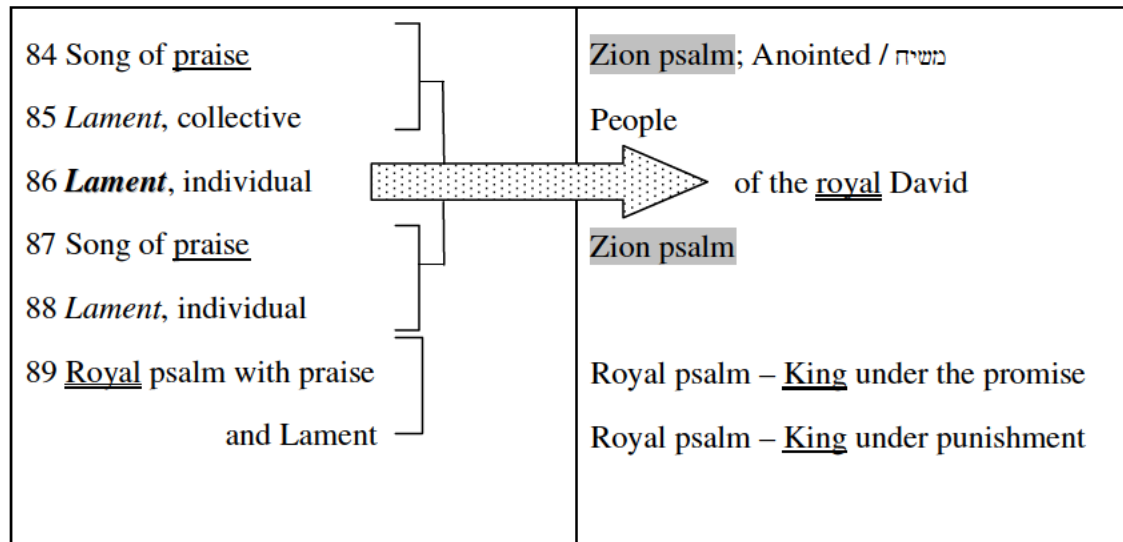
¹⁰ In order to have the text refer to a single king, עבדיך must be emended to עבדך. Firstly, the 24 manuscripts and the LXX attesting this, do not make it necessary. Secondly, in the light of the parallelism between people and king, the “I” of v 51 does not require a parallel in the singular – neither in vv. 16-19 nor elsewhere in vv. 39ff.

¹¹ Cf. Jürgen van Oorschot, “Der ferne deus praesens des Tempels. Die Korachpsalmen und der Wandel israelitischer Tempeltheologie”, in Ingo Kottsieper *et al.* (ed.), “*Wer ist wie du, HERR, unter den Göttern?*”. *Studien zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte Israels für Otto Kaiser zum 70. Geburtstag.* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 418; also Süssenbach, *Der Elohistische Psalter*, 64-65. We will see below in (section D) that this fits the form-critical examination of the context well and can also be squared with the notion of “clusters” (Matthias Millard, *Die Komposition des Psalters. Ein formgeschichtlicher Ansatz* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994], 162ff.).

¹² Cf. 1 Chr 15:16; 16:1ff.; 25:1-31. Korahites and Asaphites as well as the role of David in the organisation of the cult and temple music have an important place in the theology of the Chronicler.

D PSALM 86 AS CENTRE OF A GENRE-RELATED GROUP ARRANGEMENT

Let us now turn to the second observation noted above, and therefore to the second type of contextualising within the psalm group, namely the intertextual context. This type of context is best studied by means of a form-critical perspective.¹³ Consider the sketch below:



1 Form-critical symmetry

Reading the relevant psalms from the perspective of their relationships to specific text types entails a form-critical comparison with other texts – irrespective of whether or not these texts are also found in the Psalter, in other parts of the Old Testament or in extra-biblical sources. What is important, is that they are texts as defined above, comparable in terms of their genres and therefore together constitute a multitextual context so as to be called “intertextual”. A genre can exist where at least two specimens of a comparable text form are present. The more criteria are required as characteristics of a genre, the smaller the text group belonging to it becomes; the less characteristics are required, the larger the group can become.

