THE TRANSLATION OF ELOHIM IN PSALM 45:7-8

By Murray J. Harris

Psalm 45 is one of the 42 psalms in the 'Elohist Psalter' (Pss. 42-83), so-called because the term אלהים predominates as the divine name. The psalm belongs to a group of some ten 'royal psalms' in which the king is the central figure. It is a wedding-song (epithalamium) that was composed for some unspecified royal marriage and that was included within the Psalter probably because it epitomised an ideal king of the Davidic dynasty, the royal Messiah.

1. For the relevant statistics see M. H. Segal, 'El, Elohim, and Yhwh in the Bible', JQR 46 (1955) 104f.
2. Viz. Pss. 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132 (some would add 118 and 144).
3. The identity of the king and queen remains obscure, but some of the more common proposals are Jehoram of Judah and Athaliah of Israel (who was Tyrian [cf. v. 13] on her mother's side; cf. 2 Ki. 8:16), Solomon and the daughter of Pharaoh (cf. 1 Ki. 3:1-3; 11:1-2), or Ahab and Jezebel (see the summary of research in L. Jacquet, Les psaumes et le coeur de l'homme. Vol. 2 [Gembloux: Duculot, 1977] 42). Because allusions to Nathan's oracles (2 Sa. 7:8-16) are scattered throughout the poem (e.g. vv. 3, 5, 7, 17; cf. Pss. 72, 89, 132), the king in question was probably king of Judah. After a thorough examination of the literary background of the psalm, J. S. M. Mulder concludes that 'Ps. 45 was all but certainly written before the exile under the influence of the court style of the later Neo-Assyrian empire. It originated probably in the seventh century B.C. in the Southern kingdom, with a good chance that Josiah is the king who is celebrated in the psalm' (Studies on Psalm 45 [Oslo: Witsiers, 1972] 158). T. H. Gaster, however, has proposed in light of the common Near Eastern practice of treating a bridal couple as royalty, that the psalm describes a conventional wedding ceremony, with a comparison between the characteristics of a bridegroom and the qualities of a king ('Psalm 45', JBL 74 [1955] 239-251).
4. A messianic interpretation of Ps. 45 does not preclude an original particular historical setting (see vv. 9-10, 13-15) involving a royal marriage. On
As for the psalm's setting, M. E. Podechard believes that the poet's thought follows the successive stages of the wedding ceremony, from the bridegroom's procession to the bride's home, to the meeting of the two groups, to the joyful return to the royal palace. Some suggest that this nuptial ode may have been sung as the new queen and her attendants entered the royal palace in splendid procession (G. H. A. von Ewald) or after the marriage ceremony had taken place and the king and queen were seated on thrones in their palace attended by the royal retinue and celebrating their wedding feast (with vv. 14-16 referring to an earlier event) (E. J. Kissane).

R. Tournay sketches the three principal interpretations of the psalm: (i) a purely secular marriage-song, incorporated into the Psalter owing to a messianic adaptation; (ii) a marriage-song for a king of Israel or Judah, regarded as a type of the Messiah; (iii) a directly messianic marriage-song composed in the third or fourth century B.C. ('Les affinités du Ps. XLV avec le Cantique des Cantiques et leur interprétation messianique', in *Congress Volume. Bonn 1962* (VT Supplement, 9) [Leiden: Brill, 1963] 173).

5. 'Notes sur les psaumes', *RB* 32 (1923) 28.
With regard to the structure of the psalm, v. 2 is a dedicatory preface in which the psalmist describes his pleasant task, while v. 18 forms a valedictory epilogue that indicates the desired outcome of the wedding-song, viz, perpetual praise of the king among the nations. Within this structure v. 3 is an introduction that praises the beauty and graciousness of the king, and v. 17 a conclusion which foresees that illustrious descendants will come from the marriage union. The heart of the poem consists of two sections, vv. 4-10 and vv. 11-16.8

There are depicted in vv. 4-10 the two pre-eminent characteristics of the king: martial prowess in the defence of truth and right (vv. 4-6); a just administration in a dynasty that is destined to endure for ever, an administration that merits the divine pleasure and prompts the joyful homage of his court (vv. 7-10). Or as L. C. Allen expresses it, 'verses 4-6 focus upon the king engaged in a just war, wielding sword and bow in his right hand; verses 7-10 envisage him on his throne wielding his royal sceptre, symbol of justice, and in his palace precincts in festive garb with his new consort at his right hand'.9

Verse 10 represents a climax and a transition, for the poet's thought has moved from the king himself (v. 3) as a mighty warrior (vv. 4-6) and just administrator (vv. 7-8) to the king's robes (v. 9a), to the royal musicians (v. 9b) and harem (v. 10a), to the king's consort (v. 10b), who is then immediately addressed in


9. 'Psalm 45:7-8' 226. Podechard aptly observes that this king excels in performing two essential functions of royalty - defence of the nation from without, the maintenance of justice within ('Notes' 33).
vv. 11-13. In the second principal segment of the
psalm (vv. 11-16), which is ‘an unfolding of the
statement in v. 10b: “the consort stands at your right
hand’,” the poet exhorts the new bride to give
exclusive allegiance to her lordly husband (vv. 11-13)
and describes the splendid pomp of the bridal train and
the consummate joy of the bridal party as they enter the
royal palace (vv. 14-16),

Verses 7 and 8 of Psalm 45 are bound together by
על־כן in v. 8b. God could be said to have anointed the
king with the oil of incomparable exultation (v. 8b,c)
precisely because the king's dynasty was permanent or
eternal (v. 7a), his royal administration was marked by
equity (v. 7b), and he himself loved righteousness and
eschewed wickedness (v. 8a). If 'the oil of gladness'
(v. 8c) refers to a literal anointing, it could allude
to an earlier consecration with oil at the king's
coronation (cf. 1 Sa. 15:17; 2 Sa. 12:7; Ps. 89:20) or
possibly to the preparations for the wedding
celebration or for the marriage bed. On the other hand,
if the expression is metaphorical (as seems more
probable, cf. Is. 61:3), ששים will be epexegetic of שמן
(oil = gladness”), indicating that God had anointed the
king on his marriage-day with a joy such as no other

