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PSALM 7⁵ AND ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TREATIES

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PSALM 7¹ is formally an individual lament, of the psalm of innocence subcategory, or, in H. Schmidt's terminology, a prayer of the accused.² Its superscription suggests that the psalm was recited in response to an accusation against the speaker ("... regarding the words³ of Kush..."), and this is confirmed in the opening words of the exculpatory oath: "... if I have done this..." (vs. 4a). As remarked by Artur Weiser, "The protestation of his innocence is obviously related solely to the accusations of his enemy... and is not at all meant to be a sweeping affirmation of not having committed any sins whatsoever against God."⁴ Other features which respond to the accusation are the request for convocation of the heavenly (judicial⁵) assembly (vs. 8) and the plea "judge me..." (vs. 9).

What the speaker's alleged crime was, we can infer only from the oath in which he denies it (vss. 4-6), but this has long proved elusive because of a crux. The relevant section reads as follows:

אִם-יִשְׁעוּל בְּכַפִּי:	ה' אֱלֹהֵי אִמְעִישִׁי זֹאת 4
וּאֲחַלְצָה צוּרְרֵי רִיקָם:	אִם-יִנְמַלְחֵי שׁוּלְמֵי רֵעַ 5
	... יִרְדֹּף אוֹיֵב נַפְשִׁי 6

1. *The Problem*

The heart of the problem is the clause *וּאֲחַלְצָה צוּרְרֵי רִיקָם* in vs. 5b. When the verb *חָלַץ* is taken in its usual sense, it gives the meaning "and if [continuing the protasis begun in vs. 4] I rescued my

¹ The once popular view that Ps 7 is composite (R.-J. Tournay, *RB*, 56 [1949], pp. 37-60) has not been echoed in recent commentaries (e.g., Weiser, Kraus, Dahood), and is explicitly rejected by E. J. Kissane (*The Book of Psalms* I, pp. 25 f.) and H. J. Kraus (*Psalmen* I, pp. 55 f.). Nothing essential to the present paper depends on the psalm's unity.

² H. Gunkel-J. Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, pp. 172, 251; O. Eissfeldt, *The OT: An Introduction*, pp. 115, 119; A. Weiser, *The Psalms*, p. 66; Kraus, pp. 55 f.

³ For *דָּבַר* in the sense of "accusation charge," cf. *BDB*, s. v. *דָּבַר*, I, 1, g (add, e.g., Deut 19 15; Exod 24 14 [pl., as in Ps 7 1]).

⁴ Weiser, p. 136; cf. A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Psalms*, pp. lxxxvii, 33.

⁵ F. M. Cross, *JNES*, 12 (1953), p. 274, n. 3.

enemy. . . .”⁶ This indeed is the sense given by *The Jerusalem Bible*, which renders vs. 5

... if I ever . . . repaid a man evil for good,
spared a man who wronged me

This interpretation is shunned by the other versions and commentaries (see notes 8–10 below), and rightly so, for in context it is a monstrosity: it makes rescuing one’s enemy, like the other acts specified in vss. 4–5, a sin.⁷

⁶ ריקם is usually taken to mean “without cause,” modifying either (a) צוררי (yielding “him that without cause is my enemy”), in view of the analogous phrases (yielding and שָׂנְאֵי חֹסֶךְ and אִיבֵי שָׂקָר (Ps 35 19; 69 5), אִיבֵי חֹסֶךְ (Lam 3 52), and הַבְּנֹדִים רִיקָם (Ps 25 3); or (b) וַאֲחֻלְצָה (yielding “without cause rescued him who is my enemy”), in view of the fact that רַע modifies the verb in the parallel clause. But A. B. Ehrlich (*Die Psalmen, ad loc.*) correctly observes that elsewhere רִיקָם = “without result,” not “without cause.” “Without result,” however, seems pointless in our passage. Another common nuance, “empty-handed,” was adopted by the JPS (1917), which translated “or spoiled mine adversary unto emptiness,” but this translation depends on a rendering of חָלַץ which will be rejected below. In the commentary of R. Menahem ha-Meiri (ed. J. Cohen, 1936), a late 13th-cent. Provençal talmudist, a clever twist on this nuance is mentioned, whereby “empty-handed” refers not to the rescued but the rescuer, meaning that the latter rescued his enemy though deriving no benefit from this act.

