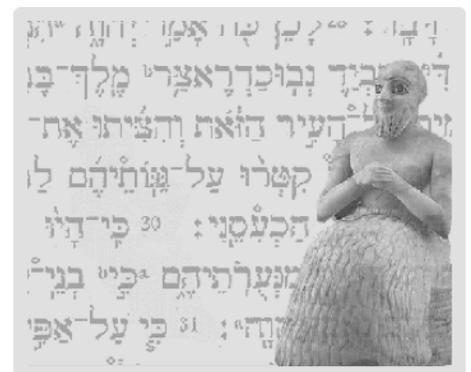


Psalm 68: Structure, Composition and Geography

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PSALM 68: STRUCTURE, COMPOSITION AND GEOGRAPHY

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Psalm 68 is presumably one of the most difficult texts in the book of Psalms. Scholars are divided on its structure, its meaning, and its date. The following article addresses some key aspects of the psalm's composition; it includes a discussion of its structure—in which I argue that it is possible to identify a numerical pattern—as well as a discussion of its distinctive geography. The discussion will mostly be based on the Masoretic Text (MT); no version of this psalm was found in Qumran, and the LXX, while presenting its own difficulties, does not appear to point to a different Hebrew base text than the one preserved in MT.¹

1. THE STRUCTURE OF PSALM 68

1.1. NUMERICAL STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION²

The significance of numerical structures in the study of the book of Psalms has been noted by Caspar Labuschagne in a recent article (Labuschagne 2009). Labuschagne pointed out several structures of word numbers in different psalms which appear to have symbolic meaning. This notion, applied here to the number of cola, may help us understanding the structure of one of the most difficult psalms, Psalm 68. It may also help us to differentiate between the original nucleolus of this psalm and later additions. Let us start by presenting this psalm, divided into its cola.³

¹ The use of the Greek text of Ps 68 is complicated by the fact that the Greek translator interpreted difficult words and expressions in the MT on the basis of their graphic similarity with other, more common Hebrew words. For instance, he interpreted בערבות in 68:5 as מערב (δυσμω), and ידדון in 68:13 in the sense of ידיד (αγαπητος).

² Unless otherwise specified, the English translation used here follows the NRSV. The verse numbering follows the MT; the English numbering is different because the first verse is not counted.

³ The cola division follows Fokkelman 1990:74, except in the case of v. 9. Fokkelman divides this verse into four cola, in keeping with his understanding of the structure of vv. 8–9 as consisting of two

	א לְמַנְצַח לְדוֹד מְזִמּוֹר שִׁיר
וַיְנוֹסוּ מִשְׁנֹאָיו מִפְּנֵי	ב יְקוֹם אֱלֹהִים יְפֹצוּ אוֹיְבָיו
דוֹנֵג מִפְּנֵי אֵשׁ	ג כְּהַנְדִּיף עֵשָׁן תַּנְדִּיף כְּהִמָּס
	יֵאבְדוּ רְשָׁעִים מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים
יַעֲלֶצוּ לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהִים	ד וְצַדִּיקִים יִשְׂמְחוּ
	וַיִּשְׁשׂוּ בְשִׂמְחָה
סֵלוּ לְרֶכֶב בְּעֲרֹבוֹת	ה שִׁירוּ לְאֱלֹהִים זְמֵרוּ שְׁמוֹ
	בְּיָה שְׁמוֹ וְעִלְזוּ לִפְנֵי
אֱלֹהִים בְּמַעֲוֹן קֹדֶשׁוֹ	ו אָבִי יִתּוֹמִים וְדִין אֲלֻמְנוֹת
מוֹצִיא אֲסִירִים בְּבוֹשְׂרוֹת	ז אֱלֹהִים מוֹשִׁיב יְחִידִים בֵּיתָה
	אֲדָ סוֹרְרִים שְׂכָנָו צַחִיקָה
בְּצַעֲדָךְ בִּישִׁימוֹן סֵלָה	ח אֱלֹהִים בְּצִאֲתָךְ לִפְנֵי עַמְּךָ
מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים זֶה סִינֵי	ט אַרְץ רַעֲשָׁה אֶף שָׁמַיִם נִטְפוּ
	מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
נַחֲלָתְךָ וְנִלְאָה אֶתָּה כּוֹנֵנֶתָה	י גֹּשֶׁם נְדֹבוֹת תִּנְיָף אֱלֹהִים
תִּכְיֶן בְּטוֹבְתָךְ לְעֵנֵי אֱלֹהִים	יא חִיתָךְ יִשְׁבוּ בָּהּ
הַמְבֹשְׂרוֹת צָבָא רַב	יב אֲדֹנָי יִתֵּן אִמְרָךְ
וְנֹת בֵּית תַּחֲלֵק שֶׁלֶּל	יג מַלְכֵי צְבָאוֹת יְדוֹן יְדוֹן
כְּנִפֵי יוֹנָה נַחֲפָה בַכֶּסֶף	יד אִם תִּשְׁכַּבּוּן בֵּין שַׁפְתֵי־
	וְאַבְרוֹתֶיהָ בִּירְקֶרֶק חֲרוּץ
תִּשְׁלַג בְּצַלְמוֹן	טו בְּפֶרֶשׁ שְׂדֵי מְלָכִים בָּהּ
הַר גְּבַנְגִּים הַר בְּשָׁן	טז הַר אֱלֹהִים הַר בְּשָׁן
הַהָר חֲמַד אֱלֹהִים לְשִׁבְתּוֹ	יז לָמָּה תִרְצָדוֹן הָרִים גְּבַנְגִּים
	אֶף-יִהְיֶה יִשְׁכֵּן לְנֹצַח
אֶלְפֵי שִׁנְאָן	יח רֶכֶב אֱלֹהִים רַב־תִּים
	אֲדֹנָי בָּם סִינֵי בַקֹּדֶשׁ
לְקַחְתָּ מִתְּנוֹת בְּאֲדָם	יט עֲלִיתָ לְמָרוֹם שְׁבִיתָ שְׁבִי
	וְאֶף סוֹרְרִים לְשִׁכֹּן יְהֵ אֱלֹהִים
יַעֲמֵס לָנוּ הָאֵל יִשׁוּעַתְּנוּ סֵלָה	כ בְּרוּךְ אֲדֹנָי יוֹם יוֹם
וְלִיהוָה אֲדֹנָי לְמֹנֹת תִּצְאוֹת	כא הָאֵל לָנוּ אֵל לְמוֹשְׁעוֹת
קִדְקֹד שַׁעַר מִתְּהַלֵּךְ בְּאַשְׁמֵי	כב אֲדָ אֱלֹהִים יִמְחֵץ רֹאשׁ אֹיְבָיו
אָשִׁיב מִמְּצֻלוֹת יָם	כג אִמְרָ אֲדֹנָי מִבְּשָׁן אָשִׁיב
לְשׁוֹן כְּלָבִיד מְאִיבִים מִנְּהוּ	כד לְמַעַן תִּמְחֵץ רִגְלֶךָ בְּדָם
הַלִּיכוֹת אֵלֵי מַלְכֵי בַקֹּדֶשׁ	כה רְאוּ הַלִּיכוֹתֶיךָ אֱלֹהִים
בְּתוֹךְ עֲלָמוֹת תּוֹפְפוֹת	כו קִדְמוּ שָׁרִים אַחַר נַגְנִים
אֲדֹנָי מִמְּקוֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל	כז בְּמִקְהֵלוֹת בְּרָכוּ אֱלֹהִים
שָׁרֵי יְהוּדָה רִגְמָתָם	כח שֵׁם בְּנִימָן צַעִיר רֹדָם
	שָׁרֵי זְבִלוֹן שָׁרֵי נַפְתָּלִי
עוֹזָה אֱלֹהִים זֶה פְּעֻלַּת לָנוּ	כט צוּה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עֲזֵךְ
לָךְ יוֹבִילוּ מְלָכִים שָׁי	ל מִהִיכָלְךָ עַל יְרוּשָׁלָּם
עֲדַת אַבִּירִים בְּעֵגְלֵי עַמִּים	לא גְּעַר חֵית קָנָה
בְּזֵר עַמִּים קְרָבוֹת יַחְפְּצוּ	מִתְרַפֵּס בְּרָצִי כֶסֶף
כּוֹשׁ תִּרְיֵץ יְדִיו לְאֱלֹהִים	לב יִאֲתִיו חֲשֵׁמָנִים מִנֵּי מִצְרַיִם
זְמָרוּ אֲדֹנָי סֵלָה	לג מִמְּלֻכוֹת הָאָרֶץ שִׁירוּ לְאֱלֹהִים

