A social-scientific reading of Psalm 129[1]

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Abstract

Psalm 129 is analysed as a poetic composition, as well as an ideological document. It was found that the social codes of honour and shame play an important role in what and how the psalm was supposed to communicate. It is described as an attempt to strengthen the cohesion and loyalty of an in-group of people living near or in Jerusalem. This group considers itself to be part of the people of Israel. Its members expect Yahweh to intervene on their behalf and to restore their (and his own) honour by shaming their enemies.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Psalm 129 is especially noted for its eloquent images: the metaphor of blows (or some other form of abuse) as furrows ploughed on the backs of the supplicants; the metaphor of liberation from captivity or subordination as cords being cut off; and the comparison of the downfall of enemies with grass that quickly withers on the roof-tops. The psalm does not seem to pose any real difficulties of interpretation, but there are some vague areas and unresolved questions. The purpose of this article is to explore the possible contribution that a social-critical approach can make to solving the remaining questions and to opening up new avenues of understanding the psalm. An investigative approach will be followed, using the method of social-scientific analysis to probe the social dimensions of the text. The results of such an approach will be compared with the results of other approaches that have been used on this psalm. In order to determine the parameters of

the social-scientific investigation, however, the text will first be subjected to an intratextual stichometric analysis.

2. STICHOMETRIC ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE POEM

			Hebrew		English
			twl¡[Mh'ryvi 1		A song of ascents.
I	A	1 3	yrW[NòhiynWrrx]tB'r'		"Too much have they opposed me from my youth",
		2	.larcylanArm'ayœ		let Israel say (this):
		2 3	yrW[NòhiynWrrx]tB'r' 2		"Too much have they opposed me from my youth,
		3	.yliWlkyAal¡µG"		yet they have not subdued me.
	B	3 3	µyvhrjoWvrj;yBGAl['3		Upon my back the ploughers ploughed;
		2	.µtwnl['n'l]Wkyriaĥ,		they made their furrows long."
		4 2	qyDx'hwhy0 4		Yahweh is just;[2]
		3	.µy[vr]twb[}Åxœqi		he cut off the cords of the wicked.
II	C	5 3	rwôla;WgSøòWvbyE 5		May they be ashamed and turned backward,
		3	.÷wxiyaenc¡lKo		all who hate Zion.
		6 3	twGG"ryxijK'Wyhyl 6		Let them be like the grass on the roofs,
		3	.vby; ¹lv;tm'dQÒv,		which withers before[3] it can grow up,
		7 4	rxwöq wPk'aLmialNv, 7		with which the reaper does not fill his hand
		2	.rMe[m]wôxjiw]		or the sheaf-binder the fold of his garment,
		8 3	µyrb][ôh;Wrma;alyw0 8		and (let) those who pass by not say,
		2	µkyle}a}hwhytK'rBi		"May the blessing of Yahweh be toward you!"
		4	.hwhy0µvB]µkta,Wnkrbe		"We bless you in the name of Yahweh."

There are a few textual problems. In verse 3 the Septuagint reads "On my back the *evildoers* ploughed", probably misjudging µyvrj for µyavrh.[4] In the same verse, the *Kethib* version of µtwn[ml (plural of hn[m, "ploughing furrow") should be read rather than

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[2] The suggestion to read this as "Yahweh, the just ..." ("just" in apposition: cf Baethgen 1904:387; Kraus 1966:867; Gunkel 1968:560; Viviers 1990:118) is not convincing, since the presence of the *Atnach* supposes that these two words form a syntactic unit such as a nominal sentence. For contrast with the actions of the enemy, the subject (Yahweh) is placed before the predicate. With good reason, Allen (1983:187) translates "Yahweh is loyal". As he notes, qydx here signifies conformity to the covenant.

[3] BHS's conjecture of "which the east wind withers" (following Gunkel, cf Kraus 1966:865; Weiser 1975:770) is unnecessary and unwarranted whether it restores the metre or not. See the note by Allen (1983:187, n 6a).

