
Living Faith in Adversity: The Psalms of Solomon Proposal

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Abstract: Pseudepigraphic literature is a privileged place from which to explore the experience of the faith in Judaism at the turn of the era. This article studies the Psalms of Solomon, specifically Psalms 2, 8 and 17, to determine how the loss, to the Romans, of Jewish sovereignty affected this group. To this end, we follow Lloyd Bitzer's theory of the Rhetorical Situation to reconstruct the historical context in which each psalm arose. Moreover, we analyse the *modus vivendi* that the psalmists propose at each specific moment to

its addressees. In this way, we actualize the guidelines established to maintain faith and identity of the group during the post-war period. We conclude that faithfulness to the covenant and trust in God as the only one who has the capacity to resolve the crisis are proposed as the keys to maintaining the group's identity.

Keywords: Pseudepigraphic Literature - Rhetorical Situation - Pompey - Davidic Messiah - Alliance - *Modus vivendi*.

Vivir la fe en la adversidad: la propuesta de los salmos de Salomón

Resumen: La literatura pseudoepigráfica es un lugar privilegiado para explorar la experiencia de fe en el judaísmo del cambio de época. Este artículo estudia los Salmos de Salomón, específicamente los Salmos 2, 8 y 17, para determinar cómo la pérdida a manos de los romanos de la so-

beranía judía afectó a este grupo. Para ello, se aplica la teoría de la Situación Rhetórica de Lloyd Bitzer para reconstruir el contexto histórico en el que surgió cada salmo. Además, se analiza el *modus vivendi* que los salmistas proponen en cada momento concreto a sus destinatarios. De

esta manera, se ponen de relieve las pautas de conducta establecidas para mantener la fe y la identidad del grupo durante la posguerra. Se concluye que la fidelidad a la alianza y la confianza en Dios como el único que tiene la capacidad de resolver la crisis se proponen como claves para mantener la identidad del grupo.

Palabras Clave: Literatura pseudoepígrafa – Situación retórica – Pompeyo – Mesías davídico – Alianza – Modus vivendi.

In the Jewish context, we find several works of diverse origins and genres in which there is a concern to offer their audience an answer to the crisis that arose among the Jews when they were subjected to the yoke of Rome. Among them is the collection Psalms of Solomon (PsSal)¹. This article examines PsSal 2, 8 and 17, the so-called “Historical Psalms” of the collection, a designation occasioned by the abundant and clear references to events that happened at the beginning of the Roman domination of Judea in the 1st century BCE². In these psalms, as well as historical events, one finds the solution that the authors provide so that their audience may face this crisis while keeping their identity and faith intact.

One of the premises of this research is the application to PsSal of the theory of “The Rhetorical Situation” of texts elaborated by Bitzer, and subsequently developed by other authors³. One of the best applications is found in Schüssler Fiorenza’s work on the book of Revelation⁴. For Bitzer, the original meaning of a text is recovered, in the first place, by reconstructing, as far as possible, with the help of extra-textual sources, the socio-

¹ In addition to the Psalms of Solomon, which are the subject of this article, there are some works from Qumran (1QpHab or 1QM), The Sibylline Oracles 4 and 5, The Apocalypse of Abraham, 4 Esdras, 2 Baruch or The War of the Jews by Flavius Josephus.

² REGGIANI, C.K., “I Salmi di Salomone, una testimonianza storica”, in *Annali di storia dell’esegesi* 15 (1998), 448; NICKELSBURG, G.W.E., *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah. A Historical and Literary Introduction*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 2005, 238-248.

³ BITZER, L.F., “The Rhetorical Situation”, in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968) 1-14; Vatz, R.E., “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation”, in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 6 (1973) 154-57; Biesecker, B.A., “Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of Difference”, in *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 22 (1989) 110-30; Garret, M. – Xiao, X., “The Rhetorical Situation Revisited”, in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 23 (1992) 30-40.

⁴ SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, E., *REVELATION: Vision of a Just World*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1991, 133-136.

historical circumstances in which the text was composed. This reconstruction is not merely speculative but brings to light the rhetorical situation in which the textual proposal makes sense: its real historical-rhetorical situation. Secondly, the analysis of how the text deals with the challenges generated by these historical circumstances provides another element: the textual rhetorical situation, which is the response given to the concerns of the audience with the aim of effecting certain attitudes in the group. The sum of both elements, the historical and the textual, allows recovery of the original rhetorical sense of the text.

This research is divided into two parts. First, we bring to light the real historical-rhetorical situation of each of the three “Historical Psalms”. The second part explains how this situation was understood in each psalm and what was proposed to the addressees to engage it. Special attention is paid to *Modus Vivendi*: the suggestions made to the audience regarding the way they might relate to their occupiers, and the behaviour they might assume in order not to dilute their identity.

The investigation of the historical verities contained in these hymns enables a diachronic perspective on the collection. This view allows us to identify the evolution in the interpretation of events, as well as the response offered to the audience in facing them. This solution involves adopting a non-belligerent stance with respect to Rome, being faithful to the covenant maintaining the hope in God and, ultimately, imitating the messianic king whose coming is invoked.