tricola. In his view, the words **ארץ רעשה** conclude the first sentence, while the parallel expression **אף שמים נטפו** opens the next one. I find this interpretation problematic. My own division treats v. 9 as an independent tricola, which corresponds to my view of the central position of the words **מפני אלהים זה סיני** in the middle of this verse.

הן יתנו בקולו קול עז על ישראל גאנותו	לד לרכב בשמי שמי קדם לה תנו עז לאלהים ועזו בשחקים לו נזרא אלהים ממקדשיך ברוך אלהים
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Psalm 68 contains several unique words and expressions,⁴ a feature which makes its interpretation very difficult. Furthermore, scholars also disagree regarding the integrity of this psalm. Some regard it as a homogeneous composition, while others emphasize its apparent disunity.⁵

As was noted by several scholars,⁶ v. 5 is similar to vv. 33–34, and together they form an *inclusio*. Many scholars⁷ see the words **בְּעֶרְבוֹת רֶכֶב** in v. 5 as a parallel to the Ugaritic title of Baal **רֶכֶב עֶרְפַת**—“the rider of the clouds.” In this case, there is a clear parallel between the call to praise God “who rides upon the clouds” in v. 5 and the call to sing to the “the rider in the heavens” in vv. 33–34.⁸ The assumption that our author was familiar with the descriptions of Baal can be further supported by the description of God in v. 34—“O rider in the heavens, the ancient heavens; listen, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice.” These words should be compared to the description of Baal in the opening of Amarna Letter 147. The sender of this letter, Abimilki King of Tyre, flatters the Egyptian monarch (probably Akhenaten)⁹ by comparing him to Baal, who sends forth his voice in heaven while all the earth trembles when that voice is heard.¹⁰ This Baal image—the image of the god of clouds, thunder, and rain—is further reflected in 68:10: “Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad.”

I agree with Fokkelman that the *inclusio* between vv. 5 and 33–34 points toward the unity of Ps 68.¹¹ In my view, however, this notion is only valid with regard to the verses that are found within the *inclusio*, namely, 68:5–34. The rest of the verses—vv. 1–4 and 35–36—are presumably a late editorial

⁴ I list here the unique words and expressions with the numbers of the different verses where they appear:

(10) גשם נדבות תניף, (7) בכושרות, (5) סלו לרכב בערבות ביה שמו, (14) בירקרק חרוץ, שפתים, (13) ידדון ידדון, (12) יתן אמר, (11) חיתך, (19) מתנות באדם, (18) שנאן, (17) תרצדון, (16) הר גבננים, (15) תשלג, (24) מנהו, (22) קדקד שער מתהלך באשמיו, (21) תוצאות למות, (34) לרכב בשמי שמי קדם, (32) יאתיו חשמנים, תריץ ידיו, (31) בור, (25) אלהים הליכות אלי, (27) במקלות, (28) רגמתם, (29) ברצי כסף, (30) רגמתם, (31) בור, (32) יאתיו חשמנים, תריץ ידיו, (33) בור.

⁵ Thus, e.g., Albright 1950–1951, who described it as “a catalogue of early Hebrew lyric poems.”

⁶ See, e.g., Fokkelman 1990:75; Hossfeld and Zenger 2005:162.

⁷ See the references listed by Day 2002:92–93.

⁸ Even John Day (2002:93), who claims that the words **רכב בערבות** should be translated “rider through the deserts,” agrees that “it is still likely that Yahweh is here conceived as riding *on* a cloud.”

⁹ See Albright 1937; Campbell 1964:68–77; Grave 1980, 1982.

¹⁰ See also the reference to II AB iii 30–37 in Cassuto 1973:278 note 88.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

addition. Other indications appear to support such division between 68:5–34 and the rest of the psalm. First, the unique words and expressions to which I have already referred¹² are all to be found within the section comprised by vv. 5–34. Second, our psalm evinces several connections with Ugaritic literature, as various scholars have pointed out,¹³ but such connections are likewise restricted to vv. 5–34.¹⁴ Finally, as was remarked by Goldingay (2007:309), the current opening of the psalm in v. 2 departs significantly from the usual openings of psalms of praise. The original opening is probably preserved in v. 5, which introduces the psalm with an exhortation to praise God that fits well the traditional pattern that characterizes psalms of praise.

This finding is consistent with the recent interpretation of Hossfeld and Zenger (2005:163), who likewise agree that 68:1–4, 35–36 form a later addition to this psalm, presumably from the hand of the psalm’s final editor. However, they also argue that 68:5–7, 33–36 are secondary and stem from an earlier editor. In their view, therefore, the “core” section of the psalm is contained in vv. 8–32. They raise two arguments for this claim (*ibid.*). (1) First, in verses 8–11 we have a description of the theophany of God, which is reminiscent of similar depictions found at the opening of other poems: the blessing of Moses in Deut 33, Deborah’s song in Judg 5, and the poem in Hab 3. (2) Moreover, they point to what they perceive to be a tension between vv. 5–7 and 8–32: In 68:7, “the rebellious are put outside God’s care and banished to the wilderness, but at God’s enthronement, described in v. 19, where God as a king brings captive in train... They [i.e., the rebellious, I. K.], again take part... and... are introduced into the rank of those who owe tribute.”

The first argument appears to be based on problematic evidence. Out of the three poems mentioned, it is only the blessing of Moses which opens with the description of the theophany. In the two other cases we have a short introduction before this depiction (cf. Judg 5:2–3; Hab 3:2). Actually, the call to bless God and the appeal to the foreign kings to sing to God which opens the song of Deborah should be compared with the function of 68:5. I regard the second argument as being equally unconvincing. Verse 7 does not say that “the rebellious are banished to the wilderness,” but rather that they dwell in a parched land. Hence, I do not see any contradiction between this statement and the later inclusion, in v. 19, of the rebellious among those who owe tribute or service to God after his victory.

