

Suffering Bodies – Divine Absence: Towards a Spatial Reading of Ancient Near Eastern Laments with Reference to Psalm 13 and An Assyrian Elegy (K 890)

GERT T. M. PRINSLOO (UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA)

ABSTRACT

Suffering is a universal human experience. It causes an existential crisis and a struggle to construct meaning. When suffering is expressed through the medium of language, it is often done in terms of bodily experience in negative lived space. It is aptly illustrated in individual laments. Functional-anthropological and canonical approaches to laments open avenues to investigate individual laments as literary-poetic creations telling a "story" of intense suffering, as paradigmatic songs expressing the negative spatial experience caused by suffering. Drawing upon insights from "space" and "body" theories the thesis in this study is that the individual spatial experience of a sufferer provides a key to a holistic interpretation of individual laments. Suffering is expressed as the spatial experience of separation from the divine and his/her benevolent presence as well as social isolation, thus suffering is ultimately an experience akin to death. The resulting discordance can only be rectified by divine intervention. It is illustrated by means of a spatial reading of two texts, the "Assyrian Elegy" (K 890) and Ps 13.

"...we all experience sadness, we all come at times to despair, and we all lose hope that the suffering in our lives and in the world will ever end. I want to share with you my faith... that this suffering can be transformed and redeemed..." (Desmond Tutu).¹

A INTRODUCTION

Suffering has been labelled "the universal experience of the human race."² Any human being "at some stage in his or her life, inevitably, becomes the victim of illness, loss, failure, and disappointment."³ The influence of suffering upon human beings is far-reaching. It causes "disjunction and discordance, and in the

¹ Desmond Tutu, *God has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (London: Ebury, 2011), 1.

² John T. Willis, "The Dignity and Suffering of Humankind According to the Hebrew Bible," *SCJ* 1 (1998): 231–41.

³ Gert T. M. Prinsloo, "Suffering as Separation: Towards a Spatial Reading of Psalm 11," in *Psalms and Suffering* (ed. Dirk J. Human; LHBOTS; London/New York: Bloomsbury), forthcoming.

existential crisis which follows severe suffering, human beings—both individually and in community—struggle to construct meaning.”⁴ Suffering is an intimate, personal, intense experience, experienced *by*, and quite often, *in* the suffering body.⁵ When suffering is expressed through the medium of language,⁶ it is often done in terms of bodily experience⁷ because “there is an intimate relationship between the body and its space, between the body’s deployment in space and its occupation of space.”⁸ The body is actively involved in the production of space, in acts of *spacing* (i.e. creating and shaping space) and in processes of *synthesis* (i.e. conceiving an arrangement of objects and humans as space).⁹ Every human being is part of this relational arrangement that we call *space* and the constant process of *shaping* space and *being shaped by* space.¹⁰

B INDIVIDUAL LAMENTS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The close relationship between body and *negative lived space* is aptly illustrated in the ancient Near-Eastern literary genre classified as the lament of an individual.¹¹ This study will not engage in a debate on the form-critical

⁴ Elizabeth Boase, “Constructing Meaning in the Face of Suffering: Theodicy in Lamentations,” *VT* 58 (2008): 449.

⁵ The human body is *subject* and *object* of suffering because suffering can come from *outside* (conduct of others) or *inside* (illness), cf. Marcella Althaus-Reid, “Doing a Theology from Disappeared Bodies: Theology, Sexuality, and the Excluded Bodies of the Discourses of Latin American Liberation Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology* (ed. Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Sheila Briggs; OHRF; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 441–55.

⁶ According to Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (6th printing; Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4–5, humans and animals share a sense of place and space, but people “respond to space and place in complicated ways that are inconceivable in the animal world” because we can *express* spatial experience.

⁷ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 41 states: “Every person is at the center of his world, and circumambient space is differentiated in accordance with the schema of his body.”

⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith; Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 170, remarks that “each living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space” (italics in original).

⁹ Martina Löw, *Raumsoziologie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 158–64.

¹⁰ Cf. Michaela Geiger, “Creating Space Through Imagination and Action: Space and the Body in Deuteronomy 6:4–9,” in *Further Developments in Examining Ancient Israel’s Social Space* (vol. 4 of *Constructions of Space*; ed. Mark K. George; LHBOTS 569; London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 44–60 (esp. 52–54).

¹¹ Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), 212–65. Individual laments are written from a 1st person singular perspective and consist of at least four typical building blocks: (1) invocation of the deity and call for assistance; (2) lament; (3) prayer; (4) expression of trust, thanksgiving and praise. This genre classification is *imposed* upon the ancient text from the *outside* by modern scholars (a

approach or its history.¹² The *presence* of the genre is well documented in ancient Near Eastern literature in general and in the Hebrew Bible in particular.¹³ In this study I focus on individual laments in Mesopotamia and the Psalter.¹⁴ There are definitive differences in the details when laments in the two

“kritische Gattung”). An “ethnische Gattung” originated in the ancient culture itself, e.g. the notation KA.INIM.MA ŠU.IL₂.LA₂ in the colophon of “prayers for the lifting of the hands” in Akkadian texts or notations like מִזְמוֹר or שִׁיר in psalm superscripts; cf. Anna E. Zerneck, *Gott und Mensch in Klagegebeten aus Israel und Mesopotamien: Die Handerhebungsgebete Ištar 10 und Ištar 2 und die Klagepsalmen Ps 38 und Ps 22 im Vergleich* (AOAT 387; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2011), 22. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1988), 213 argues that so-called individual laments should rather be classified by the “ethnische Gattung” תפלה “prayer” because suppliants do not lament or complain but rather “openly declare their distress before Yahweh and pray for his intervention.” Anneli Aejmelaeus, *The Traditional Prayer in the Psalms* (BZAW 167; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1986), 110 regards the term “prayer psalms of the individual” as more appropriate than “individual laments.”

¹² Cf. Martin J. Buss, “The Study of Forms,” in *Old Testament Form Criticism* (ed. John H. Hayes; TUMSR 2; San Antonio, Tex.: Trinity University Press, 1974), 1–56; Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method* (trans. Susan M. Cupitt; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1969). Classical form criticism’s emphasis upon “pure” *Gattungen* has been called into question; cf. Erich Zenger, “Psalmenforschung nach Hermann Gunkel und Sigmund Mowinckel,” in *Congress Volume Oslo 1998* (ed. André Lemaire and Magne Sæbø; VTSup 80; Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2000), 399–435; James Muilenberg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” in *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism* (ed. Paul R. House; SBTSOT 2; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 49–69. Contributions in Marvin A. Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi (eds.), *The Changing Face of Form Criticism in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003) confirm the continued influence of the approach. Roy Melugin, “Recent Form Criticism Revisited in an Age of Reader Response,” in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism in the Twenty-First Century* (eds. Marvin A. Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 46, regards form criticism as “an invaluable tool” because of “its ability to help us determine what *kinds* of utterances we encounter in the text.”

¹³ Cf. John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (LBI; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1989), 135–68; Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005), 84–126. Although present in Egyptian and Hittite literature, the genre is especially prominent in Mesopotamia (Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 90). Gunkel and Begrich, *Einleitung*, 173 regard individual laments as the “eigentliche Grundstock des Psalters” with the following thirty nine songs belonging to the genre: Pss 3; 5; 6; 7; 13; 17; 22; 25; 26; 27:7–14; 28; 31; 35; 38; 39; 42; 43; 51; 54; 55; 56; 57; 59; 61; 63; 64; 69; 70; 71; 86; 88; 102; 109; 120; 130; 140; 141; 142; 143.

¹⁴ For a comparative studies of Akkadian and Hebrew laments, cf. Geo Widengren, *The Accadian and Hebrew Psalms of Lamentation as Religious Documents* (Stock-

cultural and religious contexts are compared,¹⁵ but there is consensus that comparisons between the two cultures are valid.¹⁶ The existential crisis associated with severe suffering is a central theme in poems containing elements of lament/petition.¹⁷ The *function* of the genre and its *social setting* is, however, controversial.¹⁸ The social setting of *individual laments* is set somewhere between the extremes of *spiritual songs* and *cultic-ritualistic* interpretations.¹⁹

Laments and/or prayers in Mesopotamian literature generally have definitive cultic connotations, indicated by ritual notations and/or colophons giving information about the scribe, provenance and intended use of the texts.²⁰ Mesopotamian lament genres with an individual perspective provide striking

holm: Bokförlags Aktiebolaget Thule, 1937); Edward R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Patternism* (Leiden: Brill, 1962); Zernecke, *Gott und Mensch*.

¹⁵ In biblical laments the invocation and attributes ascribed to YHWH at the beginning of laments are brief while the opposite is true of Akkadian laments. Widengren, *The Accadian*, 41, remarks that "the Akkadian style is closely related to that used in another class of literature – the hymns. Some of the Akkadian psalms of lamentation are almost entirely of hymnal character, the only difference being a short lamentation and prayer towards the end." Cf. Zernecke, *Gott und Mensch*, 329–35; Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature*, 141.

¹⁶ Cf. Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 118–19; Widengren, *The Accadian*, 1–16. Zernecke, *Gott und Mensch*, 1.

¹⁷ All laments reflect "the struggle and affliction" experienced by the sufferer, cf. Alec Basson, *Divine Metaphors in Selected Hebrew Psalms of Lamentation* (FAT 2/15; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 1.

¹⁸ For a survey of research on the psalms of lamentation, cf. Basson, *Divine Metaphors*, 6–23.

¹⁹ Susan Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (OxBS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 173–89; Erich Zenger, "Vorwort," in *Ritual und Poesie: Formen und Orte religiöser Dichtung im alten Orient, im Judentum und im Christentum* (ed. Erich Zenger; HBS 36; Freiburg: Herder, 2001), VII–IX. Zernecke, *Gott und Mensch*, 349 maintains that "Ritual und Poesie" should not be seen as "Gegensatz... sondern als Schritte in der Entwicklungs- und Verwendungsgeschichte – vor allem der Klagepsalmen."