2 Songs of praise and laments

- (i) In our group two obvious songs of praise occur.¹⁴ Psalms 84 and 87 are

¹³ Developed with success especially in the monograph by Millard, *Die Komposition des Psalters*; cf. the critical survey by Süssenbach, *Der Elohistische Psalter*, 33-36.

¹⁴ Principal characteristics of songs of praise or hymns: call to praise (often with הלל־יהוה and appositional metaphors for God), substantiation (often with כִּי) containing the content of the praise, frequent use of the participial style (cf. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen* Bd. I. [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966], xli-xlv; already

both hymns since the element of the praise of God predominates in both poems. A further element, the Zion motif as characteristic of the special hymnic type of the so-called Songs of Zion, is also clear in both psalms. But in the second half of Psalm 87¹⁵ a divine speech is found where God speaks of himself in the first person singular. That means that the psalm acquires an individual aspect, although hymns are normally collective songs.¹⁶ Even if this is not an individual person offering prayer,¹⁷ the effect of the “I” is parallel to the “I” of the lament in Psalm 88.

- (ii) Three of the five psalms in our group are laments,¹⁸ notably the respective second of the flanking psalms as well as the Davidic psalm in the middle. Psalm 85 is a collective lament, Psalm 88 on the other hand an individual lament. *Intertextually* the two subgenres are well attested in the Psalter, but their *intratextual* relationship¹⁹ creates a dimension of meaning they do not have when they are read individually.
- (iii) The individual element of Psalm 88 can be related backwards to Psalm 87, but also with the royal individual in the following Psalm 89 annexed to it. The lamenting individual of Psalm 88 is therefore associated with the royal individual of Psalm 89, who also has lamenting traits (Ps 89:39-52).²⁰ In Psalm 89 the solidarity of the king with his people is so

Hermann Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen. Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels*. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966 {1933}], 33ff.).

¹⁵ On the problem of the difficult psalm (not necessarily to be solved in an essay concerned with the inter- and intracontextual relations in which it has a part), cf. John A. Emerton, “The Problem of Psalm LXXXVII,” *VT* 50 (2000), 183-199.

¹⁶ Cf. Pss 46; 47; 48, *vis-à-vis* Ps 84; also the following footnote.

¹⁷ The individual dimension of Ps 45, as opposed to the plural dimension in Ps 87, causes Millard (*Die Komposition des Psalters*, 68ff.), to see Ps 87 on one level with only Pss 46-48 in the first Korah collection and to exclude Ps 45 in this regard. But Zenger (“Zur redaktionsgeschichtlichen Bedeutung der Korachpsalmen”, in: Klaus Seybold & Erich Zenger (eds.), *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung. Festschrift für Walter Beyerlin*. [Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1994], 188) does include Ps 45. Although it is not necessary for the sake of my argument to oppose Millard’s view, it may be said that Ps 87 (despite v. 7) can hardly be classified as a plural psalm.

¹⁸ Principal characteristics of the lament: call on God, description of the reasons for doing so, supplication, hope of having the prayer answered, and mood reversal or – in collective laments – a vow of praise (cf. Kraus, *Psalmen*, xlv-xlvi; Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, 117ff. and 172ff.).

¹⁹ Second member of the first wing / second member of the last wing flanking Ps 86.

²⁰ God’s wrath, covenant broken, crown violated, city destroyed, enemies loot and mock, weapons rendered ineffective, “how long?”.