If we conclude that the original psalm is included in 68:5–34 we have to look for the reasons that led to the editorial ad-

¹² See above, note 4.

¹³ For a comprehensive list, see especially Gray 1977:8–20.

¹⁴ Dahood 1986:35 argues that 68:3 reflects Ugaritic morphology; however, this argument was already rejected by Gray (*ibid.*:15).

ditions found in vv. 1–4, 35–36. As is well known, Ps 68 is part of the “Elohistic Collection” or “Elohistic Psalter” (Pss 42–68). The name **אלהים** is the dominant divine name used in this collection. Only rarely do the names **יהוה** or **יה** appear within this collection.¹⁵ The inclusion of Ps 68 within the “Elohistic Collection” seems problematic: While it is true that the name “Elohim” is the dominant name in this psalm, a variety of other divine names also appear here. This phenomenon already led Fokkelman (1990:75–76) to dispute the presence of an Elohistic redaction in this psalm. I can partially agree with him, in the sense that there is no evidence, in my view, for an Elohistic redaction in the original nucleus of this psalm (68:5–34). However, the supplementary material identified in 68:1–4, 35–36 should be assigned, in my opinion, to such an Elohistic redaction. The Elohistic redactors were apparently troubled by the variety of the divine names within this psalm. For some reason, they refrained from changing the divine names in the original nucleus of this psalm (68:5–34). However, they sought to reinforce the “Elohistic” tone of the psalm by framing the psalm with additional verses in which the name “Elohim” appears six times, while there is no mention of the divine names **יהוה** or **יה**.

I also agree with Fokkelman (*ibid.*) that this psalm should be divided into three sections and that the central section, in 68:12–24, “is the full report of the war of liberation fought by God himself.” Finally, I agree with his view that the psalm is built of eight stanzas (see *ibid.*:73). However, I cannot accept all the details of his stanza division. Fokkelman sees the whole psalm as one original unit and divides it into eight stanzas. As stated above, in my view, the original nucleus of this psalm is contained in 68:5–34, and I suggest that this original nucleus itself is built of eight stanzas.¹⁶ The transition from one stanza to another is usually marked either by a change of the grammatical person or by the introduction of a new divine name. Thus, the variety of the divine names in this psalm is also part of its stanza building. Below is the division of the original nucleus (68:5–34) into three sections and eight stanzas, with a detailed discussion of that division.

Section One: 68:5–11

Stanza 1 (68:5–7)

ה	שִׁירוּ לְאֱלֹהִים זְמֵרוּ שְׁמוֹ
	בֵּיתָה שְׁמוֹ וְעֲלִזּוּ לְפָנָיו
ו	אָבִי יְתוּמִים וְדִין אֱלֹהִים
ז	אֱלֹהִים מוֹשִׁיב יְהִידִים בֵּיתָה
	אֲדָ סוֹרְרִים שְׁכֵנוֹ צְחִיחָה
	סְלוּ לְרֵכֶב בְּעֲרֵבוֹת
	אֱלֹהִים בְּמַעוֹן קִדְשׁוֹ
	מוֹצִיא אֲסִירִים בְּבוֹשְׁרוֹת

¹⁵ For a recent discussion of the use of the divine names in this collection, see Joffe 2001, as well as Hossfeld and Zenger (2003).

¹⁶ In several cases I followed the stanza division of Hossfeld and Zenger (2003:161).

After the opening verse, which gives an exhortation to sing to God (Elohim), the stanza contains a description of God's protection and just judgment. As was noted by Kraus (1993:51), this description is "stated in very general terms" and "corresponds to the typical ancient Near Eastern picture of an ideal king." God is described here as the father and advocate for the *personae miserae* of all humanity.¹⁷ There is no mention of a special relationship between God and Israel in this paragraph.

As was mentioned above, the opening verse seems to refer to God with the title of "the rider of the clouds," which is taken from Baal, the rain god. The last words of the stanza, "but the rebellious live in a parched land," refer to the rebellious people who do not get the blessing of rain but dwell in arid land. The identity of these rebellious people will be explored elsewhere.

Stanza 2 (68:8–11)

ח אֱלֹהִים בְּצֵאתְךָ לִפְנֵי עַמְךָ	בְּצֵעֲדֶךָ בְּיִשְׁמוֹן סֶלָה
ט אֶרֶץ רַעֲשָׁה אֶף שָׁמַיִם נָטְפוּ	מִפְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים זֶה סִינֵי
י גֶּשֶׁם נְדָבוֹת תִּנְיֶף אֱלֹהִים	נִחַלְתְּךָ וְנִלְאָה אֶתָּה כּוֹנְנָתָה
יא חִיתְךָ יֵשְׁבוּ בָּהּ	תִּכְיֶן בְּטוֹבְתְךָ לְעַנֵּי אֱלֹהִים

The transition to the following stanza is marked by a change in the person used to address the deity: In the previous stanza, the third person was used in reference to the universal god. Here the poet comes to the description of God's help to Israel. The tone is more intimate, and the speech about God (Elohim) is given in the second person.

The first two verses of this stanza describe the march of God before Israel in the desert. Unlike the parallel verses in Judg 5:4–5, the point of departure of the march is not indicated here.¹⁸ Within the description of the march, there is a reference to the raining heavens—"the heavens poured down rain" (68:9). This reference supports the connection with the following verses that also deal with rain.

The following two verses (68:10–11) refer to the benefits that God gave to Israel after the march, namely, a land watered with rain.¹⁹ As a result, a clear distinction is established between the "rebellious who dwell in a parched land," mentioned at the end of the first stanza (68:7), and the people of Israel who are supplied with "rain in abundance" (68:10).

Section Two: 68:12–24

The description of God's help and salvation to all humankind and to Israel in the first two stanzas serves as an introduction

¹⁷ See Hossfeld and Zenger 2005:164.

¹⁸ I intend to deal with the question of the chronological and literary relationship between these verses elsewhere.

¹⁹ The exact meaning of the term חִיתְךָ used at the beginning of v. 11 to refer to the people will be explained below.

to the central section, which describes God's salvation during the war.

Stanza 3 (68:12–14)

המבשרות צבא רב	יב אדני יתן אמר
ונות בית תחלק שלל	יג מלכי צבאות ידדון ידדון
כנפי יונה נחפה בכסף	יד אם תשכבון בין שפתים
	ואברותיה בירקרק חרוץ

The transition to a new stanza is again marked by a change in the person used to address the deity, this time from the second person to the third. Another mark of the new stanza is the use of the divine name “Adonai” for the first time in the psalm (68:12). This stanza, which opens the central section, refers first to an oracle or a war prophecy,²⁰ indicated by the phrase **אדני יתן אמר**.

The next verses cite God's words, which are announced by the heralding women. The message tells of the coming defeat, the dispersion of the enemy kings, and the division of their spoil.²¹ The fact that we have here an announcement which predicts the results of the battle before the war is reflected in the use of the future tense: **ידדון ידדון, תחלק, תשכבון**. This device can be compared with the past tense used by the heralding women after the victory of David (see 1 Sam 18:7): **הכה שאול באלפיו ודוד ברבבותיו**.

This pre-war announcement ends with the description of the precious object in the second part of v. 14, an object that is part of the war booty.