10. 'Psalms' 74.
11. Thus also E. König, Die Psalmen (Gütersloh:
Bertelsmann, 1927) 474 n. 3, comparing Ps. 95:1b.
Alternatively שמן could symbolise consecration so
that the phrase would mean '(God. . . has anointed you)
in a consecration that brought you gladness'. But
C. A. Briggs construes שמן ששים as a vocative that
begins the third strophe of the poem (vv. 8c-18), a
strophe whose characteristic theme is the joy of the
bridegroom: 'O, oil of joy above thy fellows' (cf.
Ct. 1:3; 4:10-16). The king himself is thus seen
(in vv. 8c-9a) as embodying 'all precious ointments'
and 'delightful odours and plants' (A Critical and
Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Psalms [with
E. G. Briggs] [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906], I,
383, 387; Messianic Prophecy [New York: Scribner's,
1886] 142 and n. 1).
king or friend of the bridegroom had ever experienced.\textsuperscript{12}

One of the most celebrated \textit{cruces interpretum} in the OT is found in v. 7a. How are the words \( חסאך אֱלֹהִים \) to be understood? It should be noted immediately that not a few scholars, daunted by what they consider to be insuperable grammatical or conceptual difficulties in the text as it stands (such as the anarthrous state of \( אֱלֹהִים \) or its application to a human being, if it is a vocative), have resorted to various conjectural emendations. For the sake of completeness these may be briefly listed, before we consider in detail the main ways of understanding the MT.

(i) C. Bruston suggests that an original \( יִהְיֶה \) was read as \( יְהֹוָה \) which was then subject to an Elohist alteration to \( אֱלֹהִים \). The text should therefore be rendered 'Your throne will be eternal' (\textit{cf.} 2 Sa. 7:13, 16; Ps. 21:4; 72:5; 89:4, 29, 36f.).\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Cf.} Moffatt's translation: 'Your throne shall stand for evermore.'

\textsuperscript{12.} \textit{מחבריך} here may mean (i) 'above your fellow-kings' (or, 'wedding-guests', \textit{cf.} Mt. 9:15); (ii) 'in greater measure than other men' (\textit{cf.} v. 3a); or, less probably (iii) '(God, your God, has anointed you,) rather than your companions...'. P. C. Craigie (\textit{Psalms 1-50} [Waco, Texas: Word, 1983] 336; \textit{cf.} BDB 582, 6a, s.v. \( מָנָה \)) supports this latter view.

\textsuperscript{13.} \textit{Du texte primitif des psaumes} (Paris: Sandoz \& Fischbacher, 1873) 91f. Bruston was followed \textit{inter alios} by J. Wellhausen, \textit{The Book of Psalms} (London: Clarke, 1898) 45, 183; B. Duhm, \textit{Die Psalmen} (Leipzig: Mohr, 1899) 129; and Podechard, 'Notes' 28, 29, 33. This view was subjected to a lengthy critique by O. T. Allis ("Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever". \textit{A Study in Higher Critical Method}, \textit{PTR} 21 [1923] 236-266). On the whole matter of the 'Elohist redaction' of the Psalter, see R. D. Wilson, 'The Names of God in the Psalms', \textit{PTR} 25 (1927) 1-39 (esp. 7-10); 'The Names of God in the Old Testament', \textit{PTR} 18 (1920) 472-475.
(ii) S. R. Driver expressed (at least in 1892) a hesitant preference for P. de Lagarde's conjecture of סָעַד for עֵד (cf. Pr. 20:28): 'Your throne Elohim has established for ever'.

(iii) T. K. Cheyne proposes נַשָּׂאך יהוה: 'Yahwe lifts thee up for ever and ever'.

(iv) אלָדָה could be omitted as a gloss or later addition to the text (GK, § 128d, 'most probably').

(v) Following earlier suggestions, T. H. Gaster supplies the verb חָכַם: 'Thy throne hath some god [set firm] to endure for all time!'

(vi) Reading אלהים טולך רעה (i.e. with enclitic mem) and vocalising כסאך as a denominative piel (כסֶַאֲך) from כסא, M. Dahood translates 'The eternal and everlasting God has enthroned you', a proposal which creates a parallelism between vv. 3, 7 and 8 ('God has blessed you... God has anointed you you').

Confronted by all these conjectures and knowing that the text as it stands may be understood satisfactorily in several different ways and that the ancient versions uniformly construed אלהים as a vocative (see below), the exegete may be excused for viewing any resort to emendation as an ill-adviced counsel of despair. There are, in fact, at least five ways of translating the phrase כסאך אלהים.


16. 'Psalm 45' 244, 250.

1. 'Your divine throne' (RSV)

On this view אֱלֹהִים is genitival - 'your throne of God' means 'your throne established and protected by God', or 'the throne that God has given you' (GNB), or 'your God-like (or, godly) throne'. Proponents of this view frequently cite such parallels as the phrases בְּרֵיהֶרֶת יַעֲקֹב, literally 'my covenant, Jacob', in Leviticus 26:42, and מַחְסִי נֶץ, literally 'my refuge, strength', in Psalm 71:7.

