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 אֱלֹהִים 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).

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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 כי 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), שמן 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 מים 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 מים 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.12

One of the most celebrated cruces interpretum in the OT is found in v. 7a. How are the words פסאך אלהים 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 אלהים 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 יהוה was read as אלהים which was then subject to an Elohistic alteration to אלהים. The text should therefore be rendered 'Your throne will be eternal' (cf. 2 Sa. 7:13,16; Ps. 21:4; 72:5; 89:4, 29, 36f.).13 Cf. Moffatt's translation: 'Your throne shall stand for evermore.'

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

(ii) S. R. Driver expressed (at least in 1892) a hesitant preference for P. de Lagarde's conjecture of סעַד for עוֹד (cf. Pr. 20:28): 'Your throne Elohim has established for ever'.

(iii) T. K. Cheyne proposes נָשֹאך יהוה: ‘Yahwè lifts thee up for ever and ever’.

(iv) אלְדָהֵם 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 חוכִין: 'Thy throne hath some god [set firm] to endure for all time!'

(vi) Reading אלְדָהֵם וּלְכָל עַד (i.e. with enclitic mēm) and vocalising כסאך as a denominative piel (כִּסֶּאֲך) 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-advised 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',\(^\text{18}\) or 'the throne that God has given you' (GNB), or 'your God-like (or, godly) throne'.\(^\text{19}\) Proponents of this view\(^\text{20}\) frequently cite such parallels as the phrases ברְיָיתִי ויעָקָב, literally 'my covenant, Jacob', in Leviticus 26:42, and מַחְסֵי וַעֶז, 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)\(^\text{21}\) 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 ברְיָיתִי וַעֲקָב.\(^\text{22}\) 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,\(^\text{23}\) the two nouns involved are usually related by apposition, so that מַחְסֵי וַעֶז means 'my refuge, which is strength (or strong)',

Sometimes the second noun may be classed as an accusative of definition: מַדְבַּד (L.\,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 מַדְבַּד having been omitted by haplography or for the sake of euphony after the final מַדְבַּד of מַדְבַּד.
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 כסה אלהים stands for the more regular כסא אלהיך, 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 אלהים 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 אלהים is predicative, it seems unfitting to assert that any human throne, however כסא 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 אלהים.

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

In this case הסאכ has been supplied from כסאך אלוהים before כסאך. The construction may be explained as follows.\(^{26}\) In the expression כסאך 'a wall of wood', עץ is used absolutely as part of the subject. But the absolute עץ could also be used predicatively, without any copula, as in the phrase כסאך עץ קריתך (Ezk. 41:22), lit. 'its walls, wood', i.e. 'its walls [were] wood(en)'. This represents, in expanded form, 'its walls [were] walls of wood', with קריתך supplied from קירות before עץ. Similarly כסאך אלוהים, 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 כסאlassen [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.\textsuperscript{31} 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\
\begin{quote}
כסאך כסא אלוהים
\end{quote}
in v. 7a\textsuperscript{32} (to parallel v. 7b) or\
\begin{quote}
שבט מישר מלכותך
\end{quote}
in v. 7b\textsuperscript{33} (to parallel v. 7a, \textit{ex hypothesi}). In any case, as T. K. Cheyne remarks,\textsuperscript{34} 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).\textsuperscript{35}

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

\begin{itemize}
\item This point is made by E. B. Pusey, \textit{Daniel the Prophet} (Oxford: Parker, 1869) 476 n.
\item Perhaps Ex. 32:16 affords the closest parallel to this: המכתב מכתב אלוהים הוא.
\item Or if \textit{שבט מלכותך} is the subject of v. 7b, \textit{שבט מלכותך מישר} might have been expected.
\item T. K. Cheyne, \textit{Psalter} 182.
\item A. R. Johnson, \textit{Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel} (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1955) 27 n.1; D. Winton Thomas, \textit{The Text of the Revised Psalter} (London: SPCK, 1963) 16; J. A. Emerton, 'The Syntactical Problem of Psalm XLV.7' in \textit{JSS} 13 (1968) 58-63 (whose aim is to defend Driver's rendering as a 'possibility').
\end{itemize}
distinct Hebrew idioms. After the preposition כ ("like") there may occur an ellipsis of a word or words necessary to the sense. Thus חציו כבואר (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 כהמט פ (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'.36