Stanza 4 (68:15–19)

תשלג בצלמון	טו בפרש שדי מלכים בה
הר גבגבים הר בשן	טז הר אלהים הר בשן
ההר חמד אלהים לשבתו	יז למה תרצדון הרים גבגבים
	יח אף יהוה ישכון לנצח
אלפי שנאן	יח רכב אלהים רבתיים
	יט אדני כם סיני בקדש
לקחת מתנות באדם	יט עליה למרום שבית שבי
	ואף סוררים לשכון יה אלהים

This stanza tells of the fulfillment of the oracle announcing the defeat of the enemy kings and their dispersion, which are now reported in the present tense: **בפרש שדי מלכים בה**. The beginning of a new stanza is marked not only by the transition from future to present tense but also by the introduction of a new divine name, this time the name “Shaddai” (68:15). The last two verses of the stanza, 68:18–19, describe the divine army and mention the prisoners of war that were taken by God.²² The meaning of the central verses 68:16–17 and their connection to the rest of the stanza will be discussed below.

²⁰ Compare, e.g., Hossfeld and Zenger 2005:165.

²¹ See Hossfeld and Zenger 2005:165; Tate 1990:178.

²² See Kraus 1993:54.

It should be noted that, at the end of the stanza, there is a reference to the rebellious ones who are mentioned after the prisoners of war: **שְׁבִית שְׁבִי ... וְאֵף סוֹרְרִים לְשֹׁכֵן יְהוָה**. This echoes the reference to prisoners and rebellious ones at the end of the first stanza: **אֲדָם סוֹרְרִים שִׁכְנוּ צַחִיחָה**. Finally, one may also note that the same verb, **שָׁכַן**, is used in both cases after the reference to the rebellious ones. This may be regarded as a further indication of the integrity of the different stanzas of this psalm.

Stanza 5 (68:20–21)

כּ בְּרוּךְ אֲדֹנָי יְיָ הַיּוֹם יְעִמָּס לָנוּ הָאֵל יִשׁוּעָתָנוּ סִלָּה
 כּא הָאֵל לָנוּ אֵל לְמוֹשָׁעוֹת וְלִיְהוָה אֲדֹנָי לְמֹת תִּצְאוֹת

The fifth stanza is the shortest one; it is also unique in its content, as it contains a blessing formula for Elohim as “savior.” This blessing is said by the entire community in the first person plural; this is the first time that we see this form of speech within this psalm. In addition, the blessing presents a chiasmic structure:

ברוך ... האל ישועתנו סלה ... האל לנו אל למושעות ... תוצאות

The element of God’s salvation is emphasized by the repetition: “God is our salvation... Our God is a God of salvation.” In the context of the central section, presumably the reference is primarily to salvation in war.

Stanza 6 (68:22–24)

כב אֵף אֱלֹהִים יִמְחֵץ רֹאשׁ אִיבֵיו קָדְקַד שִׁעָר מִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּאַשְׁמֵי
 כג אָמַר אֲדֹנָי מִבְּשֵׁן אָשִׁיב אָשִׁיב מִמְצִלּוֹת יָם
 כד לְמַעַן תִּמְחֵץ רִגְלֶךָ בְּדָם לְשׁוֹן כְּלָבִיךָ מֵאִיבִים מְנַהוּ

As was noted by Fokkelman (1990:77), the sixth stanza is the “twin” of stanza 3 (68:12–14). Whereas stanza 3 quoted the words of God before the battle, stanza 6 now quotes the words of God following the battle and the fulfillment of the previous oracle. The connection is highlighted by the chiasmic format; compare **אמר אדני יתן אדני** (68:12) and **אמר אדני** (68:23). Another, more subtle device that reflects the connection between the two stanzas is the duplication of verbs in both verses: compare **ידדון ידדון** (68:13) and **אשיב אשיב** (68:23). The strong linguistic and thematic connections between stanzas 3 and 6 create a frame that holds together the various elements within the central section of Ps 68, which consists of stanzas 3–6 (68:12–24). Fokkelman notes that the central section “is the full report of the war of liberation fought by God himself” (ibid.:76). Even though we do not have any term for liberation in this poem, the content of v. 30, which will be discussed below, appears to justify Fokkelman’s designation of this war as a war of “liberation.”

Section Three: 68:25–34

The third section looks back at the war that was described in section two.

Stanza 7 (68:25–29)

הַלִּיכוֹת אֱלֹהִים מְלִכֵי בְקִדְשׁ	כֹּה רָאוּ הַלִּיכוֹתֶיךָ אֱלֹהִים
בְּתוֹךְ עֲלָמוֹת תּוֹפְפוֹת	כֹּו קָדְמוּ שָׂרִים אַחֵר נִגְנִים
אֲדֹנָי ²³ מִמְּקוֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל	כֹּז בְּמִקְהֵלוֹת בְּרָכוּ אֱלֹהִים
שָׂרֵי יְהוּדָה רְגַמְתָּם	כַּח שֵׁם בְּנִימֹן צָעִיר רַדָּם
עוֹזָה אֱלֹהִים זֹו פָּעֵלְתָּ לָנוּ	שָׂרֵי זִבְלוֹן שָׂרֵי נַפְתָּלִי
	כֹּט צָוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עֲזָךְ

This stanza opens the third and last section of the original poem. Stanza 7 mainly describes the procession and celebration after the victory. As in the case of stanzas 1 and 2, the transition to a new stanza is marked by the form of address to the deity: it changes from the third person in the sixth stanza to the second person in the seventh stanza.

The stanza starts by mentioning the procession of God. I agree with Cassuto (1973:270) that the reference here is to “God who returns... to the Temple... after the defeat of the foe.” In addition, the imagery used in v. 25 binds together the description of God’s return to his sanctuary with the depiction of him as king (“the processions of my God, my King, into the sanctuary”). This is then followed by a detailed description of the procession of the people who celebrate the victory (vv. 26–29). The stanza ends aptly with a quotation of the words that were uttered by the people during the procession (v. 29).

Stanza 8 (68:30–34)

לָךְ יוֹבִילוּ מְלָכִים שֵׁי	לִ מִהִיכָלְךָ עַל יְרוּשָׁלַם
עֲדַת אַבְיָרִים בְּעִגְלֵי עַמִּים	לֹא גָעַר חַיַּת קָנָה
בְּזֶר עַמִּים קְרָבוֹת יַחְפְּצוּ	מִתְרַפֵּס בְּרָצִי כָסֶף
כּוֹשׁ תִּרְיָץ יָדָיו לְאֱלֹהִים	לֵב יִאֲתִיו חֲשֵׁמְנִים מִנֵּי מִצְרַיִם
זָמְרוּ אֲדֹנֵי סָלָה	לֵג מִמְּלֻכוֹת הָאֲרָץ שִׁירוּ לְאֱלֹהִים
הֵן יִתְּן בְּקוֹלוֹ קוֹל עֹז	לֵד לְרִכְבּ בְּשָׁמַי שָׁמַי קָדָם

Stanza 8 changes the focus: we no longer observe the Israelites celebrating their victory but rather the fate of the nations and their kings. Following God’s victory over the enemy, they are supposed to bring tribute to God as an acknowledgment of his superiority. Two nations are mentioned explicitly within this context: Egypt and Kush (68:32).