This translation, popularised by the RSV, is not without serious difficulties. If כסא is in fact qualified by two different types of genitive (viz. a pronominal suffix kaph denoting possession, and an adjectival genitive, אֱלֹהִים 'divine'), we have a construction that is probably unparalleled in the OT (see GK §128d). With regard to Leviticus 26:42, if is not simply an archaic marker of the construct state or a case of dittography, either ברית has the suffix because the following proper name (unlike אֱלֹהִים could not be so qualified or the expression is an ellipsis for בְּרֵיהֶרֶת בְּרֵיהֶרֶת יַעֲקֹב. What is more, 'my covenant [made with] Jacob' is not parallel to 'your throne [established by] God'; God may be said to establish a throne, but not Jacob the covenant. As for Psalm 71:7 and comparable parallels often adduced, the two nouns involved are usually related by apposition, so that מַחְסִי נֶץ means 'my refuge, which is strength (or strong)', Sometimes the second noun may be classed as an accusative of definition: מַדּוֹבְדָךְ (Lv. 6:3) means 'his

19. A variation of this is 'Your throne is like God (in that it is) for ever and ever', where אֱלֹהִים is predicative and stands for אֱלֹהִים, the כ having been omitted by haplography or for the sake of euphony after the final כ of כסא.
22. See the discussion in GK §128d, 131r; E. W. Hengstenberg, Commentary on the Psalms (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1846) 133f.
23. Viz. Lv. 6:3; Num. 25:12; 2 Sa. 22:18, 33; 2 Ki. 23:17; Ps. 79:5; Ezek. 16:27; Hab. 3:8.
garment, in (= made of) linen'. If, in these two instances, the second noun can be appropriately translated by an adjective ('my strong refuge', 'his linen garment') this is not because the substantive thus rendered is genitival. Furthermore, if it be argued that נָּסָּעַ אֵלֶּה הָיָה stands for the more regular נָּסָּעַ אֵלֶּה הָיָה, this latter means 'the throne of your God' (cf. 1 Ki. 1:20, 27, 37; 2:12, 24), not 'your throne is from God' or 'your divine throne'.

2. 'God is your throne' or 'Your throne is God (or, divine)'Here אֵלֶּה is subject or predicate and the sense is either that God himself is the creator and sustainer of the king's rule or that regal power is securely founded on and supported by the immovable rock of divine authority.

Grammatically, no valid objection may be raised against these renderings, but conceptually they are harsh. An Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, may 'become a throne of honour to his father's house' (Is. 22:23) but God could scarcely 'be a throne' to a king, for the concept of 'God' and the idea of 'throne' (= dynasty) are too dissimilar to permit even a bold metaphor such as is found elsewhere in the Psalter - 'You are my rock and my fortress' (Ps. 71:3; cf. 91:2,9; Is. 26:4), 'Lord, you have been our dwelling-place in all generations' (Ps. 90:1; cf. Dt. 33:27). And, given the Hebrew word-order, 'God is your throne' could not be taken as brachylogy for 'God will establish (יכין) your throne'. With regard to the translation 'Your throne is God', where אֵלֶּה is predicative, it seems unfitting to assert that any human throne, however כָּסָא be interpreted, belongs to the category of divine beings ('is God'). And it is unlikely that the notion of 'founded on God' or 'protected by God' or 'having divine qualities' may be abbreviated to the single word אֵלֶּה.

25. Cf. R. A. Knox's rendering, 'God is the support of your throne'.
3. 'Your throne is God's throne'\textsuperscript{26} or 'Your throne will be a divine throne'.\textsuperscript{27}

In this case \כָּסָאָר has been supplied from \כָּסָאָר אֱלֹהִים before \אֱלֹהִים. The construction may be explained as follows.\textsuperscript{26} In the expression \כָּסָאָר, 'a wall of wood', \כָּסָאָר is used absolutely as part of the subject. But the absolute \כָּסָאָר could also be used predicatively, without any copula, as in the phrase \כָּסָאָר אֱלֹהִים (Ezk. 41:22), lit. 'its walls, wood', \textit{i.e.} 'its walls [were] wood(en)'. This represents, in expanded form, 'its walls [were walls of] wood', with \כָּסָאָר supplied from \כָּסָאָר אֱלֹהִים before \כָּסָאָר. Similarly \כָּסָאָר אֱלֹהִים, lit. 'your throne, God', means 'your throne [is the throne of] God.' This concept of a royal throne being God's throne is paralleled by 1 Chronicles 29:23 (cf. 28:5; 1 Ki. 3:28) where Solomon is said to sit 'on the throne of Yahweh'. Psalm 45:7-8a would thus affirm that since the king rules in equity and righteousness, his kingdom will always remain secure; it will be a kingdom of God.


The problem with this translation is less grammatical than conceptual. In the following texts that are sometimes adduced as parallels to Psalm 45:7 there are (in Hebrew) two or more nouns in juxtaposition without a copula, the first noun being the subject and the other(s) predicative. A literal translation is given to illustrate our point.

'The whole earth [was] one language’ (Gn. 11:1)
'The barley [was] ear and the flax [was] flower’ (Ex. 9:31)
'Your bars [shall be] iron and bronze' (Dt. 33:25)
'The season [is] heavy showers' (Ezr. 10:13)
'All your robes [are] myrrh and aloes and cassia' (Ps. 45:9)
'Our vineyards [are] blossom' (Ct. 2:15)
'One basket [was] very good figs' (Je. 24:2)
'Hamath and Arpad [are] confusion' (Je. 49:23)
'It's walls [were] wood' (Ezk. 41:22).

Although these instances may be considered formally parallel to Psalm 45:7, there is one significant difference. In each case there is implied a certain identity between subject and predicate, so that the second (and any subsequent) noun denotes the material of which an object is made or a characteristic which an object possesses. Thus the copula ('be') supplied in the literal translations may be paraphrased or better expressed by phrases such as 'consists of', 'is made of', 'contains', 'is filled with', or 'is characterised by'. But God is neither the material of which the throne is composed nor a characteristic it possesses. Between this subject and predicate there may be certain likenesses (such as eternality) but any form of identity is lacking. What this rendering in fact presupposes is the ellipsis not simply of כסא but of כסא ככסא 'is like the throne of (see #4 below).''