1. The Real Historical-Rhetorical Situation of Psalms of Solomon

The PsSal is a collection of 18 hymns composed in or near Jerusalem in the late 1st century BCE. Its current arrangement is due to a compiler who attributes the work to King Solomon to give it a higher authority⁵.

⁵ The final compiler or redactor also elaborated the psalms that begin and end the composition (PsSal 1 and PsSal 18) and titled each psalm, cf. Atkinson, K., *I Cried to the Lord. A Study of Psalms of Solomon's Historical Background and Social Setting*, Brill, Leiden 2004, 204-209; Winnige, M., *Sinners and the Righteous. A Comparative Study of the Psalms of Solomon and Paul's Letters (=CB.NT 26)*, Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm 1995, 20. The consideration of Solomon as the model of wisdom explains his attribution, as well as that of the works of Pr, Si, Ct and Sb. It was claimed that he had composed 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs (cf. 1 Kgs 4:32). For this reason, in some codices the

While only Greek and Syriac witnesses of the text survive, most exegetes postulate a Hebrew original that served as 'the basis for an early Greek translation⁶. The authorship of PsSal is attributed to scribes of an unknown Jewish sect in the Second Temple period, whose interpretation of the Law was close to that of the Pharisees, and opposed to the interpretation of the Sadducees⁷. As with the collections that comprise the canonical psalter, it is not easy to establish a motif that grants the work its unity. Most obviously, PsSal 17 and 18 close the collection, as this is the final message the compiler wanted to convey to the hearers of his time.

The analysis of the psalms will follow the chronology proposed by Atkinson⁸. First, we study PsSal 8, which, since there is no reference to it in the psalm, most likely predates Pompey's death (63-48 BCE); then, PsSal 2, where quite an accurate knowledge of the end of Pompey is in evidence, but without any mention of Herod the Great's ascent to power (48-37 BCE); finally, PsSal 17, which alludes to the end of the Hasmoneans and the beginning of the reign of Herod I over Judea (37-30 BCE). These dates correspond to the possible terminus ad quo and terminus ad quem

PsSal appear alongside other canonical and apocryphal wisdom books. Gordley argues that aim of the attribution to Solomon is to contrast the decadent era of the author/s with the glorious reigns of David and Solomon, especially, in the important matters such as the leadership of the country and the temple, cf. Gordley, M.E., "Psalms of Solomon as Solomonic Discourse: The Nature and Function of Attribution to Solomon", in *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 25 (2015) 52-88.

⁶ This has recently been contested by Joosten, but his work has had little impact. In recent years, the tendency to dismiss the Syriac translation as a translation from the Greek has been reversed. The Syriac version does not depend on a Hebrew original, but on a different Greek translation which has not come down to us. Moreover, the Syriac version is missing Psalms 1, 2 and part of Psalms 3 and 17 and all of Psalm 18. Trafton, J. L., *The Syriac Version of the Psalms of Solomon. A Critical Evaluation*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 1985; J. Joosten, "Reflections on the Original Language of the Psalms of Solomon", in Bons, E. – Pouchelle, P. (eds.), *The Psalms of Solomon: Language, History, Theology (=SBLJL 40)*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2015, 31-48; Atkinson, K., "Toward a Redating of the Psalms of Solomon: Implications for Understanding the Sitz im Leben of an Unknown Jewish Sect", in *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 17 (1998), 99-100.

⁷ ATKINSON, *I Cried to the Lord*, 220-222; WERLINE, R. A., "The Psalms of Solomon and the Ideology of Rule", in WRIGHT III, B. – BENJAMIN, G. – WILLS, L. M. (eds.), *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism (=SBL.SymS 35)*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2005, 81-82.85.

⁸ ATKINSON, "Toward a Redating", 95-112.

of the composition of each psalm. The study of the data will show that this dating is the most appropriate and, therefore, will clarify the real historical-rhetorical situation of each psalm, which allows a better understanding of its meaning.

1.1. The Historical Context of PsSal 8

The description in vv.1-2 of the arrival, through the desert, of a mighty army in Jerusalem coincides with the historical account of the arrival of the Roman army under Pompey's command in the capital by way of Jericho⁹. The recourse to the biblical imagery commonly used to describe the action of the armies that were on a campaign to tell the historical event lends credibility to the account¹⁰.

Vv. 15-21 contain the majority of the references to Pompey's conquest of the capital, which state that, at the head of the army comes a foreigner, responsible for bringing the war to Jerusalem and Judea, who was welcomed by "the leaders of the country" (vv.15-16)¹¹. This seems a clear allusion to the embassies that the Hasmonean brothers, Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, had sent to Pompey to seek Rome's support for their cause to settle their dispute over the throne and the High Priesthood of Judea. Alongside these, another embassy of the people's representatives asked Pompey not to support either of the brothers or allow them re-establish a theocracy¹².

Vv. 17-18 describe Pompey's entry into Jerusalem, facilitated by the supporters of Hyrcanus II. These, supported by the majority of the people afraid of the strength of the Roman army, were in favour of surrendering the city, opening its gates to the legions, and handing over the Hasmonean palace to the Roman general¹³. In vv.19-21, it is narrated how the Romans seized the fortresses and walls protecting the temple, which were in the

⁹ Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 14,54; *B. J.* 1,139.