As discussed above, the two final verses of this stanza (68:33–34) create an *inclusio* with v. 5. In these two final verses the nations are exhorted to sing to God .

2.2. THE CONCENTRIC STRUCTURE OF PSALM 68

As was already remarked by Hossfeld and Zenger (2005:161–62), Ps 68 is built according to a concentric structure:²⁴ The

²³ The version אֲדֹנֵי is supported by several Hebrew manuscripts, including the Aleppo Codex. The Leningrad Codex and other Hebrew manuscripts have the Tetragrammaton here.

²⁴ However, Hossfeld and Zenger claim that this structure is restricted to the two outer rings only, while the core of the psalm (vv. 12–32) would be structured differently, mainly on a narrative prin-

outer ring is formed by stanzas 1 and 8, both of which discuss the relationship between God and humankind. The first stanza describes the deity's righteous rule over humanity, whereas in the last stanza we find a call to all kingdoms of earth to accept and proclaim his sovereignty. These two stanzas are further connected by the above mentioned *inclusio*.

The next ring is formed by stanzas 2 and 7. Both of these stanzas describe the "walking" of God in connection with the walking of the Israelites. In the second stanza, we read about the march of God and Israel in the desert: "O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness" (68:8). In the seventh stanza, we see the procession of God and Israel after the victory:

Your solemn processions are seen, O God,
the processions of my God, my King, into the sanctuary,
the singers in front, the musicians last,
between them girls playing tambourines(68:26–27).

The next ring is formed by stanzas 3 and 6. The strong linguistic and thematic connections between stanzas 3 and 6 were noted above.

The inner nucleus of the concentric structure is formed by the fourth and fifth stanzas. Here, we have the description of the enemy's defeat by the divine army, as well as of the blessing of the people after their salvation by God.

Below is a graphic description of the concentric structure of this psalm:

Outer ring	Stanzas 1, 8	Ps 68:5–7, 30–34
First medial ring	Stanzas 2,7	Ps 68:8–11, 25–29
Second medial ring	Stanzas 3, 6	Ps 68:12–14, 22–24
Central ring	Stanzas 4–5	Ps 68:15–21

Let us now add the number of cola in each of these rings to this diagram. The numbers are based on the cola division that was presented at the beginning of this chapter.

Outer ring	Stanzas 1, 8	20 cola
First medial ring	Stanzas 2,7	20 cola
Second medial ring	Stanzas 3, 6	13 cola
Central ring	Stanzas 4–5	17 cola

As was noted above, the central section of this psalm includes stanzas 3–6. The frame of this section is clearly marked by the linguistic and thematic affinities that are shared by the two outer stanzas, numbers 3 and 6. In this way, therefore, we can

ciple. In my view, this latter part of their interpretation is problematic, and a concentric pattern can likewise be identified in the central section of the poem. The arguments for this claim are listed below.

also regard this entire section as forming the inner ring of the psalm’s overall concentric structure. Let us now take the total number of cola of the central section and apply it to our diagram:

Outer ring	Stanzas 1, 8	20 cola
Medial ring	Stanzas 2, 7	20 cola
Central Section	Stanzas 3–6	30 cola
All rings	Stanzas All	70 cola

We see here an elaborate numerical structure: The three rings together form the sacred number of 70 cola. Each of these rings contains a “full” number of cola, either 20 or 30. The number 17, which is the total number of cola of the two stanzas that stand at the center of the psalm (stanzas 4–5) has already been noted as a key number in the structure of several psalms and probably has a symbolic meaning.²⁵ The careful and elaborate numerical structure of the original nucleolus of this psalm (i.e., 68:5–34) is impressive. This numerical structure is based on the concentric structure of the different stanzas, a structure which has also thematic aspects. As we have seen, there are thematic connections between the two stanzas in each of the rings.

Overall, these findings are consistent with the assumption made above that the earlier core of this psalm, the poem identified in vv. 5–34, is a homogenous composition. In this regard, the study of the structure of Ps 68 confirms our observation about the separation between the original psalm (68:5–34) and the secondary editorial addition in vv. 1–4, 35–36. As was noted above, within the original psalm a variety of divine names are used. Furthermore, in several cases, the transition from one stanza to another is marked by the use of a new divine name. In sharp contrast, the additional verses use only the names “Elohim” and “El.” Hence, it seems that these verses were added to enable the inclusion of this psalm within the “Elohistic Collection” or “Elohistic Psalter.”

2. THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF PSALM 68

2.1. “MOUNT BASHAN” IN PSALM 68

Various earlier scholars, such as Mowinckel, Weiser, Kraus and Gray, have argued for the northern origins of Ps 68. Identifying

²⁵ See Labuschagne 2009:586, who suggested two possible interpretations for this prominence of the number 17: Either (1) this number is the numerical value of the word טוב, or (2) the number 17 is the “small” numerical value of the Tetragrammaton. I tend to agree with the second explanation; as I have argued elsewhere (Knohl 2012), various biblical poems, both inside and outside the book of Psalms, contain literary units representing the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton.

“Mount Bashan” in 68:16 with Mount Hermon and relying on the mention of “Tabor and Hermon” in Ps 89:13, they have suggested connecting Ps 68 with a temple on Mount Tabor.²⁶ While I fully agree with the notion of the northern origin of Ps 68, the connection with a temple on Mount Tabor is problematic in my view, especially considering the fact that Mount Tabor is not mentioned at all in our psalm.²⁷ From a methodological perspective, the search for the geographical context of this psalm should be strictly based on the sole locations that are explicitly mentioned in the text.

As was noted above, the central section of Ps 68, vv. 12–24, is mainly devoted to the description of war and victory. In v. 13, we read: “The kings of the armies, they flee, they flee,” and the fleeing enemy kings are mentioned again in v. 15: “When the Almighty scattered kings there, snow fell on Zalmon.” Mount Zalmon is mentioned once in the Hebrew Bible, as being in the area of Shechem (Judg 9:48). Since we have no other reference in this psalm to this area, however, this identification is not entirely satisfactory and we may look at other possibilities. In his commentary, Ibn Ezra refers to this verse, citing Zalmon as a known mountain in Transjordan. Indeed, in Ptolemy’s *Geography* (5:14:12),²⁸ from the second century CE, we learn that the mountain known today as Jabel el-Druze was called Zalmon in his time.²⁹ This mountain is located in the land which in the Hebrew Bible is referred to as the land of “Bashan.” Thus, this location for Zalmon fits well with the reference to “Mount Bashan” in the next verse of the psalm. Hence, we should prefer the identification of Zalmon as being in the northern part of the Transjordan rather than in the area of Shechem.

Following the mention of the snow on Zalmon, the poet addresses Mount Bashan:

הַר גְּבֻנִים הַר בְּשָׁן	זו הַר אֱלֹהִים הַר בְּשָׁן
הֵהָר חָמַד אֱלֹהִים לְשִׁבְתּוֹ	יז לָמָּה תִרְצָדּוּן הָרִים גְּבֻנִים
אֶלְפֵי שָׁנָאן	אף יְהוָה יִשְׁכֹּן לְנִצְחָה
	יח רָכַב אֱלֹהִים רִבְתִּים
	אֲדֹנָי בָּם סִינֵי בִקְדָשׁ

Many ancient and modern interpreters have seen here a description of the rivalry between Mount Bashan and Mount Sinai. However, in my view this interpretation is based on an incorrect understanding of the verb **תִּרְצָדּוּן**.