Grammatically there is no objection to finding ellipsis in v. 7a but it is remarkable that in v. 7b, where there would have been no ambiguity of meaning without the repetition of the nominative, the subject actually repeated in the predicate (שבט . . . שבט), whereas in v. 7a, where the repetition would have

29. Cf. the similar comments in Driver, Tenses §§187f., 194.
30. H. Herkenne renders v. 7a this way: ‘Dein Thron gleicht dem Jahves immer and ewig’ (Das Buch der Psalmen [Bonn: Hanstein, 1936] 172),
removed any ambiguity, the subject is not repeated. That is, if in fact v. 7a meant 'Your throne is the throne of God', we might have expected (considerations of metre apart) the poet to have written either הבסאר המלכה אMui in v. 7a (to parallel v. 7b) or הבסאר מישר מלכותך in v. 7b (to parallel v. 7a, ex hypothesi). In any case, as T. K. Cheyne remarks, given the simple style of the poet, the idea of the king's sharing the rule of God might have been more directly expressed by 'You sit beside Yahweh on his throne'.

4. 'Your throne is like God's throne' (G. R. Driver; NEB).

This rendering, which reflects the conceptual tendency of #3 above, represents a fusion of two

31. This point is made by E. B. Pusey, Daniel the Prophet (Oxford: Parker, 1869) 476 n.
32. Perhaps Ex. 32:16 affords the closest parallel to this: המכתב מכתב אלהים הוא.
33. Or if שבט מלכותך is the subject of v. 7b, שבט מלכותך might have been expected.
34. Psalter 182.
distinct Hebrew idioms. After the preposition כ ('like') there may occur an ellipsis of a word or words necessary to the sense. Thus קטנים חצור (Je. 50:9) means 'his arrows will be like [those of] a warrior'. Secondly, in comparisons Hebrew sometimes omits the preposition כ. For example, ראשなかם פי (Ct. 5:11), 'his head is [like] the finest gold'. Accordingly, Driver's translation of Psalm 45:7a simply 'presupposes a natural development of idioms that are well attested in Hebrew'.

To support this translation appeal has been made to three main texts. C. R. North refers to the expression עיניך יונים, 'your eyes are doves', in Canticles 1:15 and 4:1, which, in light of 5:12a (יונות ראה, 'his eyes are like doves'), he takes to mean "thy eyes are like doves' eyes" for softness and innocence'. The comparison, however, may equally well be between the whiteness of the eyes and the whiteness of doves (cf. 5:12b, 'bathed in milk'; 4:2, 'your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes') or between the eyes and the gentleness and purity of doves themselves. In either case, 'your eyes are doves' means simply 'your eyes are like doves'.

In appealing to Psalm 80:11, J. A. Emerton expands the RV (text) rendering of the verse to illustrate the parallel: 'The mountains were covered with the shadow of it [viz. Israel as a vine planted in Canaan], And the boughs thereof were like the boughs of cedars of God' (similarly NEB). 'Just as the boughs of the vine are said to be like cedar trees because they offer shade, so the king's throne may be compared to God either because he is eternal or because his throne is eternal (cf. Lam. v. 19)'. But we maintain that the immediate context in v. 10b (the vine 'filled the land') suggests that vv. 11f. together illustrate the remarkable expansiveness of the vine rather than its compass (vv. 11a, 12) and its protectiveness (v. 11b; 'offering shade', as Emerton puts

36. Emerton, 'Psalm XLV.7' 60. My summary of this view is drawn from Emerton.
37. 'Religious Aspects' 30.
39. Emerton, 'Psalm XLV.7' 61-63 (citation from p. 63).
it). יבש (v. 11a) may indicate height and ילב (v. 12a) breadth, and just as the latter verb is to be supplied in v. 12b, so the former is to be supplied in v. 11b.40 We may therefore safely follow the RSV (similarly RV margin) in its rendering of the verse: 'The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars [were covered] with its branches'.41 But even if ינפתי ('and its boughs') is nominative, as Emerton alleges, there is more than one possible interpretation of the text: as JB notes (ad loc.), "the branches were cedars of God" (i.e. the highest of cedars, cf. 36:6; 68:15).

We conclude that although both the Hebrew idioms referred to (viz. an ellipsis after י; the omission of י in comparisons) may be separately attested, the purported conflation of the two idioms in Psalm 45:7 lacks any unambiguous parallel in the OT42 and therefore remains an unconvincing explanation.43

5. 'Your throne, O God'

Such a rendering, where אלהים is a vocative,44 is found in all the ancient versions,45 the majority of English translations (AV, RV, RSV mg, NASB, NAB, JB, NIV, Knox, Berkeley), and many modern commentators.

40. I owe this observation to Dr. Craig C. Broyles of Cambridge.
41. As for the Hebrew word-order on this view (nominative-accusative-accusative-nominative), it is a case of ABBA.
42. G. R. Driver himself called the construction in Ps. 45:7 'an archaic form of comparatio compendiaria which has survived unaltered in an early poem . . . a rare relic of a primitive syntax' ('Hebrew Language' 115, 116). On Driver's appeal to an 'identical construction' in the Babylonian Creation Epic (4:4,6), see Porter, 'Psalm XLV.7' 52.
43. It would be somewhat strange to have a simile in v. 7a ('your throne is like . . .') but an identification in v. 7b ('your royal sceptre is . . .') (cf. A. A. Macintosh, 'The Meaning of אלהים in Psalm 45:6', in Trivium 1 (1966) 182.
44. אלהים occurs as a vocative in some 47 other places in the Psalms, יד 4 or 5 times, and ידנ 3 times (Allis, 'Throne' 250 n. 30).
45. On Ps. 44:7-8 in the LXX, see the Additional Note below. It is not impossible that the uniform
But to whom does אלהים refer? If we regard this vocative as an address to God himself, as does the Targum, we ignore the presence of a series of second person singular pronominal suffixes in the preceding and following verses that can refer only to the king. What is more, a sudden apostrophe to God in v. 7a would be singularly out of place when the next verse speaks of God in the third person (v. 8b). Only slightly less difficult is the suggestion that אלהים is an apostrophe to the messianic King, for it involves the unlikely supposition that embedded within a poem addressed to the royal couple is a brief messianic prophecy found in v. 7 or vv. 7-8.