¹⁰ The voice of trumpets is mentioned in vv.1-2. (cf. *Josh* 6:5; *Jer* 4:19,21; *Ezek* 33:4-5), as well as the hurricane wind (cf. *Jer* 4:12-13), the whirlwind (cf. *Isa* 21:1) and finally the fire, a possible allusion to the fact that behind the coming of the foreign armies is the hand of God, who uses fire as an instrument in his judgments on the nations (cf. *Isa* 66:15-16). These prophetic texts resonate in the Psalms, even if the quotations are not taken literally.

¹¹ PsSal quotations are taken from Atkinson's translation; Atkinson, *I Cried to the Lord*.

¹² Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 14,34-47; *B. J.* 1,131-132.

¹³ Cf. "Most of the city, to be sure, he (Pompey) took without any trouble, as he was received by the party of Hyrcanus", *Dio Cassius, Hist.* 37,16.1.

hands of the supporters of Aristobulus II¹⁴. Their resistance caused their commanders, along with other nobles and citizens of Jerusalem, to be executed by the conquerors¹⁵. Mention is also made of the deportation of the families of the defeated who, together with thousands of other prisoners from the campaigns in the East, were taken to Rome to be exhibited in Pompey's Triumph (61 BCE)¹⁶.

The psalm's fear that "the nations swallow us up" seems to indicate that at the time of its composition there was still an atmosphere of uncertainty among the population, and fear of Roman reprisals for the resistance the city had offered (v.30)¹⁷. This is entirely compatible with the early days of the occupation of a place when conquerors and vanquished have not yet fully adapted to the new situation.

1.2. The Historical Context of PsSal 2

PsSal 2 begins with the description of the fall of Jerusalem once the walls had been breached by battering rams. This is in line with the historicity of the siege machines that Pompey's army brought with them from the city of Tyre to demolish the temple fortifications (v.1)¹⁸. It continues with the desecration of the sanctuary by the conquerors, alluding to the entry of Pompey and his entourage into the sancta sanctorum of the temple: "foreign nations went up to your altar, in pride they trampled it with their sandals" (v.2)¹⁹. Later, it is mentioned how the sons and daughters of the families who fought against Pompey were enslaved (v.6)²⁰. Vv. 19-

¹⁴ Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 14,58-63; B. J. 1,142-43; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 37,16.1-2.

¹⁵ Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 14,66-68.69-76.79; B. J. 1,148-154.157-158. The sources report the death of twelve thousand Jews, including many priests, and the beheading of Aristobulus II's father-in-law and the leaders of the resistance, mostly members of the Sadducean aristocracy.

¹⁶ Just as Aristobulus II and his family were taken to Rome, it should not be surprising that other notables of the people accompanied them, as was the custom among the Romans, cf. Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 37,16.4; Plutarch, *Lives Pomp.* 45,5.

¹⁷ Atkinson, *I Cried to the Lord*, 64.

¹⁸ Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 14,58-69; B. J. 1,147; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 37,16.2.

¹⁹ Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 14, 69-76; B. J. 1, 1,152.

²⁰ The "seal" and "mark" refer to the common practice of marking slaves, mainly on the hand or forehead, and to the collars that were put on them. 4QpNah 3-4 IV 2-4 also reflects the slaughter and enslavement of Sadducees that took place after Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem, a valuable testimony that confirms the veracity of the information in PsSal 2:6 and PsSal 8:20-21. WINNINGE, *Sinners and the Righteous*, 32; DIMANT, D., "Qumran Sectarian Literature", in STONE, M. E. (ed.), *The Literature of the Jewish People in the Period*

21.24 depict the humiliation and despoilment that the invasion of Jerusalem has brought upon the people. To describe this, vv. 19-21 use the metaphor of the fall and fate of Aristobulus II, who, divested of his status as king and High Priest, was taken captive to Rome²¹. All these facts point to PsSal 2 being composed at a time after PsSal 8 when the consequences of the Roman invasion were still seen only as a threat.

The most reliable historical reference for dating PsSal 2 appears in vv. 26-27: “And I did not wait long until God showed me his insolence, pierced, on the mountains of Egypt, more despised than the smallest thing on land and sea; His body, was carried about the waves in great shame, and there was no one to bury him, for he had rejected h'm in dishonour”. The description of the manner of death, the place and what happened to Pompey's corpse is in accordance with the information in the historical sources²². The psalmist turns again to the OT to give a deeper meaning to this event and to show that this is the fate God has reserved for those who rise up against his people²³. The psalm includes in this part more information corroborating that this allusion refers to Pompey's death: the mention of the Roman general's excessive pride (vv.25.29.31)²⁴; the claim “I will be lord of land and sea”, referring to his victorious campaigns that were a cause of admiration among his contemporaries (v.29)²⁵; the adjective “great”, is an ironic allusion to the nickname given to the general (v.29)²⁶.

of the Second Temple and the Talmud: Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period. Volumen II (=CRINT 2/2), Brill, Leiden 1984, 511-512.

²¹ Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 14,79; Plutarch, *Lives Pomp.*, 45,5; Ps 89,40.

²² Cf. Plutarch, *Lives Pomp.* 79-80; Lucan, *Pharsalia* 8,535-870; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 45,5.6.

