PSALM 60:
COMMUNAL COMPLAINT

Structure

	MT	RSV
I. Superscription	1-2	—
A. Musical-technical	1	—
B. Historical	2	—
II. Complaint	3-7	1-5
A. Invocation	3+	1+
B. Complaint	3-5	1-3
C. Petition	6-7	4-5
III. Sermon	8-11	6-9
IV. Complaint	12	10
V. Petition	13	11
VI. Affirmation of confidence	14	12

Psalm 60 is the last in a series of songs designated as *miktām*, "educational poem" (?) (see Psalms 56–60). It also stands in another sequence of psalms with conspicuous historical allusions (Psalms 51–52; 54; 56–57; 59; 63, all within the Elohistic psalter; → Psalm 51). The technical musical information of v. 1 is all but lucid and does not allow a genre classification of the psalm ("lily of witness," v. 1, could indicate a tune; cf. Psalms 45; 69; 80). Mowinckel (*W* II, 214) thinks that lilies were used for oracular purposes in connection with Psalms 60 and 80. Even if vv. 8-10 were an oracle, this judgment is hardly tenable. The David story of 2 Samuel 8 looms large behind v. 2. The two coincide in listing a number of enemy nations, the point of most direct contact being the mention of Edom (vv. 2, 10, 11). But the general situation of defeat, lament, and petition in Psalm 60 by no means agrees with the picture of the all-victorious king in 2 Samuel 8. The scribe who added v. 2 may have taken into account, however, a possible defeat of Joab's army before the final victory over Edom was won (thus v. 2; see 2 Sam 8:13).

The song itself is divided into three main parts and set apart by meter, style,

and contents, as agreed by practically all exegetes. Most obvious is the peculiarity of the middle section, vv. 8-11, a SERMON in which Yahweh himself seems to speak; the poetic lines are true tricola (Mowinckel, *Tricola,* 16). Furthermore, this passage alone contains the strange accumulation of geographic and political names already alluded to above. Finally, these very verses reoccur together with the preceding (v. 7) and three following (vv. 12-14) lines in Ps 108:7-14 (*RSV* 6-13). Looking at the Yahweh discourse (vv. 8-11) as a comforting, promising speech, we note the complaint character of the framing parts in vv. 3-7 and 12-14. Are we therefore entitled to call Psalm 60 a cult-prophetic liturgy for situations of defeat (thus Mowinckel, *W* II, 59, 76; Gunkel, *Psalmen;* H. Schmidt, *Psalmen;* Weiser, *Psalms;* Johnson; Kraus, *Psalmen;* Jeremias, *Kultprophetie;* van der Ploeg; Sabourin; et al.)?

What is the "prophetic-priestly" oracle of vv. 8-11 all about? The citation formula "God speaks/spoke" (v. 8a) certainly is neither prophetic nor priestly in origin. The expression is simply narration style through all literary sources of the Pentateuch (Gen 12:4; 17:23; 18:19; 21:1-2; 24:7, 51; 35:13-14; Deut 1:6, 11, 21; etc., and with human agents, Gen 23:16; 24:30; 42:30; 44:2; 45:27; etc.). But the list of passages also proves that the narrative usage becomes technical language in Dtr and P traditions, indicating Yahweh's communication to the people. This latter use is reflected in the Psalms as the expression "God speaks" (*'ĕlōhîm dibber)* apparently turns into a homiletical device (→ Pss 50:1; 62:12 [*RSV* 11]). Although the formula occurs only four times in the Psalter (Pss 50:1; 60:8 = 108:8 [*RSV* 7]; 62:12 [*RSV* 11]; cf. the imperfect variation in Pss 2:5; 85:9 [*RSV* 8]; 99:7 and the use of *'āmar,* "say," in Pss 2:7; 12:6 [*RSV* 5]; 33:9; 50:16; 68:23 [*RSV* 22]; 106:34), it stands out as a characteristic figure of speech to introduce important messages to the community. The formula thus seems to be an assertion of divine communication, a reference to well-known fact, almost like later reference to Scripture. It is not a prophetic messenger or legitimation formula (see FOTL XVI).

Lists of geographic and political entities as in vv. 8-11 do, of course, occur in prophetic literature. But even there they did not originate, as a brief reflection may prove. Shechem and Succoth (v. 8) are two places in the middle regions of Israel, west and east of the Jordan River. Genesis 33:17-18 combines the two from east to west in the itinerary of Jacob, who returns to take possession of the land. The four tribal areas of v. 9, with Ephraim and Judah accentuated, may mirror a good part of Israel's golden age. Finally, three foreign territories (v. 10) represent the fiercest neighbors, Moab, Edom, and the Philistines (Exod 15:14-15; Ezek 25:8-17; 2 Sam 8:12; similar listings are in 2 Kgs 3:4-9; Isa 14:28–15:9; Jeremiah 47–49; Amos 1:11–2:3; Ps 83:7-8 [*RSV* 6-7]). The point in Psalm 60 is that Yahweh claims lordship over all the regions mentioned. The psalmists use different lists and traditions of old in order to establish Yahweh's authority and thus reassure fellow Jews in their plight. Since the expectation is that Yahweh and Israel will take possession of their central homeland, it may be relatively safe to conclude that the promise of reconquest

comes from the time of dispersion and loss of statehood. It probably was communicated or preached by synagogue officials (→ Psalm 50).