But not all those who regard אלהים as an address to some contemporary king agree that this vocative should be rendered 'O God.' Alternative translations include:

testimony of the ancient versions in support of the vocative may reflect 'a messianic re-reading which stresses the transcendence of the King - Messiah' (Robert and Tournay, Cantique 434), but it is at least equally possible that all these versions testify to the most natural way of construing אלהים, whether they understood the word in reference to the Messiah, or, as Mulder believes (Psalm 45 48), to God.

46. 'Thy throne of glory, O Lord, endures for ever and ever'. The targumist understands מֶלֶךְ in vv. 2, 6, 12, 15f. as referring to God, 'the King of the world' (v. 15), 'the Eternal King' (v. 16). Verse 3 contains the one explicit reference to the Messiah: 'Your beauty, O King Messiah, surpasses that of ordinary men'. See S. H. Levey, The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1974) 109-113.


48. Thus Harman, 'Psalm 45:7' 343-347 ('The eyes of the inspired psalmist were suddenly lifted beyond the contemporary occupant of the Davidic throne to the kingly glory of the messianic ruler', p. 344).

'o Ruler',50 'o majesty',51 'o divine one',52 'o Divine One',53 'O god',54 or 'O Elohim'.55 Behind this variety of renderings are differing views about the meaning of אֱלֹהִים when the term is applied to beings other than the sovereign God. We shall return to this point below.


51. Macintosh, 'Psalm 45:6' 182f., who, citing G. R. Driver's view that the Aramaic to אֵלֹהִים could be used as an ideogram for the Persian bagan ('majesty') (Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century B.C. [Oxford: OUP, 1957] 85; but see the 1954 edition, p. 35), suggests that in the Hebrew term אֱלֹהִים, as in the Aramaic equivalent, there might have been a confusion of the concepts of divinity and majesty.

52. Briggs, Messianic Prophecy 141 and n.4 (but cf. his later Psalms 387: 'Yahweh'); Goulder, Psalms 129,130; Allen, Psalms 45:7-8' 225 (but cf. p. 226, 'God').


54. Kissane, Psalms, I, 198, 200 ("god" in the sense of "magnate", "noble").

Perhaps the attempt to defend this traditional interpretation is best made by considering the various objections raised against it. Such objections fall naturally into four categories - grammatical, structural, contextual and theological.

On the grammatical side it is alleged that אֲלֹהֵּם as a vocative would 'without doubt' have the article. Now it is true that since a person addressed is always definite the vocative is generally articular, but, as P. Joao rightly points out, especially in poetry and elevated prose it is quite often omitted. In reference to the one true God, אֲלֹהֵּם is a proper name and therefore is determinate in itself and does not take the article (GK §125a,f). In reference to supernatural or non-earthly beings or to persons standing in loco dei, אֲלֹהֵּם becomes titular and is always anarthrous. So, as a vocative referring to the king, אֲלֹהֵּם in v. 7 cannot be said to require the article. One might also note that the other two titular vocatives in the psalm (viz. גֵּבֹר, v. 4; מַגָּד, v. 11) are anarthrous.

Another grammatical objection is this: if עולֶם ועד were a 'direct predicate' (1 [is] for ever and ever'), לְעולֶם as in v. 3 (cf. v. 18) rather than the simple עולֶם would have been expected.

It is a fact that the phrase עולֶם ועד is never used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as an adverbial accusative of time ('for ever and ever') in the predicate of a verbless sentence. In defence of this rendering, however, we may point out that: (i) this phrase is

56. Podechard, 'Notes' 33.
58. The only case where אֲלֹהֵּם as a vocative referring to God is articular is Jdg. 16:28.
59. See the passages cited below, pt$$.86f.
60. Cf. Hupfeld-Nowack, Psalmen, I, 627. In Ps. 106:1 לעֶלְיוֹן is a 'direct predicate' ('Yahweh's steadfast love endures for ever'); in Ps. 10:16 לעֶלְיוֹן is an 'indirect predicate' ('Yahweh is king for ever and ever').
61. The four points listed are drawn largely from observations made by Allis, 'Throne' 254-258 and Mulder, Psalm 45 40-43.
used adverbia
ially in verbal sentences (Ps. 21:5; 52:10; 104:5) and as an adverbial modifier of the predicate in verbless sentences (Ps. 10:16; 48:15); (ii) a substantive used as an adverbial predicate may replace a prepositional phrase (e.g., 2 Sa. 2:32; Ps. 52:3; Je. 15:18); (iii) elsewhere in the Psalter is equivalent to (Ps. 61:8; 66:7; 89:2, 3, 38); and (iv) other temporal adverbs may stand as sole predicates in verbless sentences (Jb. 8:9; 2 Ch. 12:15). While admitting that a prepositional phrase would have been a more regular construction in a 'direct predicate' (cf. La. 5:19), one may fairly claim that the translation of 'is for ever and ever' is quite admissible from a grammatical point of view. It is of interest that the LXX renders in v. 7, as it does in vv. 3 and 18, by εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. But it is also possible that the phrase forms an emphatic predicate nominative, 'Your throne, O God, is perpetuity and eternity ('i.e., permanent and eternal').

62. The research of F. I. Andersen on The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch (Nashville, New York: Abingdon, 1970, 42-45, 'Rule 3') suggests that if were predicative, the word-order would probably have been וּליֹל וּתֹדַל אָלֹהָם כָּסָא. It is uncertain, however, whether Andersen's rules apply outside the Pentateuch and to poetic material. See the extensive review of Andersen's book by J. Hoftijzer ('The Nominal Clause Reconsidered', VT 23 [1973] 446-510) who points out that 'the syntax pattern of poetry is often quite different from that of . . . non-poetic material'.