²³ Isa 14:19 LXX announces the death of the king of Babylon and says that he will be “cast upon the mountains like an abominable corpse”, while Ezek 32:2-9 LXX speaks of Pharaoh as the dragon, of whom God says: “I will lay your flesh upon the mountains”. Translator's note.

²⁴ Cf. Caesar, *Civ.* 2,86; Lucan, *Pharsalia.* 8,521-522.605-608.708-711.

²⁵ Cf. Plutarch, *Lives Pomp.* 45,2; 46,1. Plutarch states that people compared Pompey to Alexander the Great because of the number of his conquests and his victory about the pirates which brought the Rome's control of the Mediterranean. It is interesting to note the psalmist's skilful use of irony as an argument for his theology. Against a mortal's claim to dominion and sovereignty over the world, he refers to the biblical texts of divine sovereignty: Ps 24:1; Ps 33:8-9; Ps 89:11; Is 61:6; Nah 1:5. He also ridicules the Roman general's nickname ‘great’, evoking the texts that sing of divine greatness: 1Ch 16:25; Ps 96:4; Is 12:6; Jer 10:6; Neh 1:5.

²⁶ In v.29 the author makes a play on words with the nickname Magnus given to Pompey for his successful military career and the benefits it had brought to Rome. Cf. Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 37,21.3; Plinio Elder, *Hist Nat.* 7,95-98.

1.3. *The Historical Context of PsSal 17*

In vv. 5-6 the rise to power of a dynasty that does not belong to the Davidic lineage and its fall is related. The disappearance of this royal family was the work of a non-Jew who has been responsible for executing all possible candidates for the throne (vv.7-9). The events referred to in these verses allude, first of all, to the establishment as rulers of the Hasmoneans, whom the author accuses of illegitimately appropriating the royal office²⁷: “they laid waste the throne of David in tumultuous arrogance”. It was Aristobulus I who united the kingship and the High Priesthood in his person, causing discontent in some sectors of Jewish society by breaking the recent tradition of the election of warrior leaders by the people²⁸. After their defeat by Pompey, the Hasmoneans lost the monarchy, but retained their priestly office²⁹. Therefore, v.7 cannot refer to Pompey’s conquest since the Hasmonean family continued to occupy positions of responsibility, albeit subject to Rome.

The information in the psalm reflects well, however, Herod I’s elimination of all possible Hasmonean aspirants to the throne. The first was Antigonus, the son of Aristobulus II, who, after the death of Julius Caesar, supported by Ptolemy, king of Chalcidice, and the Parthians, attempted to reclaim the crown. Defeated by Herod and the Roman general Sosius in 37 BC, he was assassinated because of the danger he represented to the stability of the new monarch. Later, Herod, seeing that Aristobulus III, Antigonus’ nephew, was gaining the sympathy of the people, assassinated him, even though he had named him High Priest in place of his uncle Hyrcanus II. Finally, he ordered the execution of Hyrcanus II under the pretext of corruption and treason and appointed a High Priest who did not belong to the Hasmonean family³⁰.

²⁷ The author of Psalms 17 supports a Davidic monarchy under God’s election and protection. Unlike others, such as the qumramites (cf. 1QpHab 8:8-13; 9:2; 11:4-8,12-15; 12:2-6,7-10; 4QpPsa 4:8-9), the psalmist does not seem to have a problem with the Hasmoneans exercising the priestly function. This was not the case in PsSal 2 and 8, where the priestly caste, headed by the Hasmonean nobility, was severely criticised.

²⁸ Cf. 1 Macc 9,30; 13,7; Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 13,201; 14,37-45.

²⁹ After his victory, Pompey promoted his ally Hyrcanus II to power, but only as High Priest, cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 14,69-77; *B. J.* 1,153.

³⁰ Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 14,123-126. 297-300. 330-487; 15,5-10.39- 41. 50-56. 161-178; *B. J.* 1,183-186. 238-239. 247-357. 433-437.

In these verses, the psalmist provides further information about the figure of King Herod. For many Jews, Herod, due to his Idumean ancestry, was considered “a man... foreign to our race” (v.7); therefore, it can be said of him that he had a “heart was alien from our God” (v.13). A large part of the population did not appreciate the new monarch for his violent character and due to the suspicion that his father caused the fratricidal confrontation leading to the capture of Jerusalem in 63 BCE (v.13)³¹. When v.9 says, “God will not have mercy upon them; he has sought out their offspring and let not one of them go free”, it is to be inferred that the psalmist knows of the death of the last Hasmonean royal offsprings, Antigonus and Aristobulus III. All this places the composition of PsSal 17 after 36 BCE.

Consequently, vv.11-14 may be seen as reporting Herod’s actions in Jerusalem. V.11 addresses what happened during the capture of the city in 37 BCE, when the Roman-Herodian army, short-tempered due to the prolonged siege, perpetrated a massacre so bloody that it forced Herod to demand that the Roman general Sosius put an end to it³². In v.12, some of the measures taken by Herod when he installed himself on the throne of Jerusalem are referred to: the handing over of Antigonus to Sosius to be taken to Rome (The West) as a prisoner³³; the purge of Antigonus’ supporters, killing forty-five of them and publicly exposing their corpses to the point of decomposition³⁴; Finally, in v.14 we find the modernisation programme that Herod implemented in Jerusalem following the pattern of the Hellenistic cities³⁵.