The verse would read most smoothly with a translation “(rescued) unscathed,” a view also mentioned by Meiri who, however, realized that there is nothing outside the present context to support such a rendering. The question must remain undecided for the present.

Another approach to רִיקָם, maintaining its usual meaning “empty-handed,” might be based on certain passages in the Amarna letters where to return empty-handed (*riqā-mi, riqūtam*) describes the failure of appeals for aid, usually military. In a letter (*EA* 9:26–35) to the king of Egypt the Cassite king of Babylonia, Burnaburiaš II (1375–1347) recalls his father’s loyalty to his treaty with the (or a) previous king of Egypt when some rebellious Canaanites sought his help in rebelling against Egypt. Now Burnaburiaš asks similar loyalty of the present Egyptian king: a delegation of Burnaburiaš’ Assyrian subjects has gone to Egypt without his permission (presumably to seek military aid or supplies); if the king of Egypt loves him, he will allow the Assyrians to purchase nothing and will expel them “empty-handed” (*riqūtišunu kuššidašunūti*, cf. W. von Soden, *Orientalia*, [NS] 21, p. 431).

Now conceivably our psalmist may be claiming to have done something of this sort. Meiri (and Saadia, according to J. Kapāh in his edition of the latter’s Psalms translation and commentary) long ago suggested that in Ps 7 5 חָלַץ may mean “send away” (a meaning which is not far from the usual “rescue” <“remove [from danger]”). Combining this suggestion with our emendation, and treating vs. 5b as an antithetic parenthesis, we might translate: “— Nay, on the contrary, I sent his enemies away empty-handed (when they came to me for help) —” This interpretation would obviously accord well with treaty responsibilities. However, aside from its anomalous rendering of חָלַץ, it is handicapped by its resort to an antithetic parenthesis, which was found objectionable above.

⁷ *The Jerusalem Bible* recognizes this implication and tendentiously describes it as an example of the operation of *lex talionis* before the advent of “the morality of gospel times.” But the principle of love and kindness to one’s enemies is, of course, known and advocated in the Hebrew Bible (cf. J. A. Sanders, “Enemy,” *IDB*, 2, p. 101), and *lex talionis* itself is not a demand for vengeance but rather a limitation of vengeance

Since ancient times, two approaches have circumvented this difficulty. Some of the versions and several medieval exegetes attacked the troublesome חלץ and sought to give it a truly sinful meaning, such as "oppress"⁸ or "plunder."⁹ Other medievals and several moderns maintained the verb's usual meaning "rescue" but separated the entire clause, ב , as an antithetic parenthesis: "— Nay, on the contrary (not only did I never repay my friend with evil, but even) my enemies I used to rescue. . . —."¹⁰

Each of these views encounters serious objections. The latter view, which separates vs. ב from its context, interrupts the smooth transition from protasis (vss. 4 f.) to apodosis (vs. 6).¹¹ The former view is objectionable on lexical and contextual grounds. Lexically, חלץ = "plunder" only in Syriac;¹² for "oppress" one might cite Mandaic *hlš* II (*pe'al*), "feel/give/cause pain," which, however, is not a cognate of Hebrew חלץ but a metathesized form of לחץ .¹³ Neither meaning is attested in Hebrew;¹⁴ either would constitute a homonym of conflicting meaning with

to a punishment which corresponds to the severity of the crime (M. Greenberg, "Crimes and Punishments," *IDB*, 1, p. 742a).

⁸ The Targum (ודחיקה) and the Syriac (אליצה) either had before them a text which read ואלחצה (so *BH*³) or else interpreted MT's ואחלצה as a metathesized equivalent of ואלחצה (N. H. Tur-Sinai, *הלשון והספר*, II, p. 112). This meaning is adopted in the midrashim on Pss (שוחר טוב and the parallel שטעונו ילקוט) and by several modern exegetes, including *BDB* (p. 322b), Moffatt, Duhm, and possibly Dahood ("troubled"); others are listed in Briggs, *Psalms* I, p. 57.

⁹ Symmachus (ἀνῆρασσα), the anonymous view cited and rejected by Ibn Ezra (comparing וינצלו in Exod 12 36 [the Peshitta there reads והלצו]), *JPS* (1917), Smith-Goodspeed, RSV, Delitzsch, Ehrlich, Schmidt, Kraus; cf. Rashi (לשון הפשטה). This interpretation avoids emendation and is preferred by moderns to the previous one.