[4] Allen (1983:187) regards the word for "the wicked" as an explanatory gloss for "plowmen" that subsequently supplanted the original word. It is interesting to note that 11QPs has the same variant reading.

the obscure *Qere* alternative[5]. The LXX translator must have had an unclear *Vorlage*[6], since the Greek text reads "they prolonged their iniquity" (ונמ[in stead of וטונ[מ) In verse 6, the similarity between ג and נ gave the impetus for many manuscripts to adopt the less poetic and simpler reading of "the grass of gardens" in stead of the *lectio difficilior* "the grass of roofs". In verse 8, as could almost be expected[7], many manuscripts changed "may the blessing of Yahweh be *towards* you" (לא) to "may the blessing of Yahweh be *on* (לע) you". The other remarks and conjectural proposals in the apparatus of BHS can safely be disregarded.

As the poem has been segmented here, there seems to be two stanzas (I, II) embracing three strophes (A-C). Each of the eight verse lines comprises two or (in the case of verse line 8) three stichs with 2, 3, or 4 stresses. Only in the case of verse lines 7 and 8 (respectively also verses 7 and 8) does the number of stresses per stich exceed 3. In both these instances, that is, in verse 7a and verse 8c, a segmentation of two stichs each containing two stresses is also possible. But, in the case of verse 7, the Masoretes seem to have been in favour of a 4+2 segmentation (there is a *Rebia* at the fourth toned syllable). In verse 8c they seem to have also shown a predilection for a 2+2 segmentation (by placing a *Rebia* above וכרב). This would mean that verse 8c comprises a verse line of its own. It is, however, rather more common to have a longer (in this case, tristichic with nine stresses) verse line concluding a stanza or poem than a distichic line consisting of only four stresses in total. Besides, the second and third stichs of this last line constitute a chiastic parallel. The effect of this parallelism will be greatly reduced if a different segmentation is accepted.

The psalm is a poem of great beauty[8]. The beautiful metaphors and the simile have already been mentioned. There are a number of techniques used by the poet to give

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[5] Dahood (1970:231) may be right when he dissolves this consonantal cluster into ונמל וטונ[, "upon it their furrows".

[6] Although not necessarily a different one. Allen (1983:187) thinks that the word מ[נות was merely unknown to the translators of the LXX and the Peshitta.

[7] As Viviers (1990:116) remarks, the alternative is grammatically more correct. But for exactly that reason the Masoretic reading should be regarded as more original.

[8] Kittel (1922:400) calls it a "schönes Liedchen".

a dramatic effect. Among these, the most prominent is probably the use of direct speech in verses 1, 2 and 8, forming an *inclusio*. Another is the use of the first person singular narrative style in verses 1 to 3. The use of jussive forms[9] to pray for the failure of the enemies of Jerusalem in verses 5 to 8 is yet another peculiarity. In verse lines 6 to 8, the repetition of the relative particle שׁ, and of the negative particle לא greatly enhances the idea of the progressive and complete ruin of the enemies. Parallelism and, associated with this, repetition, are used to great effect. The repetition of the introductory words of the narrator by the community creates a seven-fold parallel between verse lines 1 and 2. This heightens the defiant contrast of verse 2b: "... yet they have not subdued me"[10]. There is associative sound-play between נעוּרי and צררוּני. The complaint over the scourging of the narrator's back creates a similar parallel: In verse line 3 the morphological order of verb plus verbal noun/noun creates a parallel, while the subject (third person masculine plural) is also the same in both hemistichs. Some researchers detect the presence of onomatopoeia in the repetition of *ch-* and *r-*sounds, suggesting the "Schurfgeräusch und Geklapper" of the plough (Seybold 1978:48).