³¹ Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 14,8.13; 163-167; 399-406; *B. J.* 1,123-125.

³² “And soon every quarter was filled with the blood of the slain, for the Romans were furious at the length of the siege, while the Jews on Herod’s side were anxious not to leave a single adversary alive. And so they were slaughtered in heaps, whether crowded together in alleys and houses or seeking refuge in the temple; no pity was shown either to infants or the aged, nor were weak women spared...” (cf. *Ant.* 14,480-481). The theme of child murder in PsSal 17:11 eventually became a traditional motif (cf. Mt 2,16-18). K. ATKINSON, “Herod the Great, Sosius, and the Siege of Jerusalem (37 B.C.E.) in Psalm of Solomon 17”, *Novum Testamentum* 38 (1996) 313-222, here 320-321.

³³ Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 14,487.

³⁴ Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 15,5-11.

³⁵ According to Josephus, Herod rebuilt the Temple Tower in Jerusalem, which he named “Antonia” in honour of his benefactor Mark Antony. He erected his own royal palace in the upper part of the city with beautiful buildings, which he gave the name of his friends. He made parks around the palace, criss-crossed by promenades and streams, with

2. The Modus Vivendi of Psalms of Solomon

A main feature of all three psalms is the attempt to respond to the new socio-political situation, which arose from the loss of the Jewish national sovereignty by the Romans (63 BCE)³⁶. By recalling the historical events that affected the life of the group, the authors present the attitudes that they consider the audience should adopt in order to face their situation without renouncing their own identity traits³⁷. The fact that the collection was composed over three decades permits us to see whether there was a development in response to this particular Jewish group.

2.1. Behaviour to be adopted according to PsSal 8

At the beginning of PsSal 8, the psalmist expresses the hope that God will repulse the foreign army approaching Jerusalem in fulfilment of his covenant (vv.3-6)³⁸. However, subsequent reflection upon what had happened brought him to change this initial view (vv.7-22). PsSal 8, like PsSal 2 and PsSal 17, uses Deuteronomistic theology to interpret past events, beginning from its fundamental axiom: justice brings salvation and injustice involves punishment³⁹. In this way, an attempt is made to safeguard the

artificial lakes and adorned with bronze statues. He also introduced Greek officials, such as the brothers Nicholas and Ptolemy of Damascus, into the high administration of the state. In all this, however, he acted very intelligently to avoid offending the Jewish people. For this reason, he only minted coins without a human effigy and entrusted the rebuilding of the temple to the priests of Jerusalem (cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 15,403-424; *B. J.* 1,401-430).

³⁶ Gordley, "Psalms of Solomon", 367.

³⁷ Gordley, M. E., "Creating Meaning in the Present by Reviewing the Past: Communal Memory in the Psalms of Solomon", en *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 5 (2014), 371-372.

³⁸ A fundamental characteristic of divine justice is God's saving action on behalf of his people (cf. Deut 33:21; Isa 41:10; 51:6-8; 56:12-13; Mic 6:5; Ps 103:6; Dan 9:16; Mal 3:20), especially in Jerusalem, the abode of justice (cf. Isa 1:21,26; 9:6; 11:4; 54:14; 60:17; Jer 23:6; 31:23; 50:7; Zeph 3:5). J. J. Scullion, "Righteousness (OT)", in Freedman, D. N. (ed.) *Anchor Bible Dictionary IV*, Doubleday, New York 1992, 735.

³⁹ HORBURY, W., "The Remembrance of God in the Psalms of Solomon", en BURTON, S. C. – STUCKENBRUCK, L. T. – WOLD, B. G. (eds.), *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity* (=WUNT 212; Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2007, 111-128; EMBRY, B., "Some Thoughts on and Implication for Genre Categorization in the Psalms of Solomon", in BONS E. – P. POUCHELLE, P. (eds.) *The Psalms of Solomon: Language, History, Theology* (=SBLEJL 40), Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2015, 66-67; WERLINE, "The Psalms of Solomon.", 72-74.

image of a just God and to show that the sins of the people have caused the loss of Israel's sovereignty⁴⁰. Thus, the author of PsSal 8 interprets the occupation of Jerusalem as an act of divine justice in response to the breaking of the covenant. Those most responsible for this punishment were the rulers of the nation, especially the priestly nobility, who controlled the temple, as well as being one of the principal supporters of the Hasmonean kings. According to the psalmist, God has exposed their improper cultic practice and reprehensible behaviour (cf. Ps 8:8-22; Ps 2:3-18)⁴¹. In this context, Pompey is seen as God's envoy to punish Israel (vv.15,17,19). The Romans are thus perceived as an instrument of divine justice and exonerated from being primarily responsible for the suffering endured by the group.