²⁶ See Gray 1977:4–5 for a convenient summary of earlier scholarly references.

²⁷ The reference to Zebulun and the princes of Naphtali in v. 28 is not sufficient here, since Benjamin and Judah are also mentioned in this verse.

²⁸ See Muller 1883:964.

²⁹ The connection between Ptolemy’s words and our psalm was first noted by Wetzstein (1884). His argument has been accepted since by several scholars.

Various manuals or dictionaries, such as *BDB*, render the meaning of this verb as “[to] watch stealthily, or with envious hostility.” In addition, *BDB* points to the parallel verb in Arabic, which means “[to] watch or wait (often lie in wait).”³⁰ However, as was noted by J. A. Emerton,³¹ the Arabic verb does not include the notion of “envy.” The occurrence of this verb in Ben Sira 14:22, **ירצד**, likewise has no sense of envy, and its plain meaning is “to watch” or to “watch stealthily.” Thus, as was already noted by de Moor (1995:229), the “envious hostility” advanced by *BDB* and many commentators has no solid basis. Instead, we should understand 68:17 as a reference to the fact that the “many-peaked mountain” is watching stealthily but not with envy. This description connotes military ambush, which fits very well with the context of the central section of Ps 68. As was mentioned above, this section deals mainly with the battle. In Judg 9:25 we read that the men of Shechem ambushed men on the mountain tops. Similarly, here the high mountain is described as taking part in the ambush. This should be compared to the role played by the heavens and stars in the Song of Deborah (cf. Judg 5:20).

Another possible interpretation is to follow the translation of the Targum **תרקדון** and to see here a question addressed to the mountains: “Why are you dancing?” As was noted by several scholars, this interpretation can be supported by the comparison with the dancing mountains mentioned in Ps 29:6, as well as with the question addressed to the mountains and hills in Ps 114:4. I am not persuaded by Cassuto’s arguments (1973:264 note 63); he rejects this comparison on the basis of the argument that in Ps 29:6 and 114:4, “the meaning is that the mountains skip on account of the fear of the Lord and because the majesty of his glory,” whereas this would not be the case in our verse. One could argue, though, that in Ps 68 also, the mountains are dancing because of their fear due to the arrival of God and his armies, which is described in the following verse (see 68:18). In any event, even if we adopt this alternative interpretation, there is no ground for assuming the presence of a notion of envy and rivalry between the mountains mentioned in the psalm.

This, however, raises the question of the identity of the mountain mentioned as “Mountain of Bashan... many-peaked mountain” in 68:16–17. The name “Bashan” appears in the Amarna letters, in the name of the city “Siri-basani” (see EA 201). This city was probably located in the region of Naveh, north of the Yarmuk River.³² Several biblical verses mention Mount Hermon as the northern border of the Bashan (cf. Deut 3:1–10; 4:47–48; Josh 12:4–5). For this reason, many scholars

³⁰ See *BDB*, 952–53.

³¹ See Emerton 1993:28. See also Emerton’s rejection of the suggestion made by Cassuto (1973:264), who proposed rendering **תרצדון** as “yearning for a favorable opportunity.”

³² For this identification, see Ahituv 1984:181.

have identified “Mount Bashan” with Mount Hermon.³³ In support of this view, it should be noted that Mount Hermon has many peaks and thus fits well with the title הרים גבנונים—the “many-peaked mountain,” referred to in v. 17. This image is also reflected in the plural form, הרמונים, in Ps 42:7.

As was correctly noted by Hossfeld and Zenger (2005:68), it seems that the battle that is described in the main section of this psalm took place in the area close to Mount Bashan, i.e., in the region of Mount Hermon. This notion is supported, in particular, by the formulation of v. 15: “When the Almighty scattered kings there, snow fell on Zalmon.” As was stated above, the location of Zalmon is probably in the same region. Thus, we may conclude that the battle probably took place somewhere in the Golan Heights, between Mount Bashan—(i.e., Mount Hermon), and Zalmon (i.e., Jabel-el-Druze).

In our psalm, the poet approaches the many peaks of the Hermon and asks them: “Why are you watching stealthily?”—or, alternatively, “Why are you dancing?” (v. 17). The answer is given in the next verse (v. 18a), which refers to the thousands of chariots and bowmen of the divine army (cf., e.g., Albright 1950–1951:25).

רָכַב אֱלֹהִים רִבְתִּים אֶלְפֵי שָׁנָאן

This interpretation of 68:16–18a has one significant implication. As noted above, no rivalry of mountains is involved here. Instead, both vv. 16 and 17 are dealing with the “many peaked mountain,” which should be identified with Mount Hermon. Therefore, the words of v. 17—“the mount that God desired for his abode, where the Lord will reside forever”—describe neither Mount Sinai nor Mount Zion, but Mount Hermon. This interpretation means that for the author of Ps 68, Mount Hermon was apparently considered to be like “Mount Olympus,” i.e., the location of God’s eternal residence.³⁴

This finding also suggests one should take a new look at the expression הַר אֱלֹהִים in v. 16. Day and Emerton have rightly rejected the interpretation of the word אֱלֹהִים as a superlative here (Day 1985:116; Emerton 1993:29). In addition, Emerton also rejects the idea of a reference to a pagan sanctuary on Mount Bashan, correctly arguing that, “verse 17 speaks of the mountain where Elohim has been pleased to dwell; and if verse 16 means ‘Mount Bashan is a mountain of Elohim’ it is natural to suppose that Elohim in verse 17 is used in the same sense” (ibid.:34).³⁵ As was noted by de Moor (1995:230), the

³³ See, for instance, Gray 1977:5; Emerton 1993:27; Kraus 1993:50; Goldingay 2007:323.

³⁴ The possibility that Mount Hermon was considered to be Zaphon or Mount Olympus in early Israel was also suggested by Kraus 1993:50. Compare similarly Emerton 1993:33.

³⁵ Since I do not see any rivalry between mountains here, for the reasons argued above, I cannot follow Emerton’s interpretation (ibid.:36–37), according to which v. 16 should be read as a question,

simple meaning of this expression is that the Mountain of Bashan is the Mountain of God. This interpretation fits well with the next verse, which also speaks of Mount Bashan with its many peaks, and describes it as the eternal residence of YHWH.³⁶ This conception of Mount Bashan/Hermon probably has its roots in the Canaanite and Mesopotamian traditions, which see this area as the habitation of the gods.³⁷

2.3. “SINAI” IN PSALM 68:18

In the previous discussion, we noted the religious significance of Mount Bashan in Ps 68. However, it is remarkable that the reference in vv. 16–17 to Mount Bashan as God’s Mountain and the eternal residence of YHWH is followed in the next verse by a reference to the name “Sinai” (68:18).

רָכַב אֱלֹהִים רִבְתִּים אֶלְפֵי שָׁנָאן אֲדֹנֵי בָּם סִינֵי בְּקֹדֶשׁ

As we have seen above, the first five words of this verse describe the divine army: thousands of chariots and bowmen. The question is, however, how the last four words should be understood, and how they relate to what precedes.