²⁰ Zernecke, *Gott und Mensch*, 19. Such data are not available for biblical laments, therefore the *Sitz-im-Leben* of laments in the Psalter is much more difficult to determine. Zernecke warns, however, that the cultic notations and information in colophons are not necessarily part of the original "Gebetext." In both Mesopotamian and Israelite individual laments the *Sitz-im-Leben* cannot be determined by the lament itself. The texts as such "sind Gebete eines in Bedrängnis befindlichen Menschen, der sein Leid einer Gottheit klagt und um die Änderung der bestehenden Zustände bittet" (Zernecke, *Gott und Mensch*, 348) and do not suggest a specific, ritualistic context.

comparative material for individual laments in the Hebrew Bible.²¹ Sumerian ERŠAHUNGA laments (i.e. "laments for appeasing of the heart") and the related Akkadian penitential psalms, Sumerian DINGIR.ŠA.DIB.BA incantations (i.e. "prayers for the reconciliation of the angry god"), and Akkadian ŠUILLA prayers (i.e. "raising the hand" prayers) share with Israelite laments/petitions the three-partite structure of address/praise, prayer/lament, and thanksgiving.²² Especially important for the present study is the rare occurrence of elegies for private individuals composed to honour a deceased family member, but without any express indication of cultic and/or liturgical use.²³ One of these elegies (K 890) will be discussed in Section 4 of this study.

While the *cultic* setting of Mesopotamian individual laments can, in many cases and at least secondarily,²⁴ be assumed with some certainty, the same is not true of biblical laments.²⁵ According to Hermann Gunkel, the father of form-criticism, individual laments *originated* in the cult, but in due course became *detached* from their cultic setting and developed into "spiritual songs."²⁶ Many laments were composed outside the cult in private pious circles by poor, oppressed laymen copying the "form" of the original cultic songs.²⁷ From his seminal work, form-critical assessments of the life setting of individual laments branched in at least four directions.

First, individual laments are associated with the *official national cultic setting* and interpreted as: (1) songs uttered by the king during the liturgy asso-

²¹ For a detailed study of similarities and differences between these Sumerian/Akkadian genres and biblical individual laments/prayers, cf. Dalglisch, *Psalms Fifty-One*.

²² Cf. Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 98–119; Zernecke, *Gott und Mensch*, 334. Alan Lenzi, "Invoking the God: Interpreting Invocations in Mesopotamian Prayers and Biblical Laments of the Individual," *JBL* 129 (2010): 303–15 indicates that the DINGIR.ŠA.DIB.BA incantations (i.e. "prayers for the reconciliation of the angry god") share the brief invocation of the deity with individual laments in the Psalter. These songs are "supplications for the abatement of a personal god's wrath" (Lenzi, "Invoking the God," 304) while other lament genres in Mesopotamia are prayers "offered by individuals to high gods in the pantheon" (Lenzi, "Invoking the God," 311). In Israel/Judah YHWH was venerated as a national deity, but he was "also a personal deity and as such would be addressed in more informal terms" (Lenzi, "Invoking the God," 314).

²³ Lenzi, "Invoking the God," 98–99.

²⁴ Cf. the discussion in Zernecke, *Gott und Mensch*, 348–49.

²⁵ Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature*, 151 argues that "the Mesopotamian laments were intended to be used in ritual settings with accompanying incantations and sacrifices of appeasement. This was the function that laments performed in society. The function of Israelite laments in society is much less clear. . . . There is little to even suggest that incantations would have had a role in the use of the biblical laments."

²⁶ Gunkel and Begrich, *Einleitung*, 261.

²⁷ Gunkel and Begrich, *Einleitung*, 175–83.

ciated with the annual enthronement of YHWH festival;²⁸ (2) songs about a personal or national calamity composed for liturgical ceremonies in the temple (e.g. ritual cleansing ceremonies; atoning sacrifices);²⁹ (3) songs composed for an annual festival celebrating YHWH's choice of Zion as his holy dwelling-place and the founding of the temple;³⁰ (4) songs composed for an annual covenant-renewal festival celebrated even before the founding of the temple at various Israelite sanctuaries.³¹ The change in tone at the end of individual laments is ascribed to a priestly oracle of salvation.³² During a cultic lament and prayer ceremony a priest "wahrscheinlich durch besondere Beobachtungen beim Opfer,"³³ ensured the sufferer that YHWH accepted his/her prayer, resulting in thanksgiving.

Second, individual laments are transposed to "a more *personal and independent liturgical activity*"³⁴ and read as: (1) liturgical compositions for individuals who were falsely accused and unjustly brought to trial;³⁵ (2) compositions for cultic ordeals where a falsely accused suppliant awaits a cultic act of divine decision;³⁶ (3) forensic compositions where the accused awaits the final outcome of YHWH's decision about his/her court case;³⁷ (4) songs accompanying penitence rituals at times of illness;³⁸ (5) votive texts deposited at the temple or local sanctuaries, assembled in the temple archives and later re-worked and re-used in other contexts;³⁹ (6) songs composed for private prayer

²⁸ Sigmund O. P. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (vol. 1; trans. Dafydd R. Ap-Thomas; Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 225–46.

²⁹ Sigmund O. P. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* (vol. 2; trans. Dafydd R. Ap-Thomas; Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 1–25.

³⁰ Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150: A Commentary* (transl. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg, 1989).

³¹ Arthur Weiser, *The Psalms* (transl. Herbert Hartwell; OTL; London: SCM, 1962).

³² Joachim Begrich, "Das priesterliche Heilsorakel," *ZAW* 52 (1934): 81–92.

³³ Begrich, "Das priesterliche," 91.

³⁴ Gillingham, *Poems and Psalms*, 184 (italics added by the present author).

³⁵ Hans Schmidt, *Das Gebet der Angeklagten im Alten Testament* (BZAW 49; Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1928).

³⁶ Walter Beyerlin, *Die Rettung der Bedrängten in den Feindpsalmen der Einzelnen auf institutionelle Zusammenhänge untersucht* (FRLANT 99; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970).

³⁷ Oswald Loretz, "Psalm 13: Der altorientalischen rechtliche Hintergrund biblischen 'Klage des Einzelnen': 'Fortschrittsglaube' in der kanonischen Auslegung des Psalters," in *Psalmenstudien: Kolometrie, Strophik und Theologie ausgewählter Psalmen* (ed. Oswald Loretz; BZAW 309; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2002), 131–70.

³⁸ Klaus Seybold, *Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament: Untersuchungen zur Bestimmung und Zuordnung der Krankheits- und Heiligungpsalmen* (BWANT 99; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973).

³⁹ Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen* (HAT I/15; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 18.

rituals in the small, intimate circle of family liturgies at times of distress,⁴⁰ thus as expressions of personal piety "shaped by the basic relations and experiences within the family group."⁴¹ Individual laments are deeply personal,⁴² but nevertheless ceremonial prayers composed by cultic experts to be used in group and/or family liturgies to assist individuals experiencing misfortune.⁴³

Third, *functional-anthropological approaches* regard lament as a *typical human* reaction to suffering. Hymns and laments are "not first of all literary or cultic in nature . . . They designate the basic modes of that which occurs when man turns to God with words: plea and praise."⁴⁴ The Psalter reflects human experience. "Psalms of orientation" are concerned with "seasons of well-being" and "articulate the joy, delight, goodness, coherence, and reliability of God." "Psalms of disorientation" reflect "anguished seasons of hurt, alienation, suffering, and death" and manifest in the "complaint song." "Psalms of new orientation" are produced when humans "are overwhelmed with new gifts of God."⁴⁵ Individual laments and songs of thanksgiving/praise are grounded in the antithesis of life and death. They are "Konfliktgesprächen mit Gott."⁴⁶ Laments reflect the experience of moving "vom Leben zum Tod," songs of praise/thanksgiving with the movement "vom Tod zum Leben."⁴⁷ A lament

⁴⁰ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Der bittende Mensch: Bitritual und Klagelied des Einzelnen im Alten Testament* (WMANT 51; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980); Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Psalms," in *Old Testament Form Criticism* (ed. John H. Hayes; TUMSR 2; San Antonio, Tex.: Trinity University Press, 1974), 179–223; Rainer Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und offizielle Religion: Religionsinterner Pluralismus in Israel und Babylon* (CThM 9; Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1978); Rainer Albertz and Rüdiger Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2012).

⁴¹ Rainer Albertz, "Personal Piety," in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (ed. Francesca Stavrakopoulou and John Barton; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 135–46 (140).

⁴² "Die Bitte ist primär ein dem Individuum dienendes, konvertioniertes Zeichen- und Handlungssystem. Es soll – im weitesten Sinn – die Existenz der Einzelperson in der Gesellschaft sichern" (Gerstenberger, *Der bittende Mensch*, 60).

⁴³ "Es handelt sich bei ihnen nicht um geistliche und private Lieder, sondern um Gebete, die für eine Gemeinschaft wichtig waren" (Gerstenberger, *Der bittende Mensch*, 134).

⁴⁴ Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 153; Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms* (trans. Joshua R. Porter; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 10.

⁴⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2002), 8–9; Walter Brueggemann, "Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function," in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith: Walter Brueggemann* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1995), 3–32.

⁴⁶ Bernd Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott: Eine Anthropologie der Psalmen* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003), 13.

⁴⁷ Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 40.