After the fall of Jerusalem, the psalmist calls for patient acceptance of the new situation. The reason for this petition is that through it, God seeks to correct all His people, including the righteous, so that they may remain within the realm of the covenant (v.26)⁴². The audience is therefore exhorted to welcome suffering as a necessary remedy that prepares and disposes them to enjoy the divine promises once again. This acceptance is not simply resignation, but involves a certain way of acting that includes acknowledging sin, remaining faithful to God, and praying for God's mercy to protect the people (vv.27-30). In fact, this is the behaviour already adopted by the psalmist's group. He is convinced that the conduct of his group will bring God's deliverance from the oppression that the people suffer by the Gentiles and, moreover, will reunite the scattered Jews (v.28). This certainty is based on the previous experience of the sin of the leaders

⁴⁰ "Judgement... one the most important themes in the PsSol... is most relevant in the historical psalms, which probably is due to the fact that the historical events have forced the community to reflect on whether God's judgements are righteous or not", Winninge, *Sinners and the Righteous*, 67-68.

⁴¹ Also in Qumran, the Roman invasion is interpreted as divine punishment for the sins of the priests (cf. 1QpHab 9,4-7).

⁴² The punishment is not an end in itself, but a way of seeking reconciliation between God and his people. This theme recurs in PsSal and is expressed by the term *paideia*. The main purpose of correction is to purify the worshipper and atone for sins committed often ignorantly or unintentionally (cf. PsSal 3:7; 10:1; 13:7,10; 18:4). Atkinson, K., "Theodicy in the Psalms of Solomon" in Laato, A. A. – Moor, J. C. (eds.), *Theodicy in the World of the Bible. The Goodness of God and the Problem of Evil*, Brill, Leiden 2003, 562-569; Winninge, *Sinners and the Righteous*, 137-140.205-208.

of the nation who have brought trouble upon Israel. On the other hand, the acceptance of the new status quo is very necessary at the beginning of a new power's control of a territory, a time of great uncertainty for both conquered and conquerors. This is reflected in the fear expressed by the psalmist (v.30).

PsSal 8 concludes by glorifying God and his covenant, highlighting the psalmist's conviction of the continuity existing between the Israel of the promises and his group (vv.31-34). In doing so, consolation and guidance are offered to the audience during these turbulent events⁴³. In these final verses, the hearer is invited to continue to praise God, "our savior", and to remain faithful to him because one must firmly believe in the fulfilment of his promises (v.34). For the psalmist, the salvation depends on choice and maintaining this status involves being righteous, that is, remaining loyal and obedient to God (vv.31-34)⁴⁴.

2.2. *Behaviour to be adopted according to PsSal 2*

The position taken in PsSal 2 with respect to the Romans is very different from that in PsSal 8. Pompey is no longer seen as God's instrument for the correction of the people, and is now a sinner, the dragon, the arrogant one (vv.1.2.25.29.31)⁴⁵. The Romans are described as abusers, plunderers, people full of pride, rage and anger (vv.2.23.24). This vision is due to the invaders' treatment of the temple, desecrating it and taking some of the treasure (v. 2.19)⁴⁶, the mistreatment and plunder of Jerusalem, which had to pay 10.000 talents a year to Rome, and the fact that from that time onwards Judea became a vassal state⁴⁷. All this provoked the au-

⁴³ Cf. Deut 28,1-14; PsSal 9,1.8. Embry, "Some Thoughts.", 74.76-77.

⁴⁴ DE JONGE, M., "The Expectation of the Future in the Psalms of Solomon", in *Neotestamentica* 23 (1989), 97.

⁴⁵ The image of the dragon is applied to figures who have been hostile to Israel, such as Nebuchadnezzar or Pharaoh. Cf. Ezek 29,3; 32,2. Atkinson, K., *An Intertextual Study of the Psalms of Solomon Pseudepigrapha*, Edwin Mellen Press, New York 2001, 38-40; Werline, "The Psalms of Solomon.", 75-76.

⁴⁶ Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 14, 69-76; 15,417; B. J. 1, 1,152; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 37,16.4. Unlike Josephus who, while scandalised by the act, praises Pompey as religious and full of virtue, the author of PsSal 2 makes a totally negative portrait of the general. Hadas-Lebel, M., *Jerusalem against Rome (=Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 7)*, Peeters, Leuven 2006, 21-23.

⁴⁷ Cf. Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 14,78; B. J. 1,154.

thor to fear for the country's survival (vv.23-24). What in PsSal 8 was only a fear became a reality (cf. PsSal 8:30). The consequences of Roman rule had changed the psalmist's group's perception of the conquerors. In a few years, they changed from calling for protection against them to praying for God to do justice and punish them, since, as sinners, they deserve the same sentence as Jerusalem (v.25).

From v.26 onwards, the psalm moves from the past to the present of the author and his audience, explaining how God has listened to the group's petitions and has done justice by punishing Pompey. The death of the man who had hitherto seemed invincible sets the stage for the psalmist openly to express his rejection of the situation in his country⁴⁸. For PsSal 2, the assassination of the Roman general is the beginning of the desired change, which will lead to glorifying God's faithful and punishing those who do not recognise him (vv.26-31). The fall of Pompey is God's warning to "officials of the earth" to let them know that no one is above God's justice, a justice that shames those who rise against Israel (vv.18.30.32)⁴⁹.