63. M. Held cites examples of the poetic usage in biblical Hebrew of (as well as its synonym without a preposition where the meaning is 'for ever', and shows that the same phenomenon is observable in Ugaritic and Moabite ('Studies in Biblical Homonyms in the Light of Akkadian', Journal of the ANE Society of Columbia University 3 [1970] 50f.; I owe this reference to Mr. Philip P. Jenson).

64. Thus Allis, 'Throne' 254f.,258 (citing GK, §141b).
From the standpoint of structure, J. S. M. Mulder has argued that a vocative in v. 7a would destroy the symmetry of the two halves (vv. 4-10, 11-16), each beginning with an address (v. 4, גבור; v. 11, בת).65

L. C. Allen has issued the rejoinder that while there is no second vocative in vv. 11-16 to match a vocatival אלהים in vv. 4-10, a double reference to the king in vv. 4a and 7a would match the twofold reference to the princess in vv. 11a and 14a, and that the personal nouns בהמלתחים (v. 7a) and בת־מלך (v. 14a) may mark the beginning of the second half of their unit.66 One might also observe that v. 7a is not only related to vv. 3b and 8b by the use of אלהים, but is also connected with vv. 3b and 18b by the occurrence of (ודע, etc.), just as v. 8b has כלכלי in common with vv. 3b and 18b. If, then, vv. 7a and 18b are linked structurally, it should occasion no surprise that v. 7a applies the language of divinity to the king since the poet does precisely the same thing in v. 18 by his use of the two liturgical expressions 'I will cause your name to be celebrated (רָאוּדוּתָךְ) and '(the peoples) will praise you' (יְדוּרֹתָךְ אלהים).67

A third type of objection is drawn from contextual considerations. The studied parallelism of vv. 3b, 7a, and 8b shows, it is said, that the word אלהים must have the same referent in v. 7a as it does in vv. 3b and 8b, viz. God; by using אלהים of the king, the poet would have created an intolerable ambiguity.68

That there is verbal parallelism between these three lines is incontestable.68 But it does not necessarily follow that there must be an identity of reference in parallel terms. Indeed, one explanation of the somewhat awkward repetition in v. 8b which actually destroys any precise parallelism, is that the poet recognises that he has given the term אלהים a distinctive meaning in v. 7a and therefore seeks to

65. Psalm 45 13, 23, 25, 43f., 46.
66. ‘Psalm 45:7-8’ 225.
67. Mulder, Psalm 45 43-47. In 1888 T. K. Cheyne had argued that because אלהים in v. 8 refers distinctly and solely to Yahweh, it would be unnatural to interpret the word differently in v. 7 (Psalms 126).
68. This may be shown as follows:

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<tr>
<th>וַעֲדוּתָךְ</th>
<th>בֵּרוֹךְ</th>
<th>אלהים</th>
<th>עלַם</th>
<th>אלהים</th>
<th>(v. 3b)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>מחְּדֶר</td>
<td>אלהים</td>
<td>נַעֲלוֹ</td>
<td>אלהים</td>
<td>(v. 7a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>נַעֲלוֹ</td>
<td>אלהים</td>
<td>מַשְׂכָּל</td>
<td>אלהים</td>
<td>(v. 8b)</td>
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clarify the relation between the king as אלהים and Yahweh as אלהים: the king himself, however elevated his person or office, must never forget that Yahweh is his אלהים.

This brings us to the fourth and perhaps the major objection to our view. Given the vigorous monotheism of Israelite religion, would any court poet ever have addressed an earthly monarch as אלהים?

It should be observed, to begin with, that to address the king as אלהים was not to deify him. As surely as Israelites believed that the king was distinct from other men, they believed he was distinct from אלהים. In whatever sense the king was 'divine', it was not an actual or intrinsic divinity that he possessed.

69. If the psalm is taken to be directly messianic (thus Allis, 'Throne' 260f.), no difficulty is occasioned by the address 'O God', but as long as the exegete sees the psalm as a nuptial ode for a particular king and אלהים is taken as vocative, a problem remains in the use of אלהים, whether or not the psalm be deemed messianic. Certainly it is preferable to find a second, messianic meaning in the whole psalm (cf. Craigie, Psalms, I, 340f.) than to restrict the messianic allusion to one or two verses within the psalm (see above, nn. 47,48).


Nor was the king regarded as an incarnation of deity. Rather, he was 'Yahweh's anointed', in the sense that he served as Yahweh's deputy on earth, exercising a delegated yet sovereign authority.72 And as anointed leader of God's chosen people, the king was, by the gracious divine will, God's adopted son (2 Sa. 7:14; Ps. 2:7; 89:26f.). Yet in accounting for this unique application of the title אלהים to a king, we must reckon with more than simply the king's divine election and his unique role in standing in loco dei. The king may exceptionally be addressed as 'God' also because, endowed with the Spirit of Yahweh, he exhibits certain divine characteristics. In Psalm 45 'glory and majesty' are ascribed to him (vv. 4-5a), as they are to God (e.g., Ps. 96:6); he is a defender and lover of truth and right (vv. 5b, 8a), just as God is (Ps. 33:5; 99:4; Is. 61:8); he judges with equity (v. 7b),73 as God does (Ps. 67:4; 99:4); just as God's rule is eternal (Ps. 10:16; 93:2; 145:13), so is the dynasty to which the Davidic king belongs (v. 7a).74 Some weight must also be given to

72. See Mettinger, King 104, 259-265, who, commenting on the relation between vv. 20-28 and vv. 6-19 in Ps. 89, observes that since the king does on earth what God does in heaven 'one is almost tempted to speak of the king as "the image and likeness of God" on earth' (p. 263). According to A. R. Johnson ('Divine Kingship and the Old Testament', ExpT 62 [1950-51] 42), 'in Israelite thought the king was a potential "extension" of the personality of Yahweh',

73. שבט ('sceptre', v. 7) denotes the king's functions as judge (de Vaux, Ancient Israel, I, 103).