"richtet sich auf JHWH (*Gottklage / Anklage Gottes*), auf den Klagenden selbst (*Ich-Klage*) und auf dessen Feinde (*Feindklage*)" and expresses an "anthropologischen Tiefendimension" encompassing the totality of human experience.⁴⁸

Fourth, *canonical and redaction-compositional* readings of the Psalter regard it as a *book* with an intentional wisdom and royal prologue (Pss 1-2), a meaningful division into five "books" (Pss 3-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-145), and an epilogue of praise (Pss 146-150) rising to the crescendo of universal adoration of YHWH in Ps 150.⁴⁹ The five "books" correspond to the division of the Pentateuch, thus the Psalter becomes Torah of David.⁵⁰ Individual poems might have originated in the cult, but are now imbedded in a literary corpus with a didactic purpose; hence the Psalter is ultimately "post-cultic"⁵¹ and should be read as obedient answers to God's words as expressed in the Torah.⁵² The Psalter underwent an intentional process of re-application and re-interpretation, consequently the "form" of a psalm can no longer be regarded as "einfachhin maßgebend. . . für die Aussage des Psalmes."⁵³ As literary composition the Psalter became the "Grundtext der persönlichen, meditativen Frömmigkeit und messianischen Hoffnungen" of the post-exilic community, "das »Lebensbuch« vor allem jener Gruppen, die in den Psalmen »die Armen«, »die Frommen« und »die Gerechten« genannt werden."⁵⁴

C BODY AND SPACE: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The *functional-anthropological* and *canonical and redaction-compositional* approaches to laments open avenues to investigate these songs as literary-poetic creations telling a "story" of intense suffering, as paradigmatic songs

⁴⁸ Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 42.

⁴⁹ Erich Zenger, "Der Psalter als Buch: Beobachtungen zu seiner Entstehung, Komposition und Funktion," in *Der Psalter in Judentum und Christentum* (ed. Erich Zenger; HBS 18; Freiburg: Herder, 1998), 26–32; Bernd Janowski, "Ein Tempel aus Worten: Zur theologischen Architektur des Psalters," in *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* (ed. Erich Zenger; BETL 238; Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 279–306.

⁵⁰ Reiner G. Kratz, "Die Tora Davids: Psalm 1 und die doxologische Fünfteilung des Psalters," *ZTK* 93 (1996): 1–34; Christoph Levin, "Die Entstehung der Buchereinteilung des Psalters," *VT* 54 (2004): 83–90.

⁵¹ James L. Mays, "The Question of Context in Psalm Interpretation," in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. Jerry C. McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 18.

⁵² Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979), 511–22.

⁵³ Joachim Becker, *Israel deutet seine Psalmen: Urform und Neuinterpretation in den Psalmen* (SBS 18; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1966), 11.

⁵⁴ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalm 1–50* (vol. 1 of *Die Psalmen*; NEchtB 29; Würzburg: Echter, 1993), 8.

expressing the *negative lived spatial experience* of the sufferer.⁵⁵ Leonard Thompson reminds us that in the Hebrew Bible humanity are presented from two perspectives: "man at-center properly orientated to his world, or man off-center in chaos and disorientation."⁵⁶ In the book of Psalms one encounters an "I"—a 1st person narrator—using language that "embodies the beliefs of the society in which it arose"⁵⁷ and describes "typical situations" easily recognisable as "existential situations" that are "experienced by many different people."⁵⁸ This "I" is depicted either "at the center, the desideratum of human existence," or "off-center, in a state of distress and disequilibrium."⁵⁹

If the Psalter is concerned with *typical and existential situations* experienced by many different people the nature of the "I" in the Psalter should be considered carefully. Dörte Bester argues that three factors determine the interpretation of the "I": first, psalms are not spontaneous prayers, but carefully composed poetic texts, thus the "I" is not a historical individual, but a literary "I" presenting typical situations of suffering and salvation. Second, the "I" is not a particular individual revealing his/her deepest emotions. Laments rather present paradigmatic experiences of suffering.⁶⁰ Third, the "I" is grammatically neutral and speaks on behalf of humanity in general, male and female. The

⁵⁵ In two recently published studies I argued for the *holistic spatial interpretation* of ancient Near Eastern literature, cf. Gert T. M. Prinsloo, "From Watchtower to Holy Temple: Reading the Book of Habakkuk as a Spatial Journey," in *Further Developments in Examining Ancient Israel's Social Space* (vol. 4 of *Constructions of Space*; (ed. Mark K. George; LHBOTS 569; London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 132–54; Gert T. M. Prinsloo, "Place, Space and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World: Theory and Practice with Reference to the Book of Jonah," in *Place, Space and Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (vol. 5 of *Constructions of Space*; (ed. Gert T. M. Prinsloo and Christl M. Maier; LHBOTS 576; London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 3–25. Three spatial "dimensions" of texts should be investigated. First, the *narratological* dimension is important, because in *written* sources we encounter a "world of words," a *representational* world related to, but not identical to, the "real" world. Second, *critical spatiality's* notion of space as a three-dimensional concept should be carefully considered, with emphasis upon *lived space* as space *experienced* by the narrator and verbally *related* to the audience. Third, any interpretive effort of ancient Near Eastern literature should take *their* worldview(s), spatial orientation and spatial imagination seriously.

⁵⁶ Leonard L. Thompson, *Introducing Biblical Literature: A More Fantastic Country* (Engelwood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 13.

⁵⁷ Thompson, *Introducing*, 53.

⁵⁸ Thompson, *Introducing*, 54.

⁵⁹ Thompson, *Introducing*, 54.

⁶⁰ Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 347 indicates that individual laments describe "eine *paradigmatische Leidererfahrung*" (italics original).

Assyrian elegy discussed below illustrates that the "I" can indeed explicitly be female.⁶¹

Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher emphasises an extraordinary feature in the Psalter, namely that only seven of the 150 poems do not contain explicit references to the body and its parts.⁶² The physical human body is described only rarely, the focus falls upon the body and parts of the body as *images* of "(m)ental or physical conditions, emotions as well as intentions."⁶³ Body metaphors are used to describe the protagonists in a psalm's experience, and it is often done spatial terms: "Nearness, distance, as well as efforts to overcome a spatial separation, are expressed with the help of body language."⁶⁴ Body language addresses "(a)ll aspects of human life, its fear, desire and joy, as well as its most intimate thoughts and emotions."⁶⁵ The "I" of the individual laments does "not so much *have* a body,"⁶⁶ he/she rather *is* a body.⁶⁷ It is aptly illustrated in the two poems analysed below.

Adherents of critical spatiality link body and spatial experience. For Yi-Fu Tuan this link is inseparable, "the one not only occupies the other but commands and orders it through intention. Body is 'lived body' and space is humanly construed space."⁶⁸ Henri Lefebvre argues that ultimately space is experienced as a *social* phenomenon *produced* in the interaction between human beings and their environment.⁶⁹ Space is *at the same time* a *physical, mental* and *social* construct,⁷⁰ and for Edward Soja the social dimension of

⁶¹ Dörte Bester, *Körperbilder in den Psalmen* (FAT 2/24; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 95–98; Steven J. L. Croft, *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms* (JSOTSup 44; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987).

⁶² Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, "Body Images in the Psalms," *JSOT* 28 (2004): 301. The exceptions are Pss 1, 29, 87, 93, 113, 117, 150.

⁶³ Gillmayr-Bucher, "Body Images," 303.

⁶⁴ Gillmayr-Bucher, "Body Images," 305–06.

⁶⁵ Gillmayr-Bucher, "Body Images," 325.

⁶⁶ Gillmayr-Bucher, "Body Images," 325.

⁶⁷ Cf. in this regard Bester, *Körperbilder*; Christiane de Vos, *Klage als Gotteslob aus der Tiefe: Der Mensch vor Gott in den individuellen Klagepsalmen* (FAT 2/11; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 89–93; Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, *Body Symbolism in the Bible* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001).

⁶⁸ Tuan, *Space and Place*, 35.

⁶⁹ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 1.

⁷⁰ Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 11, 38–39. *Physical* space is "perceived space" (nature, cosmos, place). *Mental* space is "conceived space" (representations of space, conceptualised space). *Social* space is "lived space" (spaces of representation, space as experienced). Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 66–67 uses for this trialectic of spaces the terms *Firstspace* (physical/concrete/perceived space); *Secondspace* (imag-

space is "the terrain for the generation of 'counterspaces,' spaces of resistance to the dominant order... to *lived space as a strategic location* from which to encompass, understand, and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously."⁷¹

The concepts orientation/disorientation and proximity/distance permeate ancient Near Eastern worldview(s) and spatial imagination. Proximity to the "centre," usually imagined as the temple of the high god, implies protection, security and blessing⁷² and is experienced on two planes.⁷³ Horizontally, the binary pair "far/near" defines proximity. To be "far" from the temple implies to be off-centre, in distress, excluded from the deity's saving presence. Vertically, the binary pair "ascend/descend" defines proximity. To "descend" implies to be off-centre, to leave the saving presence of the deity, to disappear into the depths of Š^e'ōl. Approaching (horizontally) and ascending to (vertically) the temple has symbolic meaning. The cosmic centre symbolises order, structure, salvation, and life. The outer limits, whether horizontally (the waters of chaos) or vertically (the depths of Š^e'ōl) symbolise chaos, disorientation, persecution, and death.⁷⁴ The symbolism "refers to an existential perspective rather than a geographical location,"⁷⁵ to a lived experience "imagined" by the poet. This heaven-upon-earth experience is more important than the temple's "physical" or "abstract" qualities. It is illustrated in the two laments discussed below. In both divine proximity is desired, but a physical sanctuary never mentioned.⁷⁶

In individual laments the poet's *lived space* is off-centre, thus he/she experiences chaos, disorientation, and isolation. Numerous causes of suffering

ined/conceived/abstract space); *Thirdspace* (lived space, the confrontation between various social groups and their space[s]).

⁷¹ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 68.

⁷² Cf. Bernd Janowski, "Das biblische Weltbild: Eine methodologische skizze," in *Das biblische Weltbild und seine altorientalischen Kontexte* (ed. Bernd Janowski and Beate Ego; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 3–26.

⁷³ Cf. Nicolas Wyatt, *Space and Time in the Religious Life of the Near East* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 35–40.