In the second stanza there is a beautiful parallel in verse line 7 (with three elements being involved) and another (with four repeated elements) in verse line 8. In addition, verse lines 7 and 8 also constitute a parallel (with repetition of "not", a verb in the perfect form, and a verbal noun as subject). There is beautiful sound play between כדקים and קציר and word play between מעבר and עבר, and alliteration in the repetition of *shin* in verse 6b and in the words used at the beginning of verses 6b, 7a, and 8a, forming a parallel: שׁ, אשׁר, and ולא (already mentioned above). In verse line 8, the words "*Yahweh* toward *you*" and "*you* in the name of *Yahweh*" also establish chiasmus (Viviers 1990:120). Finally, there is an instance of irony between the image of the enemies "ploughing" the people of Israel and they themselves then becoming like a failed harvest (Viviers 1990:125).

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[9] Some commentators understand these to be imperfects rather than jussives. See for instance Kraus (1966:865), Allen (1983:187). Allen (1983:188) argues his case on the grounds of the similarity with Psalm 6:10 and Psalm 97:7, where similar statements (according to him) of trust in the comprehensive shaming of enemies/idol worshippers are found. It is not clear why something that serves as a statement of trust in one context cannot be used as a prayer in another context.

[10] Emphasised by the use and prominent placement of גם. See Viviers (1990:117).

The contents of the different sections can perhaps be summarised as follows: A speaker complains about the enmity and hatred that he has experienced since his youth. Immediately afterwards it becomes clear that the speaker actually is Israel and that her youth refers to the history of the nation[11]. Defiantly she declares that she has not been subdued by the persecution of other peoples. A second remark about suffering is added, namely that Israel's back was scourged by ploughers. This could be understood as a reference to enemies literally scourging the back or hill country of Israel, but it is more possible that this is another metaphor[12]. The reason for the perseverance is then revealed: "Yahweh is just. He cut off the cords of the wicked". It is possible to regard the first three verses as a unit, forming strophe A[13], but it is also possible to regard verse lines 1 and 2 as strophe A and verse lines 3 and 4 as strophe B. There is then a parallel between strophes A and B, since each begins with a (different) metaphorical description of the suffering of Israel and ends on a triumphant note ("they have not subdued me"; "Yahweh ... cut off the cords")[14]. From the last verse line of the first stanza, it seems that some degree of change has been achieved, that Israel was delivered from bondage and servitude.

The second stanza is a prayer that Jerusalem will be blessed, but it prays for this by requesting that Yahweh shame and turn the enemies backward[15], that he cause their life-span to be short and fruitless like grass thriving momentarily on a roof at the end of the wet winter, but then wither when the warm, dry season sets in. This stanza ends with

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[11] The "youth" of Israel probably refers in the first place to the time of the Exodus from Egypt and the journey through the Wilderness (cf Hos 11:1; Jer 2:2; Ez 23:3). See also Van der Ploeg (1974:378), Weiser (1975:771), Anderson (1981:872).

[12] Cf Mi 3:12 where it is used as a (real?) description of the destruction of Jerusalem and Is 51:23 where it is used in a comparison describing the humiliation of Judah. Anderson (1981:872) thinks of the welts or weals left by a whip on someone's back that would resemble furrows. According to Baethgen (1904:386), the concepts of people and land are interchanged in the description of the poet.

[13] Cf for instance, Viviers (1990:116-117). He cites the possibility that the placement of "Yahweh" at the beginning of verse 4 and at the end of verse 8 was meant as an *inclusio*.

[14] Allen (1983:187; see also Noordtzij 1935:215) may be right when he says that it is quite feasible that the first metaphor is continued, and that it is the ropes that were used to plough on the backs of the Israelites that were cut off.

[15] Van der Ploeg (1974:378) aptly describes it as "een wens ... die tevens een verwensing is". According to him, the purpose is that Yahweh will silence the enemies of Israel in order to give them permanent rest.

a wish for the non-blessing of those enemies of Zion, creating the biggest interpretational problem of the psalm. The questions that confront the interpreter are: Who are these enemies? Are they Israelites or non-Israelites? If they were not Israelites, why would Yahweh-worshippers want to bless them anyway? And another problem: Is the last stich of the psalm meant to be a blessing on the audience, or is it part of the blessing which the enemies will have to go without[16]?