The exhortation of PsSal 2 is very brief (vv.32-37), and like PsSal 8, is full of covenant language, especially in the clauses introduced by the particle ὅτι (vv.32b.33b.36). It presents how the group's faithfulness and trust in the divine justice have been rewarded and, therefore, encourages a positive vision for the future⁵⁰. To the psalmist, with the fall of Pompey, God's mercy has been revealed on behalf of his people, and the reward that awaits the righteous has begun (v.31.35)⁵¹. This change in the people's situation depends entirely on God; the only task of the audience is to remain faithful to the covenant, while praising God and patiently awaiting deliverance from the oppressive power, which had already been inaugurated in the punishment of Pompey (vv.33-36)⁵². Unlike PsSal 8, the theme of

⁴⁸ The conqueror of Jerusalem's dead changed the socio-political circumstances around the psalmist. This led him to make public what had hitherto only been a private prayer, cf. Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 41,52 – 42,20.

⁴⁹ Cf. Isa 45,16.25.

⁵⁰ Winninge, *Sinners and the Righteous*, 27. Atkinson, "Theodicy in the Psalms", 570; Keddie, G. A., *Revelations of Ideology: Apocalyptic Class Politics in Early Roman Palestine* (=JSJS 189), Brill, Leiden 2018, 97.

⁵¹ Atkinson, "Theodicy in the Psalms", 558; Winninge, *Sinners and the Righteous*, 27.33-34.

⁵² "Prayer is the only form of human agency urged throughout the text, and its aim is to

correction is absent in PsSal 2. This indicates the psalmist's belief that this stage has already been completed. Therefore, the audience is praised and encouraged to persevere in the wise attitude of repentance and fulfilment of the covenant (vv.22.33-35), while keeping their patience and trust in God intact (vv.36-37)⁵³. The characterisation of the audience as "his pious ans his servants" (vv.36-37) reinforces this invitation to continu^e in faithful observance of the Law.

2.3. Behaviour to be adopted according to PsSal 17

PsSal 17 begins and ends with a confession of God as Israel's eternal king (vv.1.46). This affirmation of God's sovereignty has a political focus, in contrast to PsSalms 2 and 8, where it was concerned with halakhic discussions. To the author, the fact that God is the true king implies that all forms of government must come from him⁵⁴. In consequence, the judgement of the Hasmonean monarchy, explicitly, and, implicitly, of the incipient Herodian reign, were considered fraudulent governments (vv.5-20). Thus, the Davidic monarchy alone had the divine support necessary for the legitimate rule of Israel's destiny (vv.4.6).

The hope of the group, according to PsSal 2, was that God would continue the way that had begun in the punishment of Pompey, so that Israel would be finally delivered from Roman domination. However, PsSal 17 affirms that, by virtue of his justice, God had used Herod to punish the Hasmoneans for their crimes against him and the Israel (vv.7-10). This change, however, has not resulted in an improvement in the living conditions of the group; on the contrary, corruption has reached an intolerable point and the power of the foreign conquerors has been strengthened (v.

provoke divine intervention in history...The Psalms of Solomon envisages no other form of human agency to relieve human suffering than prayer", Keddie, *Revelations of Ideology*, 97.

⁵³ To the author of PsSal 2, God's faithfulness to the covenant includes punishing the proud who reject him and crush his people (cf. Ps 94:4-7). Therefore, the demand for justice takes on a certain vengeance tone. Mafico, T. L. J., "Just, Justice", in Freedman, D. N. (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary III*, Doubleday, New York 1992, 1128.

⁵⁴ FREYNE, S., "The Herodian Period", in BOCKMUEHL, M. – CARLETON PAGET, J. (eds.), *Redemption and Resistance. The Messianic Hopes of Jews and Christians in Antiquity*, T&T Clark, London 2009, 30-31; WINNINGE, *Sinners and the Righteous*, 99.

17,15.18-20)⁵⁵. The psalmist considers that, to reverse this situation, continuing to remain faithful to the covenant is not enough (cf. Ps 2:33-37; 8:25-34).

The proposed solution is made explicit in vv. 21-22, the most important part of the psalm at the communicative level. This proposal involves the group accepting the course of action that God had been using to correct the people. A foreigner is no longer needed to punish Jerusalem, since the Hasmoneans and their supporters have lost all power⁵⁶; This explains the hostile attitude, much more marked than in the other psalms in the collection, towards the Gentiles, who are to be shattered, purged, smashed, destroyed, put under his yoke, rebuked and removed (vv.22-25.30.36)⁵⁷. The other psalms had appealed to God to intervene directly on behalf of his people⁵⁸. In this one, the psalmist, appealing to the Davidic covenant, exhorts the audience to ask God to send a descendant of David. This king would vicariously occupy the throne and rule over Israel, maintaining the people's faithfulness to the covenant, casting out from God's inheritance all who defile it, and securing deliverance from the dominion of Rome (vv.4.21-43)⁵⁹.

PsSal 17 expresses confidence that God, through his Messiah and without the intervention of any other human agency, will humble the current oppressors, thereby restoring and maintaining the people in their covenantal glory. The coming of the Messiah marks a turning point in the

⁵⁵ Atkinson, "Herod the Great.", 313.