⁷⁴ Cf. Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (MC 8; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1998), xii; Annette Krüger, "Himmel – Erde – Unterwelt: Kosmologische Entwürfe in der poetischen Literatur Israels," in *Das biblische Weltbild und seine altorientalischen Kontexte* (ed. Bernd Janowski and Beate Ego; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 65–83; Bernd Janowski, "Die heilige Wohnung des Höchsten: Kosmologische Implikationen der Jerusalemer Tempeltheologie," in *Gottesstadt und Gottesgarten: Zu Geschichte und Theologie des Jerusalemer Tempels* (ed. Othmar Keel and Erich Zenger; QD 91; Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2002), 24–68.

⁷⁵ Thompson, *Introducing*, 64.

⁷⁶ According to Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (CEC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 159, Ps 13 is concerned with "a real presence, although invisible, in the secret sanctuary of his inner life" of the divine.

can be enumerated,⁷⁷ but ultimately suffering implies separation from the deity and his/her saving presence at-centre as well as estrangement in the social sphere. Suffering ultimately has *spatial implications*, it changes the sufferer's "ganze Welt" and brings him/her "in dieser Situation 'an den Rand' bzw. 'in den Bereich' des Todes." In the *experience* of suffering "geht es immer um die *Erfahrung von Desintegration*, also den Ausschluß aus dem Sozialraum der Familie, der Freunde und der gruppenspezifischen Gemeinschaft."⁷⁸ Suffering is experienced in two *spatial* spheres – in the *body* and in *society*.⁷⁹ Uttering a lament is an attempt to restore equilibrium, an anguished cry aimed at *transcending* the crisis, a *process* of *re-connection* with the *divine*, the *self*, and the *community*.⁸⁰

My thesis is that the *individual spatial experience* of a sufferer provides a key to a *holistic interpretation of individual laments*. An *individual* is concerned hence these laments express personal experience by means of "body language." *Spatial experience* is at stake hence these laments draw heavily upon spatial language associated with ancient Near-Eastern worldview(s) and spatial orientation to give voice to feelings of *estrangement* and *divine and social distance and absence* on the one hand, and the longing for *restoration of relationships* and *divine and social presence* on the other hand. I test the thesis with reference to two Ancient Near Eastern laments,⁸¹ the so-called "Assyrian Elegy" (K 890) – a lament without any formal indication of a cultic setting, neither in the context of official religion, nor in the context of family and personal piety, and Ps 13, the "Muster eines 'Klageliedes des Einzelnen.'"⁸² The poem is "sehr persönlich gehalten," but at the same time the language used is so typical that it tells us nothing about the date and/or setting of the poem. It is quite possible that the psalm "als persönliches geistliches Lied gedichtet worden sein."⁸³ From the small sample I will draw general conclusions regarding the interplay between space and body in individual laments.

⁷⁷ Ralph K. Moore, *An Investigation of the Motif of Suffering in the Psalms of Lamentation* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1993), 8–59 lists as causes of suffering: Loneliness and isolation (Pss 12; 25); abandonment (Pss 13; 22; 42–43; 44; 55; 74); persecution by enemies (Pss 54; 94; 109; 140) accompanied by torment (Ps 137) and the denial of YHWH's existence and ability to save (Ps 14); anxiety caused by personal sin (Ps 51), disease (Ps 38), stress (Ps 31) or fear of death (Ps 88).

⁷⁸ Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 47.

⁷⁹ Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 51.

⁸⁰ Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 77.

⁸¹ The aim of this paper is not a detailed comparison of the two laments, but a reading of both laments from the perspective of body and space.

⁸² Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (6th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 46.

⁸³ Georg Fohrer, *Psalmen* (DGS; Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1993), 145.

D A SPATIAL READING OF TWO ANCIENT NEAR-EASTERN LAMENTS**1 An Assyrian Elegy (K 890)**

1	.1	.1	o.1	<i>ana mīni kī eleppê ina qabal nārê nadâki</i>	“Why, like a boat in the midst of the river are you adrift,
			o.2	<i>šabburu ḥūqīkī battuqu ašlīki</i>	your thwarts in pieces, your mooring ropes cut,
			o.3	<i>kallulu pānīkī nār libbi-āli tebbiri</i>	covering your face, do you cross the river of the inner city?”
2	.1	.1	o.4	<i>akê lā nadākū lā battuqu ašlīya</i>	“How could I not be adrift, my mooring ropes not be cut?
		.2	o.5	<i>ina ūme inbu aššūni akê ḥadāka anāku</i>	On the day I bore the fruit, how happy was I,
			o.6	<i>ḥadāk anākū ḥadi ḥābiri</i>	happy was I, happy was my husband.
		.3	o.7	<i>ina ūme ḥīlūyâ ētarpû panīya</i>	But on the day of my going into labour, my face darkened,
			o.8	<i>ina ūme ulādiya ittakrima ēnāya</i>	on the day of my giving birth, my eyes became clouded.
	.2	.1	o.9	<i>patāni upnāyâ ana Bēlet-ilī ušalla</i>	Opening my hands to <i>Bēlet-ilī</i> I prayed:
			o.10	<i>ummu ālidāte attī eṭirī napultī</i>	Mother who gave birth yourself, save my life!
		.2	o.11	<i>Bēlet-ilī kī tašmūni tuktallila panīša</i>	<i>Bēlet-ilī</i> – when she heard this, she veiled her face.
			o.12	[] <i>attī ana mīni tušsanallini</i>	[] you – why do you keep on praying to me?
	.3	.1	o.13	[] <i>uni ittidī riganšu</i>	My[] raised his voice:
			o.14	[] <i>-ni aššat laliyâ</i>	[] me the wife of my abundance.
		.2	r.1	[] <i>ša dūr šanātê</i>	[] years on end,
			r.2	[] <i>-dâ qaqqar ḥibilāte</i>	[]... land of violence,
			r.3	[] <i>libbi-āli tallak tassisî nubû</i>	[] she used to go to the inner city, you sounded a wail.
	.4	.1	r.4	[] <i>ūmē annûte issi ḥābiriya anāku</i>	[] those days with my husband I was,
			r.5	<i>issišu ašbākū ša rā'imāniya</i>	with him I lived, he who was my lover.
		.2	r.6	<i>mūtu ina bīt mayāliya iḥlulâ ḥillutu</i>	Death came creeping into my bedroom:
			r.7	<i>issu bītiyâ ussēšanni yāši</i>	it drove me from my house,
		.3	r.8	<i>issu pan ḥābiriya iptarsanni yāši</i>	from the presence of my husband it drove me,
			r.9	<i>šēpēya issakana ina qaqqar lā tāriya</i>	it set my feet into a land from which I shall not return.”

K 890 is a unique text among the thousands of cuneiform tablets discovered in the library of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh.⁸⁴ Inscribed on a single clay tablet with 14 lines on the obverse (o.1-14) and 9 lines on the reverse (r.1-9) is the lament of a woman who died at childbirth written in the New-Assyrian dialect.⁸⁵ The left lower edge of the obverse and the top left edge of the reverse are damaged, thus the beginning of o.12-14 and r.1-4 is not legible. Only this single copy of the poem is known. It contains no indication of cultic and/or liturgical use.⁸⁶ No rulings demarcating smaller sections are present.

By using the content as main indicator, two main sections can be demarcated. In **Section 1** (o.1-3) a question is directed to a female as indicated by a number of 2 f. sg. pronominal suffixes and a 2 f. sg. verbal forms.⁸⁷ The introductory interrogative adverb *ana mīni* "why?" (o.1) receives emphasis due to its prominent position as the opening expression of the poem. The following *kī* "like" alerts the reader to the presence of a simile where the desparate state

⁸⁴ S. Arthur Strong, "On Some Oracles to Esarhaddon and Ašurbanipal," *BzA* 2 (1894): 634, published the first transliteration of the text. Rainer Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit*, 53–55 provides a transliteration, translation, concise explanatory notes and photographs of the cuneiform tablet. Erica Reiner provides a new translation in Erica Reiner, "Die akkadische Literatur," in *Altorientalische Literaturen* (ed. Wolfgang Röllig; NHLW 1; Wiesbaden: Athenaion, 1978), 151-210 (186–187). A transliteration and translation appears in Alasdair Livingston, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea* (SAA 3; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), 37–39. Livingston labelled the poem an "Elegy in Memory of a Woman" (Livingston, *Court Poetry*, 37). Erica Reiner, *Your Thwarts in Pieces, Your Mooring Rope Cut: Poetry from Babylonia and Assyria* (MSH 5; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan, 1985), 85–93, contributes the only exegetical exposition of the poem. She calls it "An Assyrian Elegy" (Reiner, *Your Thwarts*, 85). Her study includes a transliteration, transcription and translation. For a brief discussion of the poem and a bibliography, cf. Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 98–99. Colour photographs of the text are available at Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative, "K.890," n.p. [cited 22 January 2013]. Online: <http://www.cdli.ucla.edu/dl/photo/P336128.jpg>.

⁸⁵ A peculiar characteristic of the poem is the presence of an additional vowel syllable at the end of some words, e.g. *ḥu-qi-ki-i* (o.2); *pa-ni-ki-i* (o.3); *na-da-ku-ú* (o.4); *ḥa-bi-ri-i* (o.6); *ḥi-lu-la-ia-a* (o.7); *e-tar-pu-u* (o.7); *up-na-ia-a* (o.9); *e-ti-ri-i* (o.10); *it-ti-di-i* (o.13); *la-li-ia-a* (o.14); *ta-si-si-i* (r.3); *iḥ-lu-la-a* (r.6); *É-ti-ia-a* (r.7). The additional syllable "is motivated neither by the cuneiform writing conventions nor by grammatical reasons" and its function is disputed (cf. Reiner, *Your Thwarts*, 90–91).