¹⁰ So Ibn Janah, Ibn Ezra, Maimonides (משנה תורה , end of דעות), Kimchi, the *Mesūdōt*, KJV, Briggs, Kirkpatrick. Some of these cite I Sam 24; note vss. 11 and esp. 17–19 there; Saul says to David,

You have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. . . . you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands. . . . if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe?

On this view, David in the psalm claims what Saul in I Sam 24 admits in similar language.

¹¹ Cf. Briggs, p. 57. The medievals who hold this view cite Gen 42 10b for a *wāw* which means "on the contrary;" there, however, the *wāw* is preceded by an explicit negative. Antithetic or "adversative clauses" (G–K §163a–b) are not unattested in oaths; cf. Job 31 16–18, 29–32, perhaps 33 f. However, in these passages (for which, see the commentaries of Tur-Sinai and Pope) we have not parentheses separating the apodoses from their imprecatory apodoses — as is alleged for Ps 7 5b — but rather clauses which *replace* the imprecatory apodoses, as elsewhere in Job 31 (vss. 14 f., 20f, 28).

¹² See the lexica of Brockelmann and Payne-Smith, s. v. *hlš*.

¹³ E. S. Drower and R. Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary*, s. v. HLŠ II; T. Noeldeke, *Mandaische Grammatik*, p. 74 with n. 2.

¹⁴ It is unlikely that the meaning "plunder" underlies the noun חליצה (Judg 14 19; II Sam 2 21), allegedly meaning "what is stripped off a person, as plunder, in war" (*BDB*, p. 322d; likewise *KBL*). This word seems to refer to a specific article of cloth-

קלץ = "rescue" — a situation which would tend, in James Barr's words, "grossly to damage the communicative efficiency of a language."¹⁵ Notably, in Syriac, where קלץ has the meaning "plunder," it does not also have the meaning "rescue." These objections to the second view are not in themselves decisive, but this view gives rise to a contextual objection as well: "plunder" or "oppress" makes vs. 5b a weak climax to vss. 4–5a, for punishing one's enemy, while not always laudable, is hardly as grave as harming one's ally, and in certain contexts, such as legal (cf. *lex talionis*) and military situations (cf. Num 31 2; Deut 25 17 ff.), is quite permissible.

2. Kissane's Solution

The above considerations indicate the need for a different approach to the problem of Ps 7 5b. The criteria which a solution must satisfy were stated by E. J. Kissane in 1953: "It is true that mercy shown to an enemy could not *in itself* be a cause of complaint [by the speaker's accuser], but if this act of clemency involves injury to a friend, the latter may reasonably feel aggrieved."¹⁶ Kissane was inclined to believe that the MT could be construed to give the required sense: "that he placated his enemy *at the expense* of his friend."¹⁷

Nevertheless, Kissane also proposed, with some hesitation,¹⁸ an alternative solution: that צורריו, "his enemy," be read for MT's צוררי, "my enemy," thus making clear how the speaker's alleged act was detrimental to his friend: it was not his own, but his ally's enemy, whom

ing or equipment, and should be related to either (1) the garment called מחלצה* (Isa 3 22; Zech 3 4), both of these words possibly deriving from הלצים, "loins" (S. Yeivin, *Encyclopedia Miqra'it* [Heb.] 4, cols. 1037, 1042); or (2) Syr. *hlīzā* / Arab. *hlīzu*ⁿ / Akk. *ḫalīšu*, all referring to a pouch or sack made of animal skin (Payne-Smith, *Thesaurus*, s. v.; A. Salonen, *Hippologica Akkadica*, p. 165, renders the Akkadian word "quiver"; with apparently less justification *CAD*^H, p. 43a, renders "a leather strap," and *AHW*, p. 312a, "abgezogenes Fell"; the alleged Akk. *hīlšu*, "belt," which C. H. Gordon adduced in support of the translation of הלצים as "wrestling belt" [*HUCA* 23/1 (1950–51), pp. 131–36] is now understood by *CAD* [s. v. *hīlšu* C] and *AHW* [s. v. *hīlšu* 1, 3] as "combed wool" and is no longer relevant to discussion of הלצים).