It is of course possible that the answer to these last questions are all in the affirmative: It is the direct speech which the enemies will not hear, but at the same time it is a blessing which draws the poem to a positive conclusion. The "not" beginning verse line 8 is a harsh word to combine with a blessing formula, turning it into a curse. For this reason, that is, in order for the psalm to end on a positive note, the final line must probably be understood as the words of the narrator and not that of passers-by[17]. It can therefore also be dissected from the rest of verse line 8 and designated as a monocolon forming verse line 9[18]. With regard to the other interpretational problem, the enemy must probably be understood to be non-Israelites. In the first place, verses 1 and 2 have been found to fit into the mouth of Israel as a nation and as referring to Israel's early history. The enemies in that case can only be people from a different religious or political dispensation[19]. In the second place, the enemies are described as "wicked" people in verse line 5 and as "haters of Zion". Especially this last description seems to confirm the notion that national enemies of Israel are meant[20]. The final verse must then be

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[16] According to Deissler (1965:163), it is not possible to answer this question decisively. He regards it to be "einer vollen Zitation der Erntesegensrufe" (Deissler 1965:163). Delitzsch (1871:301) considers it to be the counter salutation normally given to the passers-by by the reapers. It pictures a happy scene enjoyed by the righteous but denied to the enemy. Van der Ploeg (1974:380) is of the same opinion. Numerous researchers have seen this phrase as a later addition (cf Baethgen 1904:387).

[17] Van der Lugt (1980:415) has noted the *inclusio* formed by the repetition of "not" and "say" at the beginning and end of the poem. The repetition of the formula of blessing also corresponds to the repetition of the statement about enmity at the beginning of the poem (Viviers 1990:121). It is therefore also not necessary to regard this final line as a cultic benediction (cf Allen 1983:187 n.8b).

[18] Kraus (1966:865) regards it thus as "ein alleinstehender Dreier".

[19] So also Rogerson (1977:130).

[20] "Love" and "hate" are words from the context of a covenant (cf 2 Chron 19:2; Hos 9:15; Mal 1:2-3, etc). Furthermore, Van der Ploeg (1974:379) emphasises the close association between Yahweh and Zion. Those who hate Zion also hate Yahweh, he says. People who "hate" Zion can therefore not (*contra* Weiser 1975:771 and Anderson 1981:873) be members of the same covenant.

understood as a wish or a prayer that such enemies will never receive the blessing of Yahweh-worshippers.

3.   SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVES ON PSALM 129

Subsequently, the social and cultural dimensions of Psalm 129 will be explored in order to determine what new perspectives a social-scientific investigation can bring to this text. This investigation is done with certain presuppositions.   The first is that the text has a certain ideology, in other words, that it is a meaningful instrument of communication. Second, any text presupposes and contains encoded information regarding the social and cultural systems in which it originated and originally made sense (Elliott 1993:50).   The task of a social-scientific investigation, therefore, is to expose the social and cultural dimensions and scripts of a text and to correlate these matters with its literary features in order to determine how and what it was intended to communicate (cf Elliott 1993:70).

The investigation should begin by asking who is the author or sender of this communication and who were the readers or hearers.   Neither author nor audience are mentioned explicitly.   But there are some hints.   Both the author and the audience belong to a group designated as "Israel" (verse line 1).   There is a strong cohesion within this group, since members of the group can refer to themselves as "me" and to their history as "my youth" (verse lines 1 and 2)[21].   This group also uses the first person plural "we" (verse line 8), another indication of a strong cohesion.   They are defined in this psalm first and foremost by their mutual feeling of enmity towards another group of people, the out-group.