74. Hengstenberg (Psalms 133) proposes that v. 7b is the cause and v. 7a the effect: righteous judgment leads to eternal rule (cf. Is. 9:7; Pr. 29:14). On the permanence and stability of the Davidic (messianic) dynasty, see 2 Sa. 7:13, 16; Ps. 18:51; 45:18; 89:4f., 21f., 30, 37f.; 132:12; I Ch. 28:7; Is. 16:5. Sometimes 'the permanency attributed to the dynasty in the language of court etiquette was freely wished to the king himself' (Sabourin, Psalms 337). De Fraine goes further and finds in Ps. 45:7, along with Ps. 21:5; 61:7; 72:5,17; 110:4 among the royal psalms, 'exuberant promises of immortality' (Royauté 25).
the influence of the exuberant style of an oriental court (cf. v. 2, 'my heart is bubbling over'). Psalm 45 is noteworthy for its superlatives in its description of the qualities and achievements of the king (vv. 3-8); אֱלֹהִים is not the only instance of hyperbolic language in the poem (see especially vv. 3, 6, 8). But v. 7 remains distinctive in that here 'the royal compliments suddenly blossom into divine honours'. With this said, it should also be emphasized that an occupant of the Davidic throne represented a dynasty with which God had made an eternal covenant (2 Sa. 7:13,16) and from which God's ideal vicegerent would come, so that these 'divine honours' should not be explained simply as verbal extravagance. A king of David's line could be addressed as אֱלֹהִים because he foreshadowed the coming one who would perfectly realise the dynastic ideal, a godlike ruler who would embody all the ideals described in the psalm.

The poet's exuberance is tempered, however, by his theological propriety. It has been suggested above that the insertion of אלהיך after אלהים in v. 8 may reflect the poet's awareness of an extraordinary use of אלהים in v. 7. He forestalls misunderstanding by indicating that the king is not אלהים without qualification. Yahweh is the king's 'God'. Such an explanation of the expression 'your God' does not rule out the possibility that the poet is also stressing the intimate and unique relationship that exists between the king and Yahweh, although אלהיך is also used in reference to individual

76. Similarly Kittel, Psalmen 175; Bernhardt, Problem 255 n.6; Kraus, Psalmen, I, 491. On this phenomenon of 'permutation' see GK §131a,k.
77. This is not to endorse the commonly held view (e.g., Gunkel, Psalmen 189,191; North, 'Religious Aspects' 29; Mowinckel, Psalmenstudien. III, 98; A. A. Anderson, The Book of Psalms. I [London: Oliphants, 1972] 350; cf. 336) that originally יהוה אלהיך stood in v. 8b, the present text being the Elohist editor's equivalent.
prophets (e.g., 1 Ki. 17:12). What is improbable, however, is that אֱלֹהִים in v. 8 is a vocative and that אֱלֹהִים is the subject: 'Therefore, O God, your God has anointed you . . .'. Rarely, if ever, is the vocative אֱלֹהִים found between the verb and the subject; such a view would comport with a different word-order, viz.

עַל־כְּנֶה אֱלֹהִים מַשָּׂה אֱלֹהִים

None of this, however, can explain what is unique about this unique form of address: the relative fluidity of the term אֱלֹהִים in the Hebrew Bible, where on occasion it is used of the heavenly beings around Yahweh's throne (Ps. 8:6 [LXX, ἀγγέλους]; 97:7; 138:1), judges (Ps. 82:1,6; cf. Ps. 58:2, אֱלֹהִים, and also Jn. 10:34-36),

78. See de Fraine, Royauté 268-270.

79. This interpretation is espoused by Ridderbos, 'Psalms' 74; Jacquet, Psalmes, II, 38 ('ô Divin'); and tentatively by B. Couroyer, 'Dieu ou roi?', RB 78 (1971) 236, and in his review of A. Baruq, L'expression de la louange divine et de la prôfère dans la Bible et en Égypte (Le Caire: Institut Français D'Archéologie Orientale, 1962) in RB 72 (1965) 284-285. As Dahood rightly remarks (Psalms, I, 273), metrical considerations rule out the possibility that אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים is a case of dittography.

80. For example, although 49 of the 164 uses of אֱלֹהִים in Book II of the Psalter (Pss. 42-72) are in the vocative case (Ps. 45:7-8 apart), there is no instance where אֱלֹהִים stands after the verb and before the subject. (The nearest parallel is Ps. 69:30: subject-verb אֱלֹהִים -verb). On the contrary, there are five cases where אֱלֹהִים stands outside the subject-verb combination: once where the word-order is verb-subject-אֱלֹהִים (72:1) and four times where the order is verb-subject-אֱלֹהִים (65:2; 67:4, 6; 68:25).

81. See the discussion of J. L. McKenzie, 'The Appellative Use of El and Elohim', CBQ 10 (1948) 170-181, who rightly insists that poetic language shows a certain indifference to 'the severe canons of logic and metaphysics' (p. 177).

82. Against this category (in which Ex. 21:6; 22:7f. are sometimes included) see C. H. Gordon, 'אֱלֹהִים in its Reputed Meaning of Rulers, Judges', JBL 54 (1935) 139-144, and his later short note, 'History of Religion in Psalm 82' in Biblical and Near Eastern
Moses (Ex. 7:1; cf. 4:16), and the apparition of Samuel (1 Sa. 28:13; cf. Is. 8:19). It is also relevant to note that Isaiah 9:5 combines the two terms used in Psalm 45 to address the king (v. 4; אָלֹהִים, v. 7) and applies the title to the ideal king of the future (אָלֹהִים וֹבֵר, 'Mighty God', used of Yahweh himself in Is. 10:21).