¹⁵ James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the OT*, p. 138.

¹⁶ *The Book of Psalms* 1, pp. 28 f. Italics original.

¹⁷ Italics added. This interpretation is reminiscent of Joab's complaint (called to my attention by Dr. Alexander Rofé) that David "covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life . . . because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you; . . . if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased" (II Sam 19 6 f. [Eng. 5 f.]). Kissane's construction would require that David implement this attitude by, say, harming one of his own men by saving, or in order to save, Absalom. This is conceivable, but the psalm's formulation seems too vague to inspire confidence that this is the background of the complaint.

¹⁸ This suggestion was made only in the critical notes, followed by a question mark. It is not reflected in Kissane's translation, nor mentioned in his commentary.

the speaker was accused of rescuing. The resultant translation of the verse would be

if I repaid my ally with treachery¹⁹
and rescued his enemy. . . .

This solution, Kissane's hesitation notwithstanding, has much to recommend it. It avoids the shortcomings of the usual solutions, such as unhebraic and contextually anticlimactic meanings for חֲלֵץ, separation of protasis and apodosis, and implausible ideas such as the sinfulness of rescuing one's enemy. The emendation involved is slight,²⁰ and the corruption can be explained as due to the influence of the suffix of the parallel שׁוֹלֵמִי. Most important, the sense obtained is excellent; it fits the context (note the suitability of the curse in vs. 6 to the crime: "if I rescued my ally's enemy [freeing him to pursue my ally], may an enemy pursue me . . .");²¹ and it has parallels in similar (i. e., alliance or treaty) contexts, to which we now turn.

3. *Solidarity Clauses in Ancient Near Eastern Treaties*

That the word שׁוֹלֵם in our passage implies some type of alliance has long been recognized.²² Now that several ancient Near Eastern treaties and other texts relating to them have been published,²³ we can draw upon them to fill in the background of our psalm.

Most of these treaties are for international alliances and involve unilateral or mutual²⁴ defensive obligations. The obliged party (or parties) agree(s) to treat the other's enemy as his own enemy and the other's ally as his own ally. This is often expressed in a declaration of solidarity such as *itti nakri ša bēlā nakrāku u itti šalāmi* [= שׁוֹלֵם²⁵] *ša bēlā šalāmāku*, "to my lord's enemy I am an enemy, and to my lord's

¹⁹ Cf. Dahood, *ad loc.*

²⁰ On scribal confusion of *wāw* and *yōd* see, e.g., E. Würthwein, *The Text of the OT* (Eng. tr. 1957), p. 72, § a) v. (Those who hold that biblical Hebrew had a third person pronominal suffix written -y [Dahood, *Psalms 1-50*, pp. xxi, 10 f.; *Psalms 51-100*, p. xxv] will hold that the proposed meaning is possible without emendation. Dahood himself takes the MT's suffix -y as third person. His translation of צָרַר as "heart" [see *ad Ps 6 8*] is unconvincing in view of שׁוֹלֵם, to which "enemy" is an excellent antithetic parallel.)

²¹ So already Kissane, p. 29: "As he has left his friend to the mercy of the enemy, he prays that he may meet with a similar fate."

²² This word and its congeners have received considerable attention lately: M. Noth, *The Laws in the Pentateuch . . .*, pp. 113 f.; J. M. Munn-Rankin, *Iraq* 18 (1956), pp. 85 f.; J. Nougayrol, *Iraq*, 25 (1963), p. 110. See also below, n. 25.

²³ A number are translated in *ANET*, pp. 199-206, 529 f., 531-541, and 659-661 (page numbers above 500 only in the third ed.) and D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, pp. 181-205.

²⁴ For the distinction of vassal and parity treaties, see McCarthy, pp. 22 f.

²⁵ Y. Muffs, "Some Comparative Notes on Ras Shamra Akkadian," a lecture delivered at the 1967 meeting of the American Oriental Society in New Haven, Conn.

ally I am an ally."²⁶ The treaties provide for the implementation of this declaration by means of military aid and by capturing and slaying or delivering up the enemies of one's partner,²⁷ or, if it should come to this, avenging his death.²⁸ One must not give refuge to fugitives from the other,²⁹ and must seize or report those who plot against the other.³⁰ In light of these provisions, to rescue the enemy of one's ally is a serious offense.