The out-group[22] or enemy is referred to most often in verbal endings as "they". Five times in the first three verses we hear what "they" have done or failed to do: they

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[21]   Allen (1983:188) notes that in the Psalms the words מִנְּעוּרַי and צֹרְרָי most often refer to an individual's youth and enemies.   He therefore argues that the first four verses contain individualistic language that "has been put into the mouth of the community at large" (Allen 1983:189).   Immediately afterwards, he identifies the (original) individual speaker as Zion.   These statements reveal a lack of regard for Israel as a corporate personality.   Cf for instance, the use of second person singular forms in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

[22]   An out-group is "Any set of persons that is perceived by members of an in-group as holding different or competing interests and values from those of the in-group and that is designated by in-group members as "they", often with negative valuation" (Elliott 1993:132.)

have shown hostility (twice); they have "ploughed"; they have made their furrows long; but they have not subdued the in-group. They are also once described metaphorically as "ploughers". This is a word with a strong negative connotation, since it implies punishment or humiliation of Israelites[23]. Two more terms are used for the enemy. They are described as "wicked people" (verse line 4) who held the Israelites (perhaps metaphorically) captive with "cords". And they are also described as "haters of Zion". In this we have the clue that positive feelings, feelings of loyalty and love towards Jerusalem, formed a strong cohesive force among the in-group.

From this analysis it becomes clear that the audience and the author are united in their experience of a common history, that they share the resolve to withstand or to endure the hostility of other groups of people, that they have suffered much as a group but have at least on one occasion also experienced deliverance by Yahweh. The communal history of the group and the deliverance by Yahweh are seen as the divine legitimation of their existence. Verse-line 4 is a claim stating that they had experienced a reversal of social status through the intervention of Yahweh. They are also united in their love and loyalty towards Jerusalem, and in their prayer that the enemies of Zion would die young and childless and would never receive a blessing from Yahweh-worshippers. From the mentioning of Jerusalem, it seems that the members of the in-group live in or close to Jerusalem. They are at least familiar with an urban environment and houses with roofs[24], but they are also used to a labour-intensive agricultural economy of ploughing with animals and harvesting with the hand.

Regarding the social situation of the group of speakers, it is important to note that they seem to have been dominated, at least for a period of time, by the enemy. But they were not "subdued". The word ׀ky is used in contexts where someone is shamed or, with al, where that person succeeds in not being shamed. Being subdued brings shame; but not being able to subdue someone also brings shame (cf Jeremiah 20:7, 11). Besides the hostility, which Israel as a people have experienced, there is also reference to "furrows" that were ploughed on their back and "cords" with which they were bound. This means

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[23] Cf for instance, Dt 33:29.

[24] It seems that "grass on the roofs" is used as an urban parallel to the pastoral "plants of the field" in 2 Ki. 19:26.

that they experienced national shame. For this reason, a date from the time after the exile seems probable (cf Deissler 1965:162)[25]. The metaphorical description of Yahweh cutting "off the cords of the wicked" refers to an action that restores the honour of the group by restoring its proper social status[26]. Verse lines 3 and 4 therefore form an antithesis: the shame of enemies drawing long furrows on the back of Israel is turned into honour when Yahweh cuts off the cords of suppression of those enemies. A person's back was regarded as the proper part to receive blows on or to be stepped on when that person had to be humiliated (cf the servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 50:6 and 51:23 and "fools" in Proverbs 10:13, 19:29 and 26:3). This indicates that they had to accept a measure of being shamed for a certain time at least. From the juxtaposition between verse lines 4 and 5, it seems that the hostility towards the Israelites coincided with the hatred of "wicked" people for Zion. The suffering of the in-group seems to be a result of hatred for their religious or political orientation, since the word "Zion" has these two important connotations[27]. In reaction to this hostility and suffering, there is a resolve not to succumb to social or political pressure and hatred and there is a belief that Yahweh will again help them against those who oppress and try to shame them.

The most important social values invoked in this psalm are therefore that of honour and shame. Shame is implied in verse lines 1[28], 2, 3, and 4 and it is explicitly mentioned in verse line 5 when the author expresses the hope that the enemies of Zion will become ashamed and be turned backward[29]. This means that their intentions will be frustrated and that they will have to acknowledge defeat. This in turn will bring shame,

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[25] But not necessarily as late as the time of the Maccabeans (so Briggs 1969:460). Delitzsch (1871:298) considers tbr to be typical of the post-exilic language.