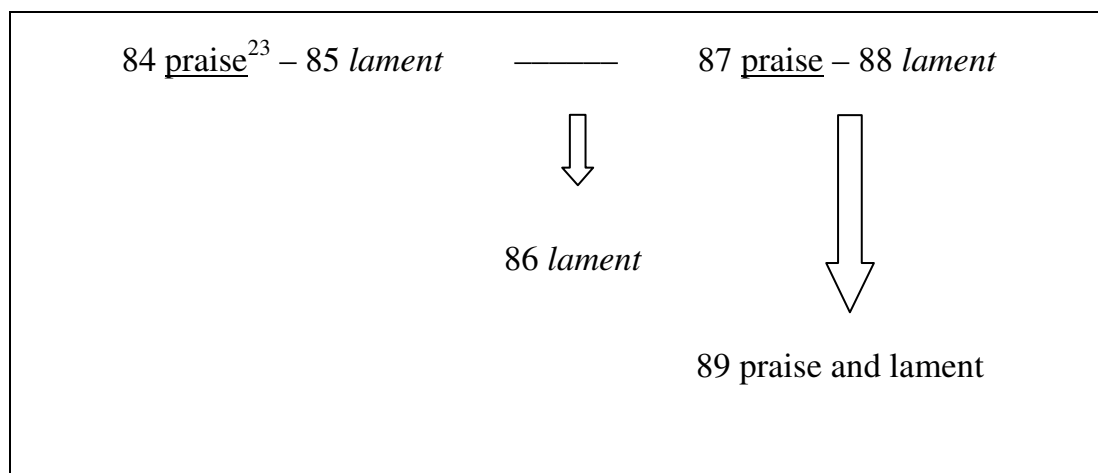
strong²¹ that the individual and collective dimensions are blurred.

- (iv) However, the collective aspect of the first lament (Ps 85) is meaningful because it immediately precedes the lament of King David in the middle of the group. The effect is once again that psalms placed adjacent to each other border on each other and therefore influence each other by a kind of reciprocal osmosis. In this case the relationship means that people (the collective element of Ps 85) and the king (author of Ps 86) are associated with each other. In both cases (Pss 85-86 and Pss 88-89) an associative identification takes place.

3 Synergy of intertextual and intratextual dimensions

Süssenbach has provided an important corrective to Hossfeld/Zenger on the one hand and Millard on the other hand. She points out the “analogies” between the two Korah collections Pss 42-49 and Pss 84-85 + 87-88 (bracketing out Ps 86), while also taking into account the differences between the two. As in the case of the authors she criticises, primarily intratextual but also genre-related intertextual aspects are discussed.²² I would now like to summarise these two sides of contextuality, which supplement each other also in my argument.

Although it should be clear that lamenting songs typically also contain elements approaching the motif of praise, and that hymnic songs can also contain elements of a lament, it is also clear that the *predominant* character of a poem can nevertheless be described in intertextual comparison. So the sequence in our psalm group is:



²¹ Cf. vv. 16-19: the whole people rejoices, all walk in the light of Yahweh’s countenance, delights, are given strength by him, the king belonging to Yahweh is simultaneously called “our shield” (מִגְּנָבֵנוּ) and “our king” (מֶלֶכֵנוּ).

²² Süssenbach, *Der Elohistische Psalter*, 376ff.

²³ Although Ps 84 does also contain traits of an individual lament (v. 9).

Without denying the phenomenon of mood shifts in the Psalter or in the smaller sections or in individual psalms, I can therefore not see the “movement” from lament to praise that Millard finds in this group of psalms.²⁴ If, on the basis of the genres, a basic mood can be detected at all, in this cluster it is the lament. Any “movement” would have to be that from praise in Psalm 84 to lament in Psalm 89:39-52 at the end (of course not counting the doxology closing the whole of Book Three in v 53).

This is confirmed by bringing the intratextual context again into play. When the specimens of the lament – identified as such by form-critical means – are correlated as so many parts of one larger textual unit, the fact that the cluster centre is a lament must be addressed: everything in the cycle revolves around a lament: the lament has the last word and even makes itself felt in the opening hymn of praise. But that does not mean that Millard’s basic insight about moods is wrong, since the interconnectedness of both dispositions is unmistakable. The intratextual aspect of the context demonstrates that this psalm cycle, for all the predominance of the lament, is to be understood positively. That is the hermeneutical relevance of taking both types of context into account.

By means of the redactional technique of centralising David within the cluster, the praise contributed by the hymnic genre acquires a new dimension in the presence of the negative elements of lament: *praise becomes an expression of hope*.