We also know, from the Bible, of alliances between individuals and between tribes.³¹ Several of these include defensive obligations, such as those between Abram and Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre (Gen 14 13, 24), the Israelite tribes and the Gibeonites (Josh 10 6 ff.),³² David and Jonathan (I Sam 20 5-16),³³ and David and Achish (I Sam 28 1; 29 8).³⁴ These, too, would naturally be violated by rescuing or allowing the ally's enemy to escape.

Reflexes of this obligation also appear in covenants between God and Israel. In the epilogue to the covenant stipulations of Exod 21-23 19 God declares that, as a reward for Israel's obedience, "I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes" (Exod 23 22b).³⁵ Conversely, Israelite kings are rebuked for releasing or allying with God's enemies (I Kings 20 42; II Chron 19 2). We may also note an example reflecting family duties, which are often identical to treaty duties:³⁶ Saul's rebuke of Michal after David's escape, "Why have you

²⁶ J. Nougayrol, *Le Palais Royal d'Ugarit* IV, p. 49:12 f.; other occurrences are *ibid.*, pp. 36:10-13; 51:11 f.; 89:13; W. Hinz, *ZA (NF)*, 24 (1967), pp. 91,93 (III, 10 ff.); E. F. Weidner, *Politische Dokumente aus Kleinasien (Boghazkoi-Studien 8-9 [1923])*, pp. 60: 6 f. and 76:5 (*ANET*, p. 204b and n. 7); 70:5 (restored; *ANET*, p. 529c); 102:7-13; 106:11 ff.

²⁷ *ANET*, pp. 200-205, *passim*, and 530c; McCarthy, pp. 182,186 (*ANET*, p. 532b), 191, 193 (*ANET*, p. 660d), 195 (*ANET*, p. 533a), 200 (*ANET*, pp. 535d, 536).

²⁸ McCarthy, pp. 193, 200.

²⁹ *ANET*, pp. 200cd, 530a,c; McCarthy, p. 193 (*ANET*, p. 660d).

³⁰ *ANET*, pp. 204d, 530c, 531bc, 535bcd, 536a,d, 537b, 660d.

³¹ Cf. G. E. Mendenhall, *IDB*, 1, pp. 716 f.

³² F. C. Fensham, *BA*, 27 (1964), pp. 96-100.

³³ J. Pedersen, *Israel I/II*, pp. 279-285; N. Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, pp. 46-49; cf. n. 31, above. This relationship has several features typical of ancient Near Eastern treaties; relevant for our purposes is David's demand, on the basis of their alliance, that Jonathan warn him of danger and not turn him over to his enemy (cf. Pedersen, p. 281; McCarthy, p. 199:73-82 [*ANET*, p. 535, §§ 6; 10]).

³⁴ This relationship must have been established by treaty or oath, although none is mentioned. David's status with Achish was that of a vassal with an overlord who had granted him a city of his own to rule (I Sam 27 5 f.). Cf. the treaty establishing a similar relationship between the Hittite king Tudhaliyas IV and Ulmi-Teshub of Dattasa, in McCarthy, pp. 183-185. On such grants in general see M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 90, 2 (1970).

³⁵ F. C. Fensham, *ZAW*, 77 (1965), p. 195.

³⁶ "Allies had the same rights and obligations as those who were blood relations" (Glueck, p. 46). For the similarity of the two types of relationship cf. Pedersen, pp.

deceived me thus and let my enemy go, so that he has escaped?" (1 Sam 19 17).

In addition to these examples, mainly from formalized alliances established by treaty or oath, Eccles 4 9–12 shows that even a non-formalized relationship — in other words, friendship — was expected to provide mutual aid in the face of an enemy:

Two are better off than one . . . for should they fall, one can raise the other; but woe betide him who is alone and falls with no companion to raise him! . . . Also, if one attacks, two can stand up to him. A threefold cord is not easily broken.³⁷

The above examples demonstrate what we should expect: alliances of all types, international, intertribal, private, and divine-human, as well as interfamilial relationships and individual friendships, were characterized by unilateral or mutual defensive obligations which would be violated by one party's aiding the other's enemy. In several cases we have seen explicit statements to this effect. Almost any of these types of alliance would provide a plausible background for Ps 7 5, given the implication of the word שׁוּלָם; and such a background, in turn, supports the emendation of צוּרְרִי, "my enemy," to צוּרְרוּ, "his enemy."