[26] To be delivered from bondage is often called "redemption" in the Bible. This refers to the freedom of a group and its members not to be under the dominion of any other group and directed to the service of God. Such a restoration of social status is directly linked to the restoration of honour. Cf Malina (1998b:85). This statement in the text probably refers to the return from exile, since a long history of hostility preceded this liberation.

[27] Cf for example, Ps 2:6, 14:7, 69:36, and 128:5. The name "Zion" seems to be an example of ideology merging with theology. This has the implication that the enemies cannot be "members of the covenant of Yahweh" as Weiser (1975:771) thinks.

[28] Cf the parallel use of tbr in Ps 123:4 where scorn, contempt, and arrogance are explicitly mentioned.

[29] Cf the parallels in Psalms 6:10 and 40:14.

since the international community will ridicule their assumption of a position of honour. When verse line 8 says that those who "pass by" will not pronounce a blessing, this must be understood as a description of those enemies being in a position of shame. The verb "pass by" is used a number of times in the Hebrew Bible to describe the reaction of passers-by to a situation of desolation or shame[30]. The situation envisaged by Stanza II is therefore probably one of desolation and shame for the enemies that more or less will reflect the (past) social suffering of the Israelites themselves. It is enlightening to note that 2 Kings 19:26 (= Isaiah 37:27) uses powerlessness and shame (ושבו) parallel to the description of the inhabitants of a city withering as grass on rooftops. The image of grass growing on the rooftops and withering quickly therefore seems also to have the connotation of shame.[31]

It is also possible to detect in this text the presence of a cluster of values often called "authoritarianism". Authoritarianism refers to a system in which authority is sanctioned by force (Malina 1998a:12). "Authority" in this definition refers to the ability to control the behaviour of others as an acceptable social practice. The highest authority in the tradition of Israel is God. Therefore, it is only God who can "cut off the cords of the wicked". Getting them to turn backwards ashamed is something that God must affect. The psalm therefore asks Yahweh to use his power against the enemies of Zion. Authoritarianism is also evident in the statement that the ploughers "made their furrows long". This reflects pride in the ability to endure suffering, a typical feature of authoritarianism (Malina 1998a:15).

Another value that should be mentioned is the dyadic or "other-directed"[32] orientation. This is a means-value that serves to support the core values of honour and shame (Neyrey 1998:55). There is a strong cohesion in the group for which this psalm

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[30]   For example Lam 1:12 and 2:15. 2 Chron 7:21 warns that the passers-by will be amazed about the destruction of the land of Israel. Ezek 36:34 in turn promises the restoration of Israel "before the eyes of all who pass by". The words "pass by" and "shame" are used together in Psalm 89:42 to describe the situation after the destruction of Jerusalem (cf also Ezek 5:14).

[31] An interesting point of view is that blessings like these were meant to increase the success of a harvest. The absence of such a blessing therefore links up with the image of the absence of a harvest in the preceding verse lines (cf Ruth 2:4; Burden 1990:221; Viviers 1990:124). It is interesting to note that the failure of a crop also caused shame (cf Jer 14:4).

[32] Instead of the modern (western) high regard for individualism, societies in the Ancient Near East knew that a person could only exist and be understood as part of a group (Neyrey 1998:54).

was meant and one of its important functions probably was to enhance this cohesion. Unity is established by referring to their common history as "my youth" and to let "Israel" speak in the first person singular (cf the parallel formed by the suffixes "me", "my", "me", "my", "me", "my" in verse lines 1 to 3). This group-consciousness is enhanced by interpreting the deliverance by Yahweh as an act of constituting a community. In this psalm, mention is made of Yahweh cutting off "the cords of the wicked". This act of Yahweh therefore forms part of a history of deliverance. It probably does not refer in the first place to the deliverance from Egypt, but that event is not altogether irrelevant in this context, since every description of it formed part of the charter of Israel as a nation.