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 (ירכויי יונים 'his eyes are like doves'), he takes to mean "thy eyes are like doves' eyes" for softness and innocence'.37 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')38 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)'.39 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). הָגוֹן (v. 11a) may indicate height and וַיְנַפֵּשׁ (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 ושלך ('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 ב; the omission of כ in comparisons) may be separately attested, the purported conflation of the two idioms in Psalm 45:7 lacks any unambiguous parallel in the OT 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, 1. אלהים 4 or 5 times, and יהוה 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,\textsuperscript{46} 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\textsuperscript{47} or vv. 7-8.\textsuperscript{48}

But not all those who regard אלהים as an address to some contemporary king agree that this vocative should be rendered 'O God.'\textsuperscript{49} Alternative translations include:

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\item 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, \textit{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.
\item 'Thy throne of glory, O Lord, endures for ever and ever'. The targumist understands מלת 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, \textit{The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation} (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1974) 109-113.
\item Thus J. B. Payne, \textit{The Theology of the Older Testament} (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1962) 262.
\item 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).
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'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 אֵלֶּהַם when the term is applied to beings other than the sovereign God. We shall return to this point below.

51. Macintosh, 'Psalms 45:6' 182f., who, citing G. R. Driver's view that the Aramaic דְֵּלֶּהַמָּ 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 אֵלֶּהַ, 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 אֱלֹהִים as a vocative would 'without doubt' have the article.56

Now it is true that since a person addressed is always definite the vocative is generally articular, but, as P. Joan rightly points out, especially in poetry and elevated prose it is quite often omitted.57 In reference to the one true God, אֱלֹהִים is a proper name and therefore is determinate in itself and does not take the article (GK §125a,f).58 In reference to supernatural or non-earthly beings or to persons standing in loco dei, אֱלֹהִים becomes titular and is always anarthrous.59 So, as a vocative referring to the king, אֱלֹהִים in v. 7 cannot be said to require the article. One might also note that the other two titular vocatives in the psalm (viz. גּוֹבָר, v. 4; חָתִם, v. 11) are anarthrous.

Another grammatical objection is this: if עולם ועד were a 'direct predicate' (1 [is] for ever and ever'), לְעולָם as in v. 3 (cf. v. 18) rather than the simple עולם would have been expected.60

It is a fact that the phrase עולם 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 out61 that: (i) this phrase is

56. Podechard, 'Notes' 33.
58. The only case where אֱלֹהִים 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 לְעולָם is a 'direct predicate' ('Yahweh's steadfast love endures for ever'); in Ps. 10:16 נָוִל לְעולָם 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 adverbially 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 זָכַּא is
equivalent to מִלְיֹלָם (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).62 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
זָכַּא וּדָע by '(is) for ever and ever' is quite admissible
from a grammatical point of view.63 It is of interest
that the LXX renders עִלָם in v. 7, as it does מִלְיֹלָם in
vv. 3 and 18, by εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. But it is also possible
that the phrase זָכַּא וּדָע forms an emphatic predicate
nominative,64 '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
זָכַּא וּדָע were predicative, the word-order would
probably have been מִלְיֹלָם זָכַּא אלָדָר הַכֹּסֶר. 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.
Hoijtizer ('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 מִלְיֹלָם (as well as its synonym מִלְיֹלָם) 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).\textsuperscript{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 בשמלת (v. 7a) and בת־מלך (v. 14a) may mark the beginning of the second half of their unit.\textsuperscript{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 (לעון(ו) תָּם), just as v. 8b has על־כן 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 (זודרה שמך) and 'the peoples will praise you' (יהудך).

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.\textsuperscript{67}

That there is verbal parallelism between these three lines is incontestable.\textsuperscript{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 (אלהים אלהים) 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

\textsuperscript{65}. Psalm 45 13, 23, 25, 43f., 46.
\textsuperscript{66}. 'Psalm 45:7-8' 225.
\textsuperscript{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).
\textsuperscript{68}. This may be shown as follows:

\begin{tabular}{llll}
על־כן & יושבך & בכרך & אלהים (v. 3b) \\
על־כן & אלהים & תובל בּה & חמס (v. 7a) \\
על־כן & מושך & נצטו & אלהים (v. 8b)
\end{tabular}
clarify the relation between the king as אֱלֹהִים and Yahweh as אֱלֹהִים: the king himself, however elevated his person or office, must never forget that Yahweh is his אֱלֹהִים.’