אֲדֹנֵי בָּם סִינֵי בְּקֹדֶשׁ

Many scholars suggest emending the text and reading it as:

אֲדֹנֵי בָּא מִסִּינֵי בְּקֹדֶשׁ

This emendation is supported by the opening words of the Blessing of Moses, which describes God coming down from Sinai (Deut 33:2). As was already noted by Tate (1990:166 and 181), however, it is possible that there is really no need for this emendation; the words have a simple and clear meaning as they are, once “Sinai” is regarded not as the name of a mountain but rather as a divine name.³⁸ This interpretation is suggested, in particular, by the parallel between “Adonai” and “Sinai,” which is similar to the parallel between רִכַּב אֱלֹהִים רִבְתִּים and אֶלְפֵי שָׁנָאן in the first part of this verse.³⁹ The poet says that “Adonai” is among them,⁴⁰ that is, among the angelic warriors who were described in the first part of the verse. He continues and says that “Sinai” is בקֹדֶשׁ, i.e., “among the holy ones.”⁴¹ The two parts of the phrase say the same thing: the deity, who is

while v. 17 would refer to the “envy” of the mountains.

³⁶ This was noted already by Ibn Ezra, who writes in his commentary to this verse: לֹא תִשְׁפֹּל הַר בְּשֵׁן כִּי אַתָּה הָר שְׁחַמְדוּ הַמְּלָאכִים לְשֶׁבֶת בּוֹ אִף הַשְּׂכִינָה תִשְׁכַּן שָׁם.

³⁷ See Gilgamesh 5:6. For the possibility of locating El’s abode on Mount Hermon, see Lipinski 1971; Day 2002:31 note 51.

³⁸ The suggestion proposed by several scholars, about the possible connection between “Sinai” and the name of the Mesopotamian moon god, Sin, is relevant in this context; see below, with note 45.

³⁹ For another case of parallelism that consists of only four words, see 68:31: עֵדֶת אַבִּירִים and בְּעֻגְלֵי עֲמִים.

⁴⁰ For the construction אֲדֹנֵי בָּם compare אֵל בְּדָ אֵל (Isa 55:14) and הִיְהוּהוּ אֵין בְּצִיּוֹן (Jer 8:19).

⁴¹ Tate 1990:166, cf. Exod 15:11; Ps 68:25; 77:14; 89:6–8.

called here “Adonai” and “Sinai,” stands in the midst of his divine army. In this regard, there is no tension between the reference to “Sinai” in 68:18 and the statement about the eternal residence of YHWH on Mount Bashan in the two previous verses.

Indeed, even if we adopt the emendation **בא מסיני בקדש**, there is no real contradiction between the mention of “Sinai” in this verse as the original place of “Adonai” and the statement in the previous verses that Mount Bashan is the eternal residence of God. It is possible to depict God as coming from his abode at Mount Sinai in order to assist his people in the war (see Judg 5 and Hab 3), and moreover, as deciding to reside on Mount Bashan and to make this mountain into His eternal abode.

2.3. “SINAI” IN PSALM 68:8

The other mention of the name “Sinai” in our psalm is in v. 8:

**ארץ רעשה אף שמים נטפו מפני אלהים זה סיני מפני אלהים
אלהי ישראל**

Scholars have suggested various meanings for the words **זה סיני** in this verse.⁴² Some see them as a description of God—“the God of Sinai”—on the basis of its resemblance with similar expressions in other Semitic languages (e.g., Albright 1950–1951:20, and the references to other scholars holding this view in Dahood 1986:139). However, as others have pointed out (Birkeland 1948; Kraus 1993:46), this interpretation is somewhat problematic inasmuch as it is based on linguistic constructions that exist in other Semitic languages but are not documented in the Hebrew Bible.⁴³ I think that the understanding

⁴² As is well known, this phrase also appears in the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:5). The relation between Ps 68 and the Song of Deborah deserves a fuller discussion, which I intend to address elsewhere.

⁴³ Other scholars have interpreted the phrase **זה סיני** as an editorial addition to connect the awe of nature before God with the event of the divine revelation at Sinai. See already Moore 1895:142, and more recently for instance Fishbane 1985:54–55, 75. This understanding can explain the formulation of Judg 5:4–5, where the phrase **זה סיני** appears after the words **הררים נולו מפני ה'**. It is possible, in this sequence, to understand the phrase **זה סיני** as an editorial addition denoting the identity of the specific mountain to “melt down from before YHWH.” But the formulation of the reference to Sinai in Ps 68 is quite distinct, and the parallel with Judg 5 is not much help here. To be sure, assuming that Ps 68 is later than the Song of Deborah, one could argue the phrase **זה סיני** was mistakenly copied into the psalm. But this argument is not a likely one, as one would have to assume that the adapter omitted, for some reason, the significant words **הררים נולו מפני ה'**, even though he left the disconnected phrase **זה סיני**. It is also difficult to accept Fishbane’s argument (ibid.:55) that the words **זה סיני** in Ps 68 were inserted by a later scribe in order to explain that the earthquake and downpour occurred at the time of the divine revelation at Sinai. If that were the reason for the addition, we would expect the phrase **בסיני** (at Sinai), as opposed to **זה סיני** (this is

that was gained above with regard to the meaning of the construct **שִׁינִי בַקְדֹשׁ**, **אֲדֹנָי בַם סִינִי בַקְדֹשׁ**, by interpreting the words **בַם אֲדֹנָי** and **סִינִי בַקְדֹשׁ** as parallel expressions referring to the deity, also makes it possible to interpret the expression **זֶה סִינִי** in a new light. We have seen that the parallelism shows that the writer of the psalm understood the word “Sinai,” like its parallel “Adonai,” as one of the names of God. In light of this, the words **זֶה סִינִי מִפְנֵי אֱלֹהִים** in v. 9 can be understood literally, in the sense that the writer of the psalm identifies “Elohim,” before whom the earth quakes and the heavens pour down rain, with “Sinai.” In this understanding, the verse should be rendered as follows: “The earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before Elohim—that is, Sinai.”

The merit of this interpretation is that it is based on the usual meaning of the word **זֶה** in Biblical Hebrew, and does not depend on linguistic parallels with other Semitic languages.⁴⁴ At the same time, this interpretation also raises a further question as to why the god of Israel is called “Sinai” here. One cannot maintain that this is because Mount Sinai is the place where that deity is revealed or where he dwells. As noted above, Ps 68:16–18 says nothing about the revelation of God on Mount Sinai or his presence on this mountain. On the contrary: according to the writer of this psalm, God dwells and is present on Mount Bashan. In my opinion, naming God as “Sinai” in this psalm is best explained as a way of connecting the god of Israel and the Mesopotamian moon god, “Sin,” or “Si-i-na.”⁴⁵ The god Sin was the chief god of the city of Haran, from where, according to the biblical tradition, the ancestors of the Israelite nation immigrated to Canaan.⁴⁶

It appears that the form of the Hebrew name “Sinai” was created after forms of the divine names **אֲדֹנָי** (Adonai) and **שִׁדְדָי** (Shaddai), which also figure in this psalm.⁴⁷ Divine names ending with a similar diphthong were current in Canaanite literature,⁴⁸ and it seems that Israelite divine names such as “Adonai,” “Shaddai” and “Sinai” were also formed in this way. In addition, the interpretation of Ps 68 offered here also suggests that the theological tendency reflected in this consists of taking divine names and attributes found in various cultural traditions

Sinai)!