4.   CONCLUSION

What is therefore the meaning of this psalm and how does social-scientific criticism help us to establish that meaning? It has become quite clear that there is numerous social codes at work in the text. Only if we understand the importance of shame and honour and the dyadic personality at work can we begin to decode the message. The issue at stake is the national honour of the people of Judah. Their honour is closely linked to the honour of Yahweh. The text can be described as an attempt to re-establish the feeling of solidarity, pride and unity within the in-group of Yahweh-worshippers, centred on Jerusalem as a political and religious symbol of honour[33].

The strategy of this text is therefore to call to mind the history of the people of God as the experience of an individual. That history is portrayed as a struggle for political and religious freedom. The psalm also calls to mind the saving acts of Yahweh in the past, acts that served to constitute the national and religious unity and honour of the people of Yahweh. It then proceeds to pray, by using a series of jussives, for the shaming of the enemies of Zion. Although different images are used to describe the requested downfall of the enemies and to portray the suffering of Israel, both scenarios probably

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[33] This does not differ substantially from Weiser's (1975:770) description of the psalm as a "liturgical formulary of the Israelite covenant community ... to be used in a cultic ceremony that ends in the cursing of those "who hate Zion" and a benediction upon the congregation". But no substantiation was found for the statement that it was used in a cultic rite (Weiser 1975:771).

refer to a situation of national disaster and shame[34]. By asking that their enemies be shamed, the psalm in actual fact constitutes a prayer to Yahweh to intervene in their present situation, a state of affairs that is not happy in all respects. If Yahweh were to intervene, it would increase their honour and also contribute towards consolidating his own cult and honour in Jerusalem as a centre of worship.

Exponents of the *Gattungskritik* have made numerous different suggestions as to what kind of psalm this is[35]. Gunkel (1968:558-559) thought of it as a *Mischgattung*, containing elements of trust, thanksgiving and lament. Kraus (1966:865) states that the *Gattung* "ist nich klar erfaßbar". A number of exegetes seem to agree that elements from a communal song of trust predominate, with motifs from a national lament[36] resonating in the background (cf Deissler 1965:162; Viviers 1990:122). But Van der Ploeg (1974:377) correctly remarks that it is not necessary to pinpoint some or other "*Gattung*" to be able to understand the psalm. In this regard, the present analysis has indeed made a contribution towards a better understanding of the text as a vehicle of communication and social interaction. The psalm is neither a song of trust[37], nor a lament. It is a declaration of political and religious resolve not to bow the head in shame before the enemy, but to defend their national and religious honour. That honour has been granted to them when Yahweh constituted them as a national and religious entity through the Exodus from Egypt. Yahweh reconfirmed that status through delivering them time and again in a history of salvation. Their honour is linked to his honour. Therefore they can take the liberty also to pray for the downfall and shaming of their enemies[38]. When that happens, their honour will be clear for all to see and people will be eager to share in their honour

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[34] This means that the enemies were identified as people from a different political and religious orientation, definitely not "members of the covenant of Yahweh" or "perhaps Israelites from the Northern Kingdom" as Weiser (1975:771) thinks.

[35] The need to appeal to a wide range of different genres to describe its form has led Allen (1983:188) to state that the psalm is "fraught with difficulty for the form critic".

[36] Dahood (1970:230) describes it as a "national lament consisting of two stanzas".

[37] Those who think along these lines, have to read the jussives in the second stanza as prophetic imperfects. Cf for instance Kraus (1966:865).

[38] It is therefore also not correct to describe the second stanza as a kind of lament or a "Rachepsalm" as Kittel (1922:400) proposed.

before Yahweh. As such, the psalm was meant to be used in public ("let Israel say ..."), but it is doubtful that it was meant to be the text of a "sacred cultic act" (Weiser 1975:772)[39].

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[39] German original: "liturgisches Formular … für eine Kultfeier" (Weiser 1987:532).

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