Recognition of the alliance background of the psalm permits greater precision in translation of four terms which are known from other covenantal contexts where they have appropriate nuances. Thus the speaker's צַדִּיק (vs. 9) refers not to general ethical behavior, nor even to "innocence" in this particular case, but to the loyalty or devotion to his ally which he was accused of violating.³⁸ The same is true for הַחַ

284 f.; W. R. Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, pp. 54–62; McCarthy, p. 196, n. 14; and Weinfeld (cited above, n. 34), notes 92–97 and text thereto.

³⁷ H. L. Ginsberg (ed.), *The Five Megilloth and Jonah*, Jewish Publication Society (1969), pp. 63 f.; *idem.*, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 21 (1952), pp. 35 f. The objection to seeing in this passage a reference to friendship "especially in view of v. 11," which mentions lying together (R. Gordis, *Kohleth: The Man and His World, ad loc.*) loses force in view of *Aboth de-Rabbi Nathan*, ch. 8 (Eng. tr., J. Goldin, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, p. 50), which mentions sleeping together as a mark of friendship (noted by Delitzsch, cited by Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 115). Cf. Gilgamesh V, *KUB* fragment, 1. 5 (*ANET*, p. 82cd): "They [Gilgamesh and Enkidu] grasped each other to go for their nightly rest," a passage which is especially telling for Eccles 4 9–12 since the cuneiform background of the rest of this passage involves the friendship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu; see A. Schaeffer, *Eretz Israel*, 8 (1967), pp. 247–50 (Heb.; Eng. summary, p. 75*), and 9 (1969), pp. 159 f. (Heb.; Eng. summary, Eng. sec., pp. 138 f.).

³⁸ This usage of צַדִּיק and cognate forms has been noted in Aramaic inscriptions (H. Donner, *MIO*, 3 [1955], pp. 96 f.; *KAI* 11, p. 227) and a biblical covenantal context, 1 Kings 3 6 (M. Weinfeld [cited above, n. 34], n. 17). Several other passages may be added where the reference is to acts of devotion which precede the establishment of a covenant, as in the passages just noted (e. g., Gen 15 6; Ps 106 31 [cf. Num 25 11 ff.]; 1 Sam 12 7 and Mic 6 5) or are otherwise covenantal (Deut 9 4–6, note the covenantal context and the contrast with "stiffnecked" and "rebellious" in 6 f.; Hos 2 21; Isa 26 2; Zech 8 8; Ps 103 17 [n.b. 18]). In Arabic, derivatives of *šdq* often have the nuance of

(vs. 9)³⁹ and, *mutatis mutandis*, for ישרי לב (vs. 11).⁴⁰ Even the very general term עול, which the speaker denies (vs. 4), is used elsewhere for faithlessness to a covenant or behavior which might precipitate it.⁴¹

It remains to be asked whether we can choose from among the various types of alliance surveyed above the one which underlies our psalm. It may be that, as Mowinckel suggested,⁴² the phrase "Lord who judges nations" (vs. 9)⁴³ implies an international background for the psalm. This is an attractive suggestion: in the context of an alliance between private individuals a reference to nations would seem misplaced. However, it may be that we ought not to press the use of divine epithets so closely.

4. *The Life Situation of the Psalm*

Whether our psalm reflects a private or an international alliance, a possible *sitz im leben* is imaginable.

According to I Kings 8 31 f., an accusation by a man against his neighbor might be denied on oath at the altar of YHWH's temple. The exculpatory oath of our psalm is usually cited as an example of such an oath,⁴⁴ and the psalm's title, apparently naming a kinsman of Saul, seems to take the psalm to refer to an affair between individuals or clans.

On the other hand, an accusation of international misconduct might also be answered before one's god. When the king of Assyria, to whom Hezekiah had previously submitted (II Kings 18 14 ff.; likely by oath or treaty) took Hezekiah's rebellion as a *casus belli* and sent a warning to him (18 19 ff.), Hezekiah spread the threatening letters before YHWH in his temple and addressed a plea for deliverance to him (19 14 ff.). Here there was no denial of the charge, but Hezekiah presented his case on other grounds. Similarly, in the Assyrian Tukulti-Ninurta

true and loyal friendship, and in the Qur'an, 33:23, the I-stem verb is used for fulfilling a covenant with God; see I. Toshihiko, *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran* (Tokyo, 1959), pp. 80-89.