⁸⁶ Reiner, *Your Thwarts*, 85 maintains that the text "belongs neither to the category of religious poetry nor to that of folk poetry." Its "place in Mesopotamian literature is not known, because it is written by itself on a clay tablet without any title, rubric, or reference to liturgical or other performance."

⁸⁷ For 2 f. sg. suffixes, cf. *nadâki* (o.1), *ḥūqīki*, *ašlīki* (o.2), *pānīki* (o.3). For a 2 f. sg. verb, cf. *tebbiri* (o.3).

of a female is likened to a “boat” (*eleppê*)⁸⁸ adrift “in the midst of a river” (*ina qabal nārê nadâki*; o.1) with her “thwarts in pieces” (*šabburu hūqikî*) and her “mooring ropes cut” (*battuqu ašlîki*; o.2). The image created by the simile (o.1), enhanced by the internal parallelism in o.2, is one of hopelessness, forelornness, and impending disaster. In o.3 the image is applied to real life when the female is asked why “covering your face, do you cross the river of the inner city?” (*kallulu pānîkî nār libbi-āli tebbiri*). The “inner city” refers to the New-Assyrian capital of Aššur.⁸⁹ The covered face and the crossing of the river (o.3) apply the image of the ship adrift (o.1-2) to a female person and enhance the expectation of impending disaster.

This is decidedly spatial and body imagery. The safe mooring of a ship is a metaphor for successful childbirth.⁹⁰ The ship adrift in o.1-2 suggests a birth process going awry. If the “ship” heading for shipwreck is a female with a “covered face,” death looms large. A “covered” face suggests isolation and the inability to communicate with the divine or human spheres.⁹¹ In this context the “crossing” of “the river of the inner city” suddenly becomes significant. “Inner city” carries connotations of safety, protection, intimate contact with family members and friends, living in a secure community, and ultimately being in the presence of the divine sphere. But “the river” can become a symbol of the waters of chaos, the waters of death encircling the earth-disk. Crossing that river suggests a final, precarious journey – a journey towards death.

In **Section 2** (o.3-r.9) the female of o.1-3 becomes a person, a suffering and dying body. The reader discovers that the text contains a dialogue and that Section 2 in its entirety is the suffering female’s answer upon the questions directed to her in o.1-3, presumably by concerned family, neighbours, and friends.⁹² Four sub-sections (stanzas) can be demarcated.

⁸⁸ The grammatical gender of *eleppu(m)* “ship” is feminine, making the simile an apt image for a female person, cf. Reiner, *Your Thwarts*, 91.

⁸⁹ Reiner, *Your Thwarts*, 91. Lit. “the heart of the city”; cf. also r.3. “Heart” indicates the centre, the innermost part. Aššur represents the very essence of the country; it is a symbol of life, vitality, divine presence (cf. Schroer and Staubli, *Body Symbolism*, 43).

⁹⁰ Reiner, *Your Thwarts*, 91–92 maintains that “the image of a boat seeking safe harbour is often associated with a child to be born.” Cf. in this regard Claudia D. Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis: Evidence from the Ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, and 1Q XI, 1–18* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 52–54.

⁹¹ *Pānu(m)* “face” occurs in o.3, 7, 11; r.8. The Hebrew equivalent (פנים) occurs in Ps 13:2b. Schroer and Staubli, *Body Symbolism*, 85 call the face the “focus of a person” and remark: “. . . the face turned toward someone is the expression of contact and relationship, while turning the back signifies breaking of relationship and lack of interest. The whole spectrum of human moods is reflected in the face and its expressions.”

⁹² Reiner, *Your Thwarts*, 90.

Stanza 2.1 (o.4-8) is characterised by 1 sg. forms.⁹³ It contains three strophes. **Strophe 2.1.1** (o.4) is the reaction of the female upon the question directed to her in o.1-3. The question *ana mīni... nadāki* "why are you are adrift?" (o.1) is countered with the question *akê lā nadākū* "how could I not be adrift?" (o.3). The dangerous situation implied by *battuqu ašlīki* "your mooring ropes are cut" (o.2) becomes an inevitable disastrous situation in the expression *lā battuqu ašlīya* "(how) could my mooring ropes not be cut?" (o.4). The interrogative pronoun *akê* "how?" (o.4) counters the question *ana mīni* "why?" (o.1). Both main sections of the poem are thus introduced by interrogative pronouns closely linked with the lament genre. This lines states the inevitability of the woman's destruction, the following lines will explain it.

Strophes 2.1.2 (o.5-6) and **2.1.3** (o.7-8) provide the reason why the hopeless situation sketched in o.1-3 and confirmed in o.4 is inevitable. The repetition of *akê* "how?" in o.5 links the line with o.4, but in o.5 it is used as an exclamation and the emphasis falls upon previously experienced joy. The threefold repetition of *ina ūme* "on the day" (o.5, 7, 8) links o.5-8, but the relationship between the two strophes is antithetical. In o.5-6 the focus falls upon the joy of the woman and her husband (*hābirī* "my husband" in o.6) when she became pregnant *inbu aššūni* "I bore fruit" in o.5). The joy is emphasised by the threefold repetition of *hadū(m)* "to be happy" (o. 5; 6 [2X]), the *anadiplosis* in o.5-6 (*hadāka anāku* "happy was I" at the end of o.5; *hadāk anākū* "happy was I" at the beginning of o.6), and the exclamation *akê* "how!" (o.5). In sharp contrast o.7-8 implies that labour (*ina ūme hīlūyā* "on the day of my going into labour" in o.7) and childbirth (*ina ūme ulādiya* "on the day of my giving birth" in o.8) brought nothing but desperation and death. Two body metaphors occur. In o.7 the woman states: *ētarpū panīya* "my face became darkened." "Darkness" is a metaphor for death. As in o.3, the "darkened face" becomes a metaphor for isolation and death. The same is implied in o.8's *ittakrīma ēnāya* "my eyes became clouded."⁹⁴ Eyes that can no longer see properly, distinguish between light and darkness, and cannot be used to make contact with others, suggest death. The *parallelism* between o.7 and 8 emphasises the woman's suffering and social isolation.

A change of focus in o.9-12 suggests that a new stanza commences. The woman attempts to break the shackles of isolation by establishing contact with the heavenly sphere. **Stanza 2.2** (o.9-12) is characterised by a confrontation between the woman and the goddess *Bēlet-ilī* as *reported* by the woman, thus 1

⁹³ 1 sg. verbs: *lā nadākū* (o.4); *aššūni* (o.5); *hadāka* (o.5). 1 sg. suffixes: *ašlīya* (o.4); *hābirī* (o.6); *hīlūyā* (o. 7); *panīya* (o.7); *ulādiya* (o.8); *ēnāya* (o.8). 1 sg. pronoun: *anāku* (o.5 and 6).

⁹⁴ The Hebrew equivalent of *īnu(m)* "eye" (עַיַן) occurs in Ps 13:4b. Schroer and Staubli, *Body Symbolism*, 105 indicate that the eye symbolises "the quality and dynamism of the gaze."

sg., 2 f. sg., and 3 f. sg. forms referring to both actors abound.⁹⁵ The stanza contains two strophes. In **Strophe 2.1.1** (o.9-10) the woman turns as suppliant to *Bēlet-ilī*, the mother-goddess and patron deity of pregnant woman.⁹⁶ The phrase *patāni upnāyā ana Bēlet-ilī ušalla* “opening my two hands to *Bēlet-ilī* I prayed” (o.9), implies the involvement of the suppliants’ body in the attempt to bridge the divide between the human and divine spheres. Outstretched hands signify the body posture accompanying urgent supplication.⁹⁷ The appeal to *Bēlet-ilī* is closely linked with the crisis at hand – impending death at childbirth. The goddess is a mother herself (*ummu ālidāte attī* “mother who gave birth yourself” in o. 10), therefore the woman fervently prays: *eṭirī napultī* “save my life!” (o.10).

In **Strophe 2.1.2** (o.11-12) the goddess, for reasons unknown, turns away from the suppliant. The moment *Bēlet-ilī* hears the plea (*kī tašmūni* “when she hears this” in o.11), *tuktallila panīša* “she veiled her face” (o. 11). The goddess’ body posture stands in sharp contrast to the suppliant’s. The suppliant stretches her two hands to the goddess. The goddess, however, veils her face, refuses to make contact, rejects the supplication. The goddess’ “veiled” face (o.11) is ultimately the reason for the suppliant’s “covered” (o.3) and “darkened” face (o.7). It is confirmed by the goddess’ reaction when she reproachfully asks: [] *attī ana mēni tuššanallini* “[] you – why do you keep on praying to me?” (o.12). The goddess uses the same interrogative pronoun as in the opening line: *ana mēni* “why” (o.12; cf. o.1). Between the “why” of the neighbours and the “why” of the goddess, a woman is dying. Her desperate cry “How could I not. . . !” (o.4) is the result of ultimate isolation: she is abandoned even by the mother-goddess, the guarantor of fertility, life and hope.

Unfortunately the broken lower left edge of the obverse and the top left edge of the reverse make proper interpretation of the following sequence impossible. Third m. sg. forms suggest that the woman *reports* the reaction of her husband, namely *ittidī riganšu* “he raised his voice” (o.13), presumably to

⁹⁵ For forms referring to the *woman*, cf. 1 sg. verb: *ušalla* (o.9). 1 sg. suffixes: *upnāyā* (o.9); *napultī* (o.10). 2 f. sg. verb: *tuššanallini* (o.12). 2 f. sg. pronoun: *attī* (o.12). Forms referring to the *goddess*: 1 sg. suff: *tuššanallini* (o.12). 2 f. sg. verb: *eṭirī* (o.10). 2 f. sg. pronoun: *attī* (o.10). 3 f. sg. verbs: *tašmūni* (o.11); *tuktallila* (o. 11). 3 f. sg. suffix: *panīša* (o.11).