- If the speaker of Psalm 86 prays for mercy (v. 3) as Yahweh’s servant (v. 4) in distress (v. 7), surrounded by arrogant enemies (v. 14), and appeals to the compassion of Yahweh (vv. 5, 15),
- then that is King David praying.
- If the lamenting King David of Psalm 89 is linked intratextually to the symmetrical cluster, then that must be aimed at the David of the central psalm,
- which in turn must be understood in its interconnectedness with the deeply distressed plaintiff of Psalm 88.
- By the same token, this distressed individual must be linked to the collective lament of Psalm 85, so that the whole people of Israel are involved.
- But if the lamenting king of Psalm 89 occupies the central position, then the central figure is also that king who stands under the prophetic prom-

²⁴ But cf. for Pss 84; 85; 87: Frank-Lothar Hossfeld & Erich Zenger, *Psalmen 51-100* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2000), 387.

ise of the same psalm.

- Therefore the praise on both sides of the centre (Ps 84 before and Ps 87 after) is the *other* side of the lament.
- Finally, since this concerns the praise of these two psalms, the praise is also about the motif of Zion that substantiates the joy in both psalms. The glory of Zion, still to be achieved by struggle, thus also propels towards the Davidic prayer of Psalm 86, whose first person singular can therefore be the king as well as the people of Israel.

Conclusion: the people in distress identify with David and with God's promise, which provides the foundation for the hope of Israel's restoration in Zion under a Davidic messiah. That is what Israel prays for in its exile among the nations of the world.

E INTRATEXTUAL CONNECTIONS OF PSALMS 84-89 TO SURROUNDING UNITS

As my intention is not to deal with all details of intratextual relationships within the context, I shall, in accordance with the purpose of the essay, only illustrate the hermeneutical implications of taking this kind of context into consideration.

1 Psalm 89 as bridge to the Psalter Book Four

Gerald H. Wilson²⁵ has advanced the thesis that royal psalms have been inserted at the dividing lines between the five sub-collections or "Books" of the Psalter. Whether this is equally convincing at all the seams in the Psalter may remain open, but at the interface of Books Three and Four it certainly is. In the light of our research question on the various types of context this would mean that a psalm with so much significance for the collection it closes, must also have a hinge significance for what follows.

- (i) Not only does the Fourth Book (Pss 90-106) begin with a psalm of Moses, the mediator *par excellence* of revelation (Ps 90), it also contains a whole group of Yahweh-is-King psalms (Pss 93; 95-99) as well as some history psalms (Pss 105; 106²⁶). The hinge function can therefore be that the psalm by its very placing carries over this sense to the following psalms: everything from Moses to Yahweh's royal dignity, including the whole history of Israel, consists of the interplay of the vicissitudes of ups and downs, of pleading and praising – and therefore pro-

²⁵ Gerald H. Wilson, "The Use of Royal Psalms at the 'Seams' of the Hebrew Psalter," *JSOT* 35 (1986): 85-94.

²⁶ Cf. also the presence of a history psalm in the middle of the Asaph collection, Pss 73-83 (Millard, *Die Komposition des Psalters*, 102).

vides the foundation for hope (which would also support the basic principle of Millard's conception of a "movement" from lament towards praise).

- (ii) The beginning of Book Four of the Psalter is also the seam where according to Millard the predominantly lamenting part of the Psalter switches to the predominantly praising part. If my argument above holds water, it would also explain that this transition is marked by a poem (Ps 89) and a cluster (Pss 84-89) in which lament and praise are blended in such a way that the lament is relativised by a highly foregrounded, albeit slightly smaller, proportion of praise. This concentration of major psalmic issues exemplifies that there is hope after all.

2 Psalms 84-89 as counterpart of the Asaph collection in Book Three

The other side of the hinge function in the cluster of Psalms 84-88+89 is that it demarcates itself as the last half of Book Three from the first half, that is, the Asaph group of Psalms 73-83. Both parts of Book Three are clearly marked.