In the sermon in vv. 8-11, where does the divine communication end? Most commentators draw the dividing line between vv. 10 and 11 and see in v. 11 the leader of the defeated people complaining or asking for help. But the first-person discourse still continues in v. 11, and the rhetorical questions could well be part of the sermon. Yahweh himself asks through his speaker for Israel's active participation in the task of reestablishing his kingdom (cf. v. 14; Isa 48:14-16; 49:1-4; 50:10; 59:16; 63:5). Other promises to restore Gilead to Israel can be found in Mic 7:14; Zech 10:10; Jer 50:19.

If we accept this division of the psalm, the complaining parts of vv. 3-7 and vv. 12-14 stand out more clearly. One important formal trait is the constant use of communal "we" (vv. 3, 5, 7, 12-14; → Psalm 46). As a rule we may take the first person plural in the Psalms as indicating congregational, and not priestly or state-official, worship. This observation is supported by the self-designation of the worshiping group as "your people" (v. 5), "your faithful ones" (v. 6), and "your beloved ones" (v. 7). These names are characteristic of the early Jewish volunteer community committed to Yahweh alone; note especially the expression *yir'ê yahweh,* "those who fear/revere Yahweh" (Pss 25:12, 14; 33:18; 34:8, 10 [*RSV* 7, 9]; 66:16; 85:10 [*RSV* 9]; 115:11; 128:1, 4; H. F. Fuhs, *TWAT* III, 887-88). Other signs of congregational origin include the affinity of Psalm 60 to Psalms 44, 74, 80, and 83, all communal laments. It should be noted, however, that there are no descriptions of enemy activities or imprecations against the adversaries in Psalm 60.

The individual forms of the complaining and petitionary parts are regular. We have an invocation of God at the beginning and subsequent affirmations about the ill-fated interventions of Yahweh against his own people (vv. 3-5, 12). Formally, such a part is an ACCUSATION of the protector deity (Westermann, "Struktur"), an element to be found also in Pss 44:10-15 (*RSV* 9-14); 88:7-9 (*RSV* 6-8); 89:39-46 (*RSV* 38-45); Job 10:2-22; 19:6-13; etc. PETITION, on the other hand (vv. 6-7, after emending the first word of v. 6 into an imperative; v. 13), seems to be subordinated to complaint and to have more symbolic than concrete significance. Instead of condemning the enemies as would be natural in communal complaint (see Pss 44:6 [*RSV* 5]; 74:18-23; 83:10-19 [*RSV* 9-18]), the entreaty is for general protection and help. "To erect a sign" (v. 6) is not indicative of a concrete refugee situation (against Gunkel, Kraus, et al.) but seems to be a metaphoric expression. Together with the pleas in vv. 7b and 13a, it is a diffuse cry for divine help that implies almost automatically a renunciation of human help (v. 13b). The AFFIRMATION OF CONFIDENCE at the end of the prayer (v. 14) may bespeak a certain aloofness from immediate danger (cf. the urgent and desperate utterances of Lamentations 1–2; Psalms 44; 74. "To perform mighty deeds" (v. 14a) otherwise is the prerogative of Yahweh (see Ps 118:15-16). My interpretation of v. 11 is reinforced by the fact that the con-

gregation is bold enough to look forward to a cooperation in the saving acts of God.

Genre

COMMUNAL COMPLAINT WITH HOMILETIC RESPONSE perhaps should be the full generic title of Psalm 60 (→ Psalm 89). The community involved is the Jewish congregation of postexilic times. The homiletic discourse is clearly based on older traditions and attempts to actualize them for the situation of weakness, domination, and exploitation. A conscious reinterpretation of Israelite history, including claims to the central lands, seems to lie behind the comforting words of the sermon (see "Introduction to Cultic Poetry," section 4B; "Introduction to Psalms," section 2).

Setting

There can be no doubt about the liturgical moorings of Psalm 60. Worship of a synagogal community is its most likely setting. Interestingly, there are no concrete complaints, nor are there any actual or direct statements against the enemies. The misery complained about is therefore probably a general one, and the hope that is communicated by the officiant is a long-range expectation of God's helpful cooperation.

Intention

The community of those who fear Yahweh and are his beloved ones (see Jer 11:15; the term "beloved one" originally had been an individual title of honor; see 2 Sam 12:25; Deut 33:12; Ps 127:2) feels free to articulate its distress and anxiety and does receive the message of help and hope from God. This community of the defeated is to regain strength and even cooperate in the liberating intervention of Yahweh (v. 14).

Bibliography

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