⁹⁶ Reiner, *Your Thwarts*, 92 remarks that *Bēlet-ilī* (lit. “Mistress of the gods) in Mesopotamian mythology “gave birth” to humanity and divinity alike. In the Epic of Gilgamesh (XI 122) the goddess says: “It is I who give birth to all these human beings of mine” and in the Anzu-Myth (IV 4) she claims “I gave birth to all the Igigu gods.” Cf. William W. Hallo and William L. Moran, “The First Tablet of the SB Recension of the Anzu-Myth,” *JCS* 31 (1979): 88–89.

⁹⁷ Schroer and Staubli, *Body Symbolism*, 150 indicate that the “hands express relationships, moods, and messages.” The lifting of the hands signifies prayer, praise, or urgent petition (Schroer and Staubli, *Body Symbolism*, 155).

confront the unwilling and absent goddess for abandoning *aššat laliyâ* "the wife of my abundance" (o.14). Only isolated words can be recognised in the first two lines of the reverse (cf. *dūr šanātê* "years on end"; r.1; *qaqqar ħibilâte* "land of violence"; r.2). The meaning of r.3 is not clear. Whether *tallak* should be taken as 3 f. sg. "she used to go" or 2 m. sg. "you used to go" is not clear, neither is the subject of the 2 f. sg. verb *tassisî nubû* "you sounded a wail" (r.3). I hesitantly assume that o.14-r.3 can be demarcated as **Stanza 2.3** and that it contains the *report* of the husband's lament about *Bēlet-ilī*'s unwillingness to save his wife from death.⁹⁸ The repetition of the expression *libbi-āli* "heart of the city" in r.3 (cf. o.3) might have significant spatial implications. There was a time when the dying woman went *to* the inner city to worship, but now she is irrevocably drifting *away* from that pace of safety.

The presence of 1 sg. forms in r.4-9 suggests that the dying woman is again reporting her own feelings and experience.⁹⁹ I demarcate the section as **Stanza 2.4**. A number of lexical repetitions suggest an *inclusio* between Stanza 2.1 and 2.4, notably *ina ūme* "on the day" (o.5, 7, 8) and *ūmē annûte* "those days" (r.4); *ĥābirī* "my husband" (o.6) and *ĥābiriya* "my husband" (r.4 and 8); *anāku* "I" (o.5 and 6; r.4). Three strophes can be demarcated. **Strophe 2.4.1** (r.4-5) picks up the theme of Strophe 2.1.2 (o.5-6) with its references to married bliss and companionship ([] *ūmē annûte issi ĥābiriya anāku*" [] those days with my husband I was" in r.4 and *issišu ašbākû ša rā'imāniya* "with him I lived, he who was my lover" in r.5). A turn for the worse is encountered in **Strophe 2.4.2** (r.6-7). Into the most intimate and secure location (*ina bīt mayāliya* "into my bedroom"; r.6) came stealthily creeping (*iĥlulâ ĥillutu* "he crept creeping"; r.6 – note the *figura etymologica*) the worst possible enemy, personified death (*mūtu* "death"; r.6). Death causes estrangement (*issu bītiyâ ussēšanni yāši* "it drove me from my house"; r.7). In **Strophe 2.4.3** (r.8-9) it culminates in ultimate isolation. The intimate relationship with the woman's husband is shattered (*issu pan ĥābiriya iptarsanni yāši* "from the presence of my husband it drove me"; r.8). Again, body imagery enhances the woman's plight. The reader discovers a link between the woman's "covered" (o.1) and "darkened" face (o.7), the goddess' "veiled" face (o.11) and her final detachment from "the face of my husband" (r.8). Death puts the woman's "feet" (*šēpēya* in r.9)¹⁰⁰ in the netherworld (*ina qaqqar lā târiya* "into

⁹⁸ Reiner, *Your Thwarts*, 92.

⁹⁹ 1 sg. verbs: *ašbākû* (r. 5); 1 sg. suffixes: *ĥābiriya* (r.4); *rā'imāniya* (r.5); *bīt mayāliya* (r.6); *bītiyâ* (r.7); *ĥābiriya* (r.8); *šēpēya* (r.9); *lā târiya* (r.9). 1 sg. pronouns: *anāku* (r.4); *yāši* (r.7, 8).

¹⁰⁰ Schroer and Staubli, *Body Symbolism*, 181 remark that "(o)ur feet bind us to the earth." Feet "set" (*šakānum*) in "the land of no return" suggest being permanently "locked" in the netherworld.

a land from which I shall not return"; r.9).¹⁰¹ She reached the final destiny of absolute isolation.

The expectations of disaster and death created by the metaphor of a ship adrift in the introductory section (o.1-3) are realised in the main section (o.3-r.9) of the poem. The voice we hear in the poem is a voice from the grave, the lament of a woman dying at childbirth, the desperate but futile cry for help by a woman abandoned by the deity, isolated from her husband and friends, in terms of both body and space beyond reach, forever isolated.¹⁰²

2 Psalm 13

Superscript 1		למנצח מזמור לדוד	1	To the conductor. A psalm. Of David.
1 .1	2	עד־אנה יהוה תשכחני נצח	2a	How long, YHWH, will you forget me – forever?
		עד־אנה תסתיר את־פניך ממני	b	How long will you hide your face from me?
.2	4	עד־אנה אשית עצות בנפשי	3a	How long should I devise plans by myself,
	5	יגון בלבבי יומם	b	sorrow in my heart the whole day long?
	6	עד־אנה ירום איבי עלי	c	How long will my enemy exalt himself over me?
2 .1	7	הביטה ענני יהוה אלהי	4a	Please look upon, answer me, YHWH my God,
	8	האירה עיני פן־אישן המות	b	enlighten my eyes lest I sleep in death,
.2	9	פן־יאמר איבי יכלתיו	5a	lest my enemy say: "I have overcome him!,"
	10	צרי יגילו כי אמוט	b	my adversaries rejoice because I stumble.
3 .1	11	ואני בחסדך בטחתי	6a	But I – in your unfailing love I trust,

¹⁰¹ The text of the final line is uncertain. Rainer, *Your Thwarts*, 89 transliterates the final phrase as ina qaq-qar la X-X-ti-ia "into a land of. . ." Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit*, 54 transliterates ina qaq-qar la GUR.GUR-ri-ja and translates "in ein land ohne Wiederkehr." I concur with this option and regard GUR as logogram for the Akkadian verb târu(m) "return"; cf. Rykle Borger, *Akkadische Zeichenliste* (AOAT 6; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1971), 31 (cuneiform sign 111). The notion of the netherworld as a "land of no return" is well-known, cf. Ishtar's Journey to the Netherworld 1: a-na KUR.NU.GL₄.A qaq-qa-ri l[a ta-a-ri] "to KURNIGIA, the land of no return..." cf. Rykle Borger, *Die Texte in Umschrift* (vol. 1 of *Babylonisch-Assyrische Lesestücke*; *Analecta orientalia* 54; 2nd ed.; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1979), 95.

¹⁰² Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit*, 55 remarks: "Es gib Fälle, in denen das Geburtsritual nichts nutzte, in denen der Gott oder die Göttin nicht erhörten, und das bedeutete für die Frauen den Tod."

	12	גל לבי בישועתך	b	my heart rejoices in your salvation,
.2	13	אשירה ליהוה	6c	I want to sing to YHWH
	14	כי גמל עלי	d	because he has been good to me.

This brief poem, like most psalms in Book I of the Psalter, is ascribed in the superscript (v. 1) to David as the exemplary suffering but persevering follower of YHWH. In its brevity but eloquence it is a remarkable little poem, consisting of fourteen cola distributed over seven poetic lines. Verse 1 is a monocolon and v. 3 a tri-colon, the remaining five cola are bi-cola. Poetic lines become conspicuously shorter as the poem progresses to its climax.¹⁰³

Apart from the superscript (v. 1) three stanzas can be demarcated. The first (**Stanza 1**: vv. 2-3) contains a *lament*, the second (**Stanza 2**: vv. 4-5) an *urgent plea for deliverance*, the third (**Stanza 3**: v. 6) the poet's *confession of trust*.

Stanza 1 (vv. 2-3) contains the poet's *lament*. It is characterised by the fourfold repetition of the interrogative pronoun עַד־אֵנָה "how long" in four of the five cola (vv. 2a; 2b; 3a; 3c) and the direct confrontation between YHWH (2 m. sg. forms), the suppliant (1 sg. forms) and the enemy (3 m. sg. forms).¹⁰⁴ Thus the three actors usually involved in laments are all introduced in the first stanza.¹⁰⁵

Two strophes can be demarcated. In **Strophe 1.1** (2ab) the repetition of the interrogative pronoun עַד־אֵנָה "how long?" (2a and 2b),¹⁰⁶ the vocative יְהוָה "YHWH" (2a) and the temporal adverb נָצַח "forever" (2a) suggest intense

¹⁰³ Poetic stress patterns occur as follows: v. 2ab: 8 (4+4); v. 3abc: 11 (4+3+4); v. 4ab: 8 (4+4); v. 5ab: 7 (4+3); v. 6ab: 6 (3+3); v. 6cd: 5 (2+3). The progressively shorter cola "markiert die Spitze oder die Plattform, von der aus der Psalmist seinem Gott zu singen gedenkt (6)" (Seybold, *Psalmen*, 64).

¹⁰⁴ For 2 m. sg. forms referring to YHWH, cf. verbs: תִּשְׁכַּחֲנִי (2a); תִּסְתִּיר (2b); suffix: פְּנִיךָ (2b). For 1 sg. forms referring to the suppliant, cf. verb: אֲשִׁיחַ (3a); suffixes: תִּשְׁכַּחֲנִי (2a); מִמֶּנִּי (2b); בִּנְפִשִׁי (3a); בְּלִבִּי (3b); אֵיבִי (3c); עָלַי (3c). For 3 m. sg. forms referring to the enemy, cf. verb: יָרוּם (3c).