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 אֱלֹהִים?69

It should be observed, to begin with, that to address the king as אֱלֹהִים was not to deify him. As surely as Israelites believed that the king was distinct from other men, they believed he was distinct from אֱלֹהִים.70 In whatever sense the king was ‘divine’, it was not an actual or intrinsic divinity that he possessed.71

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 אֱלֹהִים is taken as vocative, a problem remains in the use of אֱלֹהִים, 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. 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 אֱלֹהִים 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), 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). 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); Elohim 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 Elohim 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 Elohim after Elohim in v. 8 may reflect the poet's awareness of an extraordinary use of Elohim in v. 7. He forestalls misunderstanding by indicating that the king is not Elohim 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 Elohim 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 אלהים in v. 8 is a vocative and that אלהיך is the subject: 'Therefore, O God, your God has anointed you ...'. Rarely, if ever, is the vocative אלהים found between the verb and the subject; such a view would comport with a different word-order, viz. על־כן אלהים אלהיך (metrical considerations apart).

Another consideration that may partially explain this unique form of address is the relative fluidity of the term אלהים in the Hebrew Bible, where on occasion it is used of the heavenly beings around Yahweh's throne (Ps. 8:6 [LXX, ἄγγελος]; 97:7; 138:1), judges (Ps. 82:1,6; cf. Ps. 58:2, אלהים, and also Jn. 10:34-36),

78. See de Fraine, Royauté 268-270.
79. This interpretation is espoused by Ridderbos, 'Psalms' 74; Jacquet, Psauemes, II, 38 (ô Divin'), 47 ('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 prière 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 אלהים אלהיך is a case of dittography.
80. For example, although 49 of the 164 uses of אלהים in Book II of the Psalter (Pss. 42-72) are in the vocative case (Ps. 45:7-8 apart), there is no instance where אלהים stands after the verb and before the subject. (The nearest parallel is Ps. 69:30: subject-verb- אלהים -verb). On the contrary, there are five cases where אלהים stands outside the subject-verb combination: once where the word-order is subject-verb- אלהים (72:1) and four times where the order is verb-subject- אלהים (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, ' אלהים 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 (viz. אלהים, אֵלֶּהָוָא, v. 4; אֵלֶּהוָא, v. 7) and applies the title to the ideal king of the future (אֵלֶּהוָא, '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 אלהים 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 אלהים.

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 [ אלהים], sons of the Most High') that we find the spiritual milieu that most closely corresponds to the use of אלהים 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]) 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 אלהים 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 לעולם (v. 3), ולעולם הָעָד (v. 7) and ולעולם הָעָד (v. 18) are reflected by εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (v. 3), καὶ εἰς αἰῶνα 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 . . . ἔλαιον) with ἔχρισεν in v. 8 reflects a Hebrew idiom with משח (see GK §117 dd,ee), although the normal LXX construction after χρίω would have led us to expect σε . . . ἐν ἐλαίῳ (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 ἠκονημένα δυνατέ ('your weapons are sharpened, o mighty warrior'), where δυνατέ has no corresponding גָּבֹר in the MT, as it does in

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 αἰῶν, see H. Sasse, ‘αἰῶν’ TDNT 1, 200.

87. But Briggs (Psalms, I, 383, 386, 391) reads בָּרוּ מ 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. La5 and Augustine read sagittae tuae acutae potentissimae but La4 has (correctly) potentissime. See A. Rahlfs, Septuaginta Societatis Scientiarum Gottingensis. X. Psalmi cum Odis (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931) 38; M. Caloz, Étude sur la LXX Origenienne du Psautier (Gottingen: 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 [Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907] 34). In Ps. 45:7 Symmachus and Theodotion have ὁ θεός, and Aquila θεε (F. Field, Origenes 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.
Translations range from the woodenly literal, to the fantastically paraphrased. Somewhere between those extremes is the optimal level of literal accuracy. An example of a woodenly literal translation that has come onto the Orthodox scene in recent years is the edition of the Orthodox New Testament published by the Holy Apostles Convent in Buena Vista, Colorado. The translators of the RSV were without question on the more liberal side of the Protestant spectrum and even included among their number a non-Christian Jewish scholar. The best known example of how the theological perspective of these translators influenced the text is in how they translated Isaiah 7:14. Psalm 45 is the 45th Psalm of the Book of Psalms. In the Greek Septuagint version of the Bible, and in its Latin translation in the Vulgate, this Psalm is Psalm 44 in a slightly different numbering system. In Latin, it is known as "Eructavit cor meum". It was composed by the sons of Korach on (or "according to") the shoshanim either a musical instrument or the tune to which the Psalm should be sung. The Psalm has been interpreted as an epithalamium, or wedding song, written to a king on the day of his HARRIS: Elohim in Psalm 45 67 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. 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.