Because, then, Israelites regarded the king as God's viceroy on earth, his legitimated son who exhibited divine qualities, it is not altogether surprising that, in a burst of lyrical enthusiasm but with the appropriate qualification, a Davidic king should exceptionally be given a title that was in fact not reserved exclusively for Deity.83

We conclude that the objections to taking אָלֹהִים as a vocative in Psalm 45:7, whether they are drawn from grammar, the structure of the poem, the context of v. 7, or from general theological considerations, are by no means insuperable. The traditional rendering, 'Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever', is not simply readily defensible but remains the most satisfactory solution to the exegetical problems posed by the verse. In addition, we have proposed that in this verse it is a king of the Davidic dynasty who is addressed as אָלֹהִים.

Studies. Essays in Honor of William Sanford LaSor (ed. G. A. Tuttle) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 129-131. On the other hand, C. Schedl believes that it is perhaps in Ps. 82:6 ('You are gods [אָלֹהִים], sons of the Most High') that we find the spiritual milieu that most closely corresponds to the use of אָלֹהִים in Ps. 45:7a ('Neue Vorschläge' 316).

33. It is proper to speak of an 'identity' between the king and God (as I.Engnell does in his Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East [Oxford, Blackwell, 1967] 175) only in the sense that ideally the king is godlike in his character and conduct. He is not 'one' with God by nature but may become partially 'one' with him in practice and may therefore not inappropriately, if only exceptionally, be called 'God'.

34. If this is so, Psalm 45 is unique not only as the one genuine hymn to the king found in the Psalter but also as an instance where the title אָלֹהִים is used in direct address to the king. Cf. Mowinckel, Psalms 74f., who notes that elsewhere in Israelite psalm poetry the hymn is reserved for Yahweh himself.
In Psalm 45:8, on the other hand, אֱלֹהִים should almost certainly be construed as a nominative: 'Therefore God (אֱלֹהִים), your God, has anointed you'.

Additional Note: Psalm 44:7-8 in the LXX

In general we may characterise the LXX rendering of this psalm as consistently literal. For instance, the thrice-repeated על־כן, standing at the beginning of clauses in vv. 3, 8 and 18, is rendered each time by διὰ τοῦτο in the same position, and the slight differences between לְהַלְמָד רֹעֵד (v. 3), לְהַלְמָד רֹעֵד (v. 7) and לְהַלְמָד רֹעֵד (v. 18) are reflected by εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (v. 3), καὶ εἰς σιῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος (v. 7), and εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα καὶ εἰς αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος (v. 18). Or again, the translator reproduces the distinctively Hebrew word-order (e.g., vv. 3c, 8b, 9b) and personal pronouns even when Greek would not normally require them (e.g., vv. 3, 4, 5, 10, 11). The double accusative (σε . . . ἐλαιόν) with ἔχρισεν in v. 8 reflects a Hebrew idiom with מָשָׁה (see GK §117 dd,ee), although the normal LXX construction after χρίω would have led us to expect σε . . . (ἐν) ἐλαιό (cf. Ps. 88:21; 151:4). Such examples could be multiplied.

Several features of the LXX translation are noteworthy, especially in light of the citation of vv. 7-8 in Hebrews 1:8-9.

1. Verse 6a reads τὰ βέλη σου ἤκονημένα δυνατέ ('your weapons are sharpened, o mighty warrior'), where δυνατέ has no corresponding גבור in the MT, as it does in

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85. Unfortunately, in preparing this paper neither of the following resources was available to me: P. J. King, A Study of Psalm 45 (44) (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, 1959); A. Neuwirth, Kis'akh elohim. Dein Thron, o Gott (Ps.45,7). Untersuchungen zum Gottkönigtum im Alten Orient und im AT (dissertation in the University of Graz, 1964).

86. On these uses of σιῶν, see H. Sasse, ‘σιῶν’ TDNT 1, 200.

87. But Briggs (Psalms, I, 383, 386, 391) reads נְבָר in v. 6, following the LXX 'as required by measure' (p. 386) and assuming that a copyist has omitted the word from the Hebrew text.
v. 4a.88 This dual address to the king as a 'mighty warrior' or 'hero' in vv. 4 and 6 of the LXX heightens the probability that in the next verse ὁ θεός is also a vocative.89

2. As in the MT, so in the LXX, it is extremely unlikely that God (not the king) is addressed in v. 7, for a sudden apostrophe of this sort would involve an awkward transition from an address to God in v. 7 to a statement about God in v. 8, and from σου as referring to God in v. 7 to σου as referring to the king in v. 8 (as in v. 6).

3. To render ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεός by 'Your throne is God' is implausible in light of the articular θεός: an anarthrous θεός would have been expected in the predicate (cf. ῥάβδος in v. 7b). No more probable is the translation 'God is your throne', given the word-order and the ambiguity of subject if the two articular nouns θρόνος and θεός were both nominative.

4. In v. 7b the anarthrous state of ῥάβδος εὐθύτητος shows ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου to be the subject.

5. The exact parallelism of vv. 8b and 3c (viz. διὰ τοῦτο - verb - σε - ὁ θεός) suggests that in v. 8b ὁ θεός is nominative, not vocative: 'Therefore God (ὁ θεός), your God, has anointed you'.98

88. La⁸ and Augustine read sagittae tuae acutae potentissimae but La⁹ has (correctly) potentissime. See A. Rahlfs, Septuaginta Societatis Scientiarum Gottingensis. X. Psalmi cum Odis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931) 38; M. Caloz, Étude sur la LXX Origenienne du Psautier (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978) 141-143.

89. In the LXX the vocative of θεός is generally ὁ θεός (not θεός, as is usual in Attic Greek), although is sometimes found, even in the literary books (see R. Helbing, Grammatik der Septuaginta. Laut- und Wortlehre [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907] 34). In Ps. 45:7 Symmachus and Theodotion have ὁ θεός, and Aquila θεέ (F. Field, Origenis Hexaplorum guae supersunt . . . [Oxford: Clarendon, 1875], II, 162).

90. I have greatly benefited from comments on parts of this paper kindly given by Dr. R. P. Gordon, Dr. C. C. Broyles and Dr. L. J. McGregor.