¹⁰⁵ Westermann, *Living Psalms*, 69–70 remarks: "What invariably meets us in the psalms is a confrontation between three participants; alongside God and the suppliant, 'the others' are involved, Psalm prayer also has always a communal or social aspect... living with God cannot be separated from living with others." James L. Mays, "Psalm 13," *Int* 34 (1980): 279, calls this three-partite confrontation "the fundamental paradigm of a lament which typically portrays a predicament in terms of you (God), I (the one who prays), and they (the social context of the trouble)." Cf. also Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 57.

¹⁰⁶ For עַד־אֵנָה cf. Exod 16:28; Num 14:11; Josh 18:3; Jer 47:6; Hab 1:2; Ps 62:4; Job 18:2, 19:2. The interrogative pronoun suggests both "eine Anklage" and "die Hoffnung, daß JHWH der beklagten Situation ein Ende setzen wird" (Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 1-50*, 98).

suffering over a long period of time that can only be alleviated by YHWH's direct intervention. The poet laments YHWH's absence, explicated by two verbs suggesting YHWH's negative attitude towards the suppliant: תשכחני "you forget me" (2a) and תסתיר את־פניך ממני "you hide your face from me" (2b).¹⁰⁷ Both actions imply spatial separation, while the interrogative pronouns and adverb suggest temporal separation. The hiding of YHWH's face (cf. the Assyrian Elegy, o.11) is a well-known metaphor for the deity's unwillingness to grant the suppliant an "audience," i.e. to listen to his/her request.¹⁰⁸

The result, expressed in **Strophe 1.2** (3abc), is that the suppliant is isolated from YHWH, left to his/her own devices, and overwhelmed by enmity. The repetition of עַד־אָנָה "how long?" (3a, 3c) and the temporal adverb יוֹמָם "the whole day long"; 3b) continue the notion of temporal separation. The suppliant must devise his/her own plans (עַד־אָנָה אֲשִׁית עֲצוֹת בְּנַפְשִׁי "How long should I devise plans by myself?" 3a) under severe duress (יָגוֹן בְּלִבִּי יוֹמָם "sorrow in my heart the whole day long"; 3b).¹⁰⁹ The suppliant's total being (נַפְשִׁי),¹¹⁰ including his/her intelligence, emotions and understanding (לִבִּי),¹¹¹ is affected by YHWH's abandonment. YHWH's lack of support results in an (unspecified and unidentified) enemy gaining the upper hand (עַד־אָנָה יִרוֹם אִיבִי "how long will my enemy be exalted over me?" 3c). YHWH's absence in both the temporal and spatial spheres (2ab) causes immense suffering *in* the suppliant's body (3ab) and, via the enemy's action, *to* his/her body (3c).¹¹² Spatial and temporal separation from the divine sphere and questions to the "hidden God" thus characterises the first stanza.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Cf. also Ps 10:11.

¹⁰⁸ "Wenn Gott einen Menschen nicht mehr anblickt, dann entzieht er ihm seine Gunst" (Fohrer, *Psalmen*, 145). Cf. Deut 31:17; 32:20; Pss 22:24; 27:8–9; 30:7; 69:17; 88:14; 102:2; 143:7; Isa 8:17; 54:8; Jer 33:5; Mic 3:4 and the discussion in Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 215.

¹⁰⁹ According to J. Clinton McCann, "The Book of Psalms," *NIB* 4: 726, יָגוֹן "indicates the urgency of the situation; it is used elsewhere in the context of the death of individuals (Gen 42:38; 44:31) or of the nation (Jer 8:18)."

¹¹⁰ Cf. Schroer and Staubli, *Body Symbolism*, 56–61 for נַפְשִׁי representing life or the totality of existence.

¹¹¹ Cf. Schroer and Staubli, *Body Symbolism*, 42–44 for the heart as a symbol of the inner person as well as the seat of intelligence.

¹¹² Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 57 refers to the lament as a lament "im Blick auf JHWH" in v. 2, "im Blick auf den Beter" in vs. 3ab, and "in Blick auf den Feind" in v. 3c (italics in the original).

¹¹³ Terrien, *The Psalms*, 159.

Stanza 2 (vv. 4-5) contains the poet's *urgent prayer*. As in Stanza 1, there is a direct confrontation between YHWH (2 m. sg. forms), the suppliant (1 sg. forms), and the enemy (3 m. sg. or pl. forms).¹¹⁴

Two strophes can be demarcated. In **Strophe 2.1** (4ab) the vocative יהוה (4a) and the presence of three imperatives (הביטה "please look upon" and ענני "answer me"; 4a; האירה "please enlighten"; 4b) underlines the urgency of the prayer, while אלהי "my God" (4a) suggests a personal relationship between the suppliant and YHWH. That is the deepest ground for the prayer, a perspective completely absent in the Assyrian Elegy.¹¹⁵ Both YHWH's and the suppliant's bodies are involved in the urgent plea. In 4a YHWH is called upon to look (נבט) and answer (ענה) the petitioner. It stands in sharp contrast to the lament. There (cf. 2ab) YHWH forgot (שכח) the suppliant and hid his face (תסתיר פניך). Those acts of rejection and distancing caused isolation. The plea now is for the restoration of contact.¹¹⁶ In 4b the suppliant's body becomes involved in the plea. YHWH is called upon to enlighten the suppliant's eyes (האירה עיני) because eyes that are "darkened" or "clouded" (cf. the Assyrian Elegy, o.7-8) are associated with death.¹¹⁷ It is confirmed by the phrase introduced by פן in 4b (פן־אישן המות) "lest I sleep in death".¹¹⁸ If YHWH does not bridge the gap and restore contact,

¹¹⁴ For 2 m. sg. forms referring to YHWH, cf. verbs: הביטה (4a); ענני (4a); האירה (4b). For 1 sg. forms referring to the suppliant, cf. verbs: אישן (4b), אמוט (4b); suffixes: ענני (4a), אלהי (4a), עיני (4b), איבי (5a), צרי (5b). For 3 m. sg. or pl. forms referring to the enemy, cf. verbs: יאמר (5a); יגילן (5b). The 1 sg. verb יכלתי (5a) quotes the enemy's direct speech. Odil H. Steck, "Beobachtungen zur Beziehung von Klage und Bitte in Psalm 13," *BN* 13 (1980): 58–59, emphasises the close relationship between lament and prayer in Ps 13 with the three main actors (YHWH, suppliant, enemy) appearing in the same order in both sections (YHWH: 2ab and 4ab; suppliant: 3ab and 4b; enemy: 3c and 5ab); cf. also Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 58.

¹¹⁵ Mays, "Psalm 13," 280 remarks: "When one says 'my God' in prayer, it is a recognition that the possibility of life. . . rests in and emerges from the relation to which the pronoun points."

¹¹⁶ "Gott möge die unterbrochenen Beziehungen wieder aufnehmen, wieder blicken und wieder Hören" (Fohrer, *Psalmen*, 146). Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms* (BOI; Colledgeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 31 remarks: "The distance between God, who 'hides his face,' and the poet is eliminated by calling upon God. . . and invoking him as 'my God,' which adds a note of intimacy."

¹¹⁷ Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 68 points to the parallels between the Aaronic Benediction (Num 6:24–26) and Ps 13:2b and 4b. Numbers 6:25 יאר יהוה פניו עליך "YHWH will make his face shine upon you" stands in sharp contrast to Ps 13:2b עד־אנה תסתיר את־פניך ממני "How long will you hide your face from me?" Numbers 6:26 ישא יהוה פניו אליך "YHWH will lift up his countenance to you," on the other hand, is parallel to Ps 13:4b האירה עיני "please enlighten my eyes." The plea for "enlightened" eyes is a plea for the "Widerschein der Gegenwart Gottes."

¹¹⁸ פן "lest, that not" expresses a fear or precaution. Following upon the imperatives in 4ab, the following two פן-phrases (4b, 5a) express the negative outcome with refer-

the suppliant runs the real risk of experiencing ultimate separation – he/she will die.

Strophe 2.2 (5ab) provides a second reason for the urgent prayer, also introduced by פֶּן “lest” (5a), but now focussing on the enemy.¹¹⁹ YHWH should intervene in order to deprive אִיבִי “my enemy” (5a) the pleasure of saying יִבְלֹתֵהוּ “I have overcome him!” (5a) and צָרִי “my adversaries” (5b) the joy (יִגִּילוּ “they rejoice” in 5b) of seeing the poet stumbling (כִּי אֲמוֹט “that I stumble” in 5b).¹²⁰ The verb מוֹט “stumble” is often associated with the “final” act of stumbling, i.e. death, as is suggested by the word play with the root מוּת “to die” in 4b.¹²¹ The three actors of **Stanza 1** are again encountered in this stanza. The lament with reference to YHWH (2ab) and the poet (3ab) is telescoped into a prayer where the actions of one actor (YHWH) will have an immediate effect upon the well-being of the other (i.e. the poet; cf. 4ab). The negative actions of the enemy, mentioned only briefly in 3c, is elaborated upon in 5ab. If YHWH does not act, final isolation and separation awaits the suppliant.

In **Stanza 3** (v. 6) the poem reaches a climax with the poet’s *confession of trust*.¹²² In this stanza the suppliant refers to him/herself in the first person,¹²³

ence to the suppliant (death, 4b) and his enemy’s state of mind (exulting, rejoicing, 5ab) if YHWH fails to act on his behalf (cf. GCK §152w).

¹¹⁹ Schaefer, *Psalms*, 32 observes that in Stanza 2 three (positive) imperatives are followed by three (negative) results should YHWH not act.

¹²⁰ No specific, individual enemy is mentioned. The enemy is rather a “category” of adversaries (Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 73).

¹²¹ For מוֹט cf. Pss 16:8, 18; 30:7, 10; 55:23, 24; 66:9. The term is associated with the “*Erfahrung des Chaotischen*” (Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 71, italics original); cf. also Nico A. van Uchelen, 1-40 (vol. 1 of *Psalmen*; POut; Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1979), 85.