³⁹ Several terms with the basic meaning "whole" refer to integrity or loyalty in a relationship, including חמס/חם, e.g., Gen 17 1; Ps 101 2, 6 (Weinfeld [cited above, n. 34], notes 12 and 15, following Y. Muffs, *Studies in the Aramaic Legal Papyri from Elephantine*, pp. 203 f.); to these may be added Deut 18 13; 32 4; Josh 24 14; Judg 9 16, 19; II Sam 22 24, 26 = Ps 18 24, 26.

⁴⁰ Deut 9 5; I Kings 3 6, 9 4; I Chron 29 17.

⁴¹ Deut 32 4 (new JPS: "false"); Jer 2 5.

⁴² *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 1, p. 226.

⁴³ So, e.g., Meiri and Ehrlich, against the usual "Let the Lord" or "The Lord will. . . ." The usual translation is inferior in that it interrupts the second person address to God which otherwise prevails throughout vss. 1-11.

⁴⁴ Eissfeldt, *The OT . . .*, pp. 76, 119; Sellin-Fohrer, *Introduction*, p. 268; Kraus, p. 57.

epic, Tukulti-Ninurta I (1244–1208) took the emissaries of the hostile Cassite king Kaštiliaš IV (1242–1235), and the (accusatory or threatening) letter they bore, before the god Šamaš, to whom he then addressed a prayer much like Ps 7, in which he declared that he had observed the ancestral treaty (cf. Ps 7 5 ff.); addressed Šamaš as a judge (cf. vs. 9aα); asked why Kaštiliaš had violated the treaty; pleaded, “Šamaš, judge me!” (cf. vs. 9aβ); and called for victory for him who kept the treaty and defeat for its violator (cf. vs. 10).⁴⁵ In view of these cases⁴⁶ it is possible to imagine that our psalm was uttered by an Israelite king who had been accused by his ally or suzerain of treachery in rescuing or harboring the latter’s enemy.⁴⁷

In the case of both private and international alliances, the denial of guilt before one’s god reflects more than that god’s role as judge. In Israel, as often elsewhere, the parties to both types of alliance swore loyalty in the names of their own gods.⁴⁸ Violation of the treaty would thus be punished not only by the offended party and his gods, but, if the violator worshiped different gods, by the latter, too. Thus YHWH’s rôle in Ps 7 reflects not only his judicial qualities but also his protection of oaths and treaties which had been solemnized in his name.

5. Conclusions

The term שׁוּלַם suggests that Ps 7 5 reflects an alliance. Extrabiblical and biblical sources show that failing to pursue the enemy of one’s ally, or providing the enemy refuge, are fundamental violations of alliance duties. This is precisely what Ps 7 5b refers to when צוֹרְרִי is emended to צוֹרְרִי. The clause is now seen to deny an accusation that the speaker rescued his ally’s enemy. The emended verse is to be translated

if I have repaid my ally with treachery
and rescued his enemy. . . .

This denial was uttered on oath before God, thus befitting God’s rôle as protector of treaties and oaths.

⁴⁵ E. Ebeling, *MAOG*, 12/2 (1938), pp. 18 ff.; on the order of the epic, W. G. Lambert, *AfO*, 18 (1957–58), pp. 38–51. The dates given above follow J. A. Brinkman *apud* A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 338, 346.

⁴⁶ Prof. Weinfeld points out to me that one might construe similarly Jephthah’s action in “presenting his entire case before YHWH at Mizpah” when the Ammonites had attacked Israel for allegedly occupying Ammonite territory (Judg 11 11b, joining the verse with what follows rather than what precedes).

⁴⁷ It is no objection that since the psalm is formally an individual lament the speaker cannot be a king; see Mowinckel (cited above, n. 42), pp. 47, 226.

⁴⁸ I Sam 20 8–17; Ezek 17 19; McCarthy, pp. 39, 93 n. 50, 79 n. 36; M. Tsevat, *JBL*, 78 (1959), pp. 199 ff.