⁴⁴ For a similar usage of the word **זֶה**, compare for instance Isa 23:13: **הֵן אֶרֶץ כְּשָׂדִים זֶה הָעָם לֹא הָיָה**.

⁴⁵ For the spelling “Si-i-na” see, e.g., Haas and Prechel 1993:361; the name is frequently spelt “Suen.” The possible connection between the name “Sinai” and the god “Sin” was already pointed out by some earlier scholars, see *inter alia* Lewy 1945–1946:441–445; Key 1965.

⁴⁶ See Gen 12:4–5, 28:10.

⁴⁷ See Ps 68:12, 15, 18, 20, 21, 23, 27, 33. On the possible connection between the names “Sinai” and “El Shaddai,” see Lewy *ibid.*:431 and note 138, as well as Key *ibid.*:24 and note 18.

⁴⁸ See the discussion in Cross 1973:56. He links the form of the names “Artzai,” “Talai,” “Padrai,” and “Rahmai” to the name “Shaddai.”

and of merging them into a single divine entity whose name is “Elohim.”⁴⁹ Another example of this process can be found in the formulation of v. 5:

שירו לאלהים זמרו שמו סלו לרכב בערבות ביה שמו ועלו לפניו

(“Sing to Elohim, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds—his name is Yah—be exultant before him.”) As noted above, many scholars consider that the Hebrew epithet **רכב בערבות** is based on the epithet of the Canaanite god Baal, **רכב ערפת**, “he who rides on the clouds.”⁵⁰ But what is the meaning of the expression **ביה שמו** that comes after **רכב בערבות**? Here, as it appears,⁵¹ the author of the psalm is implying that this epithet, which was originally applied to the god Baal, has now been transferred to the god of Israel.⁵² Similarly, the same writer is stating that “Sinai,” i.e. Sin, the Mesopotamian moon god, has now become one of the names of the god of Israel.⁵³

Apparently, the exceptional meaning of “Sinai” as a divine name in Ps 68 was the earlier, original meaning. One can understand why later writers wanted to obscure the original meaning of “Sinai,” as well as the affinity between the god of Israel and the Mesopotamian god Sin.⁵⁴ The earliest effort in this direction was given, in my view, by the author of the Song of Deborah. As I plan to argue in detail elsewhere, the corresponding passage in Judg 5:4–5 represents an expanded and reworked version of Ps 68:8–9. The central aim of this reworked version was to shift the word “Sinai” from its original meaning as a divine name to the name of a mountain. It seems much more difficult to assume the opposite process. If the name Sinai originally referred to a geographical site, one can

⁴⁹ For the meaning of “Elohim” as a name that contains the identity of many gods, and the Mesopotamian customs of identifying several divine names with one god, see Machinist 2011:230–232.

⁵⁰ See above note 8. Even Day (2002) admits that the reference to God as rider in the sky in 68:34 implies a connection between Baal’s title and the reference to Israel’s deity in 68:5.

⁵¹ In the opinion of Arnold and Strawn (2003) the words **ביה שמו** are a gloss added by an editor. I believe that these words are a genuine part of the verse, expressing the poet’s theological purpose of identifying many divine entities as one.

⁵² According to Arnold and Strawn (*ibid.*: 431), the letter **ב** heading the word **ביה** is used as an identifier. Goldingay (2007) claims that this letter is used for emphasis.

⁵³ On the phenomenon of identifying and unifying divine entities in antiquity, see Smith 2010.

⁵⁴ In principle, this is comparable to the Rabbinic neutralizing of the theological meaning of **עזאזל/עזאזל** by altering it to a geographical indicator of a severe and harsh (**עז**, *ʿaz*) place in the mountains (Babylonian Talmud, *Sotah* 67b). Possibly, the fact that the Elohist and Deuteronomic sources of the Pentateuch do not use the name “Sinai,” but rather other geographical indicators (**הר האלהים**, **חורב**), indicates an attempt to further distance the connection with the god Sin.

hardly understand why the author of Ps 68 would have changed it to a divine name.

2.4. “JERUSALEM” IN PSALM 68:30

The conception of Mount Bashan as the eternal residence of God stands in sharp contrast with the common ideology of the Hebrew Bible, which sees Jerusalem as God’s Eternal Mountain. This common observation is also reflected in verse 30 of our psalm:

מִהִיכָלְךָ עַל יְרוּשָׁלַם לְךָ יוֹבִילוּ מְלָכִים שִׁי

However, as was noted by several commentators, the syntax of the sentence is difficult; the tribute should be brought to God’s Temple, not “from Your Temple”—מִהִיכָלְךָ. Because of this difficulty, some have suggested adding the problematic word מִהִיכָלְךָ to the end of the previous verse, so that verses 29–30 read in the following way:⁵⁵

כֵּט צְוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עֲזֹרָה עֲזֹרָה אֱלֹהִים זֹו פְּעֵלְתָּ לָנוּ מִהִיכָלְךָ
לְךָ יוֹבִילוּ מְלָכִים שִׁי לְךָ יוֹבִילוּ מְלָכִים שִׁי

The difficulty with this suggestion is that it does not explain what led to the separation of the word מִהִיכָלְךָ from its original place in v. 29 and caused the current problematic syntax of v. 30. A more compelling solution, in my opinion, is to follow those scholars who have assumed that the syntax of v. 30 was indicative of the editorial reworking of this verse.⁵⁶ I assume that the original reading of this verse contained a reference to the cultic center at Mount Bashan. A possible restoration should be:

מִהִיכָלְךָ (אֵל הַר בַּשָּׁן) לְךָ יוֹבִילוּ מְלָכִים שִׁי

The editors wanted to adapt this psalm to the widespread belief about God’s residence in Jerusalem. It seems to me that these editors are the same editors who added the verses at the beginning and the end of the psalm in order to adapt it to the “Elohistic Psalter.” The “Elohistic” edition of the psalm probably took place during the Persian period, as is commonly accepted. At this time, the view of Jerusalem as the chosen place for God’s residence, as well as the only legitimate cultic place, was establishing itself in Yehud; accordingly, this led in turn to the emendation of references to other cultic settings.

2.5. THE GEOGRAPHY OF PSALM 68: CONCLUSIONS

We may now summarize the results of the discussion of the geographical sections of this article. Contrary to the prevalent view, Ps 68 does not speak of the rivalry between moun-

⁵⁵ See, e.g., Goldingay 2007:330; a similar assumption is made by various other scholars.

⁵⁶ Compare, e.g., Mowinckel 1953:63; Gray 1977:5; Kraus 1993: 49–50, 55, and others.

tains, and “Sinai” is not the name of a mountain in this psalm. The writer of Ps 68 perceived Mount Bashan as the eternal residence of YHWH. In addition to the religious significance of the Bashan, there is another dimension to this reference. The battle that is described in the heart of this psalm probably took place in the area between Mount Bashan-Hermon and Mount Zalmon, i.e., in the Golan Heights. The identification of this battle is connected with the broader question of the date of this psalm. I intend to explore this question elsewhere.

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