¹²² Verse 6 contains the so-called “Stimmungsumschwung” often present in individual laments in the Psalter, cf. Beat Weber, “Zum sogenannten ‘Stimmungsumschwung’ in Psalm 13,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (eds. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller; VTSup 99; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 116–21. Fohrer, *Psalmen*, 147 ascribes the change in tone neither to an oracle of salvation nor to already granted salvation, but “soll ausdrücken, daß er der Erhöhung seiner Bitte gewiß ist.” Janowski, *Konfliktgespräche mit Gott*, 77 argues the tension “zwischen erfahrener Gottesverlassenheit und erhoffter Gottesnähe ist für die Klagepsalmen insgesamt und für die Frage des „Stimmungsumschwungs“ im besonderen konstitutiv.” The change in tone is not “sudden” and therefore to be related to an institutional act, but part of “ein Gebetsprozeß. . . der von Anfang an, d.h. mit Beginn des Betens, in Gang kommt und den ganzen Text durchzieht.” Cf. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 1-50*, 98.

¹²³ For 1 sg. forms referring to the suppliant, cf. verbs: בִּטַּחְתִּי “I trust” (6a); אֲשִׁירָה “I want to sing” (6d); pronominal suffixes: לִבִּי “my heart” (6b); עָלַי “to me” (6d); pronoun: וְאֲנִי “but I” (6a).

but YHWH is referred to *directly* in the second person in 6ab,¹²⁴ and *indirectly* in the third person in 6cd.¹²⁵ Lament (Stanza 1) turned into prayer (Stanza 2). Now prayer turns into a confession of trust in 6ab and a proclamation of YHWH's positive role in the suppliant's circumstances (6cd). Significantly יהוה appeared in 2a (lament) and 4a (petition) as vocatives, but in 6c he is referred to in the third person in the context of proclamation.

Two strophes can be demarcated. In **Strophe 3.1** (6ab) the introductory ואני "but I" (6a) stands in sharp contrast to the lamenting and petitioning poet of the first two stanzas.¹²⁶ Lament and urgent petition makes way for trust (ואני יגל לבי "but I – in your unfailing love I trust"; 6a) and rejoicing (יגל לבי "my heart rejoices in your salvation"; 6b). The suppliant's total being (יגל לבי) is involved in the confession of trust as it has been in the initial lament (יגון בלבבי יומם; 3b).¹²⁷ Moreover, the malicious glee of the enemy (cf. יגילו "they rejoice"; 5b) makes room for the poet's heartfelt joy in YHWH's saving grace (6a).¹²⁸ Relations with the divine sphere are restored. The chiasmic relationship between 6a and 6b emphasises the ground for the change in the poet's perspective (cf. בחסדך "in your unfailing love" at the beginning of 6a; בישועתך "in your salvation" at the close of 6b). חסד and ישועה are concepts deeply embedded in YHWH's relationship with his people.¹²⁹ 6ab contextualises the suffering of the individual in the communal history of YHWH and his people. In the context of this bigger picture the suppliant gains perspective, thus in **Strophe 3.2** (6cd) he/she can proclaim his/her joyous intention (אשירה ליהוה "I want to sing to YHWH" in 6c) and motivate it (כי גמל עלי "because he has dealt bountifully with me" in 6d).¹³⁰ Social isolation is also reversed. The suppliant

¹²⁴ For 2 m. sg. forms referring to YHWH, cf. suffixes: בחסדך "in your unfailing love" (6a); בישועתך "in your salvation" (6b).

¹²⁵ For 3 m. sg. forms referring to YHWH, cf. the verb גמל "he has dealt bountifully" (6d).

¹²⁶ Weber, "Zum sogenannten," 127 remarks, "Das hier sprechende 'Ich' ist verbunden mit der vorherigen Ich-Aussagen... sondern es findet auch eine deutliche *Absetzung*... im Vergleich zum Vorhergehenden statt."

¹²⁷ Van Uchelen, 1-40, 86.

¹²⁸ Van Uchelen, 1-40, 86.

¹²⁹ "The petitioner trusts in God's readiness to help, promised in the covenant" and in "the experience of deliverance" (Kraus, *Psalms* 1-59, 216). Weber, "Zum sogenannten," 128 remarks: "Der חסד ist heilvolle Gottes-Präsenz und damit gerade das Gegenteil der eingangs beklagten Gottes-Absenz." For חסד cf. H.-J. Stobel, "חֶסֶד *hesed*," *TDOT* 5:44-64; H. J. Stoebe, "חֶסֶד *hæsæd* Güte," *THAT* 1:600-21. For ישועה cf. J. F. Sawyer and H.-J. Fabry, "ישע' *yš'*," *TDOT* 6:441-61; F. Stolz, "ישע' *yš'* hi. Helfen," *THAT* 1:786-90.

¹³⁰ Both the lament (cf. 3c) and the confession of trust (cf. 6d) end with עלי. In 3c the suppliant laments the exaltation of the enemy "over me." In 6d he/she sings YHWH's praise because he has dealt bountifully "with me"; cf. Schaefer, *Psalms*, 32. גמל על carries the connotation of rewarding someone (positive or negative) beyond merit or

is once again part of a believing community. YHWH's חסד and ישועה moved the sufferer from lament to praise; his suffering has been "transformed and redeemed."¹³¹

The bigger picture is enhanced by a *contextual* reading of Ps 13.¹³² A prominent theme in Ps 12 is the trustworthiness of YHWH's words (12:6-8) versus the deceitfulness of human words (12:3-5). YHWH's promise in 12:6 that he will intervene¹³³ on behalf of the poor and the needy¹³⁴ is challenged by the fourfold repetition of עד־אנה "how long?" in 13:2-3, while the exaltation of vileness amongst humanity (12:9) is seemingly confirmed by the triumph of the enemy over the suppliant in 13:3.¹³⁵ It calls the trustworthiness of YHWH's promise into question and makes the urgent prayer for YHWH's intervention in 12:2 and 13:4 all the more relevant.¹³⁶ However, dependence upon YHWH's חסד and ישועה (13:6) amidst the poet's experience of abandonment and estrangement leads to the observation that only the fool says in his heart "there is no God" (14:1). YHWH is the universally present, active, saving deity. From heaven he looks down upon the sons of man (14:2) to judge humanity and to overwhelm them with dread (14:3-5). YHWH indeed is a refuge for the poor (14:6; cf. 12:6), therefore the poet can ultimately express confidence in YHWH's presence and salvific intervention "from Zion" on behalf of not only the individual sufferer, but collectively on behalf of his "people" (14:7).¹³⁷ The paradigmatic suffering of the individual (Ps 13) is embedded in the trustworthiness of YHWH's promise that he will "now" intervene on behalf of the "poor and needy" (Pss 12, 14) as the universally present God (Ps 14). YHWH's חסד and ישועה ultimately transform lament to song of praise.

worth, cf. 2 Sam 22:21 / Ps 18:21; Joel 4:4; Pss 13:6; 103:10; 116:7; 119:17; 142:8; Prov 11:17; 2 Chr 20:11.

¹³¹ Cf. Tutu, *God has a Dream*, 1.

¹³² Cf. Zenger and Hossfeld, *Psalm 1-50*, 97; Gianni Barbiero, *Das erste Psalmenbuch als Einheit: Eine synchrone Analyse von Psalm 1-41* (ÖBS 16; Berlin/Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), 114-39.

¹³³ Cf. עתה אקום "now I will rise"; Ps 12:6.

¹³⁴ For עני "poor" and אביון "needy" cf. Pss 12:6; 14:6. Contextually it is exactly this "poor" person who becomes the lamenting suppliant in Ps 13.

¹³⁵ Cf. כרם; 12:9 and זלזת לבני אדם; 13:3. Barbiero, *Das erste Psalmenbuch*, 127 remarks: "Es is, als ob der Beter von Ps 13 die Vertrauensaussage von Ps 12 wiederaufnehmen und problematisieren wollte."

¹³⁶ Cf. הושיעה "save"; 12:2; הביטה עוני "look upon, answer me" and האירה "enlighten"; 13:4.

¹³⁷ Cf. the prominent presence of ישע in Pss 12:2, 6; 13:6; 14:7 and גיל in Pss 13:5; 14:7.

D CONCLUSION

In this study my thesis was that the *individual spatial experience* of a sufferer provides a key to a *holistic interpretation of individual laments*. I tested this thesis by utilizing perspective of the *functional-anthropological* and *canonical and redaction-compositional* approaches to the Psalter and applying "space" and "body" theories to two ancient Near Eastern laments. My analysis of the Assyrian Elegy (K 890) and Ps 13 confirmed that the involvement of an *individual* in these laments implies that the experience of suffering is expressed by means of "body language." Both texts also confirmed that suffering is not only a personal, but also a *spatial experience*. Both laments gave voice to feelings of *estrangement* and *separation from the divine and his/her benevolent presence* as well as *social distance and isolation*. Suffering ultimately is an experience akin to *death*. The resulting *discordance* can only be rectified by *divine intervention*, hence both poems contain urgent pleas for the *restoration of relationships* and *divine and social presence*. In the Assyrian Elegy it remained a futile dream and in the end we hear the suffering woman's voice from the "land of no return" (r.9). In Ps 13 trust in YHWH's *חסד* and *ישועה* allows the suppliant to close his lament with a joyful song and to confess that "YHWH has been good to me" (v. 6b). The difference in outcome, though, does not affect the interpretational key. Body language, spatial experience and the orientation of the suffering body in space can guide modern readers towards a holistic interpretation of ancient Near Eastern laments.

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Gert Prinsloo, Department of Ancient Languages, University of Pretoria, 0002 Pretoria, South Africa. *Email*: gert.prinsloo@up.ac.za.