- (i) In the first part affliction and lament clearly preponderate. The tormenting problem of theodicy (Ps 73), the motif of the ruined sanctuary (Pss 74; 79), of the judge with the cup of wrath (Ps 75), of the dreadful God (Ps 76),²⁷ of lament (Pss 77; 80; 83), and of the stubborn people (Ps 81)²⁸ – these ideas are prevalent in the Asaph collection or first half of Book Three.
- (ii) However they are accompanied intratextually by a second part in which the element of lament is also present, but in which all thought of lament is aligned to the Davidic king. The laments are so concentrated as to highlight the mental advance from a condition of lament to a future worthy of praise – and that is called hope.

F CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON PSALM 86 AND ITS INFRA-TEXTUAL CONTEXT

If Psalm 86 and its environs reveal intratextually how single psalms *supplement* each other as well as psalm clusters and even whole sub-collections of the Psalter, if it shows how the *reciprocal flow of influence* (osmosis) makes the redaction principle a hugely relevant hermeneutical tenet – then the same expansion of scope is to be expected on the *macro-level* of the whole Book of Psalms. It would exceed the limits of this essay to attempt what can only be done in extensive investigations (instances of which have been steadily forthcoming in

²⁷ However, with hymnic sounds (e.g. vv. 2-5) and motifs that may indicate Israel's advantage (e.g. vv. 6-7).

²⁸ Here also hymnic (vv. 2-4) and jubilant (vv. 6-8) motifs.

recent research on the composition of the Psalter²⁹). Since, however, an illustration of the hermeneutical significance of contextuality is offered, reference to the remaining levels of working with psalm contexts may round off the picture.

Firstly, the *infratextual* aspect of contextuality, that is, the relation of a textual unit to the whole of the text containing it, suggests a specific question. Does the positive interplay of praise and lament centring on the Davidic focus perhaps also contribute to the character of the whole Psalter as composition (or, *vice versa*, is it confirmed by the compositional character of the rest of the book)? The answer is positive, as the steady flow of major monographs and commentaries in recent years has demonstrated. That has convincingly put on view to what extent redaction criticism has extended traditional historical criticism's respect for context as an *extratextual* phenomenon. It has given the notion of "context" a new prominence in dealing with the Bible and has highlighted the closeness of literary and historical dimensions.

Secondly, and on the other hand, this should not lead to the neglect of the individual textual units on the micro-level, in the case of the Psalter the individual psalms.³⁰ The discovery of the compositional context may not violate the right of each individual psalm to be read on its own and to be understood as a poem. Fortunately this is also emphasised in recent psalm research.³¹ We do not read the psalms for the purpose of proving that they are interwoven threads on the reverse of the hagiographic carpet – so that we may wonder at an anthology so finely crafted. We read them in order to understand them, which means to experience their poetic multidimensionality on all its levels.

So our exemplary poem, Psalm 86, can *also* be understood without its redactional superscript and architectural interconnections. It can and should *also* be read as the prayer of a pious individual who sees himself as a servant of God, professes his faith in the paramount greatness of Israel's God, but who also trusts that his incessant appeals to the mercy of God will lift him from his distress – and who is willing to offer thanksgiving to this God in obedience and

²⁹ Apart from the works by Millard and Süssenbach referred to above, see also Michael D. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korach, The Prayers of David. Studies in the Psalter II* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), and *The Psalms of Asaph and the Pentateuch. Studies in the Psalter III* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996); Frank-Lothar Hossfeld & Erich Zenger, *Die Psalmen I. Psalm 1-50* (Würzburg: Echter, 1993), and *Die Psalmen II. Psalm 51-100* (Würzburg: Echter, 2002), also *Psalmen 51-100* (Freiburg: Herder, 2000).

³⁰ This seems to me the element of truth in the view of Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1996), 120, even if his criticism that redaction-critical studies of the Psalms have neglected detailed research, is too sweeping.

³¹ Especially to be seen the commentaries by Hossfeld and Zenger.

praise. Thus: the psalm should also be read as a microcosm that contains all the essentials of faith and therefore remains alive.

Whoever wishes to deny Jacques Derrida's³² (thoroughly ambivalent) claim that nothing exists outside the *text*, would probably find it harder to deny that nothing exists outside the *context*.

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³² Cf. footnote 1 above.

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