⁵⁶ On Psalm 17 as a response to Herod's messianic pretensions, Atkinson, K., "On the Herodian Origin of Militant Davidic Messianism at Qumran: New Light from Psalm of Solomon 17", in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118 (1999), 444-445; Rocca, S., "Josephus and the Psalms of Solomon on Herod's Messianic Aspirations: An Interpretation", in Rodgers, Z. (ed.), *Making History: Josephus and Historical Method (=JSJ.S 110)*, Brill, Leiden 2007, 324-327; Gordley, "Psalms of Solomon", 88.

⁵⁷ Sharon, N., *Judea under Roman Domination: The First Generation of Statelessness and its Legacy (=AGJU 78)*, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2017, 229.

⁵⁸ Cf. PsSal 2,32-37; 7,10; 8,27-31; 9,8-11; 12,6; 14,9.10; 15,12.13.

⁵⁹ This idea is not an *ex novo* creation of the psalmist, but appears already in the Chronistic history (cf. 1 Chr 17,14; 28,5; 29,23; 2 Chr 13,8). WINNINGE, *Sinners and the Righteous*, 95; TRAFTON, J. L., "What Would David Do? Messianic Expectation and Surprise in Ps. Sol. 17", in BONS, E. – POUCHELLE, P. (eds.), *The Psalms of Solomon: Language, History, Theology (=SBLEJL 40)*; Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2015, 162. ATKINSON, *I Cried to the Lord*, 13.

course of history, ending the wait for a future in which God's justice would triumph. In this new phase, the Law, the concrete embodiment of the divine will, would be observed by the people of Israel and by all those who trust in the Lord. Thus, the coming of the Messiah would put an end to the people's unfaithfulness to God and their opposition to his plans, even beyond the realm of Israel⁶⁰.

PsSal 17 does not urge the audience to take violent action against the oppressive regime. As in PsSal 2 and 8, it is trust and hope in God they have to adopt. Nonetheless, their expectation should now be centered on the coming of a Messiah⁶¹. The group represents peaceful people who, encouraged by prayer, wait for God to intervene and resolve their situation of distress (cf. PsSal 12:5). However, violence against the gentiles, and against those who have adopted their customs is a means used by the Messiah to correct the people and have them return to obedience towards God⁶². Together with PsSal 18, which also speaks of the Messiah who will lead people to the Lord (vv.5-8), PsSal 17 closes the collection. Consequently, this is the final message that the compiler wants to communicate to his group⁶³.

Throughout the collection, some groups and characters, whose attitude does not conform to the requirements of God's justice, have been brought to the fore: the Hasmoneans, the leaders of the people, the temple priests, Pompey, Herod, the Roman troops. In this way, the audience has been shown the behaviour they are to avoid should they wish to come into

⁶⁰ DE JONGE, "The Expectation", 94. GORDLEY, "Creating Meaning", 387.

⁶¹ It is significant that, unlike PsSal 2 and 8, the plural subject does not appear only in the exhortative part of the prayer (cf. PsSal 2:32-37; 8:25-34), but is present from the beginning, indicating that over time this Jewish group has progressively strengthened its collective identity. EMBRY, B., "The Psalms of Solomon and the New Testament: Intertextuality and the Need for a Re-Evaluation", in *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 13 (2002), 109-110.

⁶² As in the case of Israel, the action against the Gentiles requested in the psalm has a corrective purpose. This explains the announcement of the pilgrimage of the nations to Israel, albeit by force, to behold the glory of God and of Jerusalem, his dwelling place.

⁶³ PsSal 18 seems to have been composed by drawing on the vocabulary of the other psalms in the collection. This indicates that it is the creation of the final compiler, who is also the author of PsSal 1 and the headings of the psalms in the collection, to provide an appropriate conclusion to the work. Atkinson, I Cried to the Lord, 204-209; Winnige, Sinners and the Righteous, 20.

right relationship with God. This contrasts with the detailed description of the Davidic Messiah in PsSal 17. The psalmist thus seeks, not only to present this figure and prompt the listeners to pray that God send his Messiah, but also to offer them a paradigm of behaviour in order to empower their identity while they await God's intervention and the reversal of their present situation.

The Messiah's main task, certainly, is to resolve the calamitous situation in which, for the psalmist, the nation is immersed (v.20). This he achieves by putting into practice the promises that God had made to his people through the covenant: to correct them (v.42), to glorify them above and beyond the nations (vv.30-31), to sanctify them (vv.26.32) and gather them (v.26), and to settle them again throughout the Promised Land (v.28)⁶⁴. The hymn further outlines the main features that define the character of the Messiah (vv.30-43): his close relationship with God, who will always be his king, his hope and his support before his enemies; his holiness, which comes from his faithfulness to the Law, and which makes him sinless and righteous in relation to his people. All these characteristics show that the Messiah possesses the Holy Spirit, whose gifts imbued all his actions: wisdom (vv.35.37), counsel (v.37), fortitude (vv.36.37.38.40), mercy (vv.35.41) and fear of God (v.40)⁶⁵.

Throughout this collection of psalms, hope, praise, and trust in God have been the cornerstones of the exhortation addressed to the hearers. Therefore, PsSal 17 presents the messiah-king as the paradigm of the faith of its group, encouraging them to persevere in the *modus vivendi* it proposes. In consequence, the audience is invited to model their behaviour on those traits that shape the identity of their group: faithfulness to the covenant, abandonment of sin, and recognition of divine justice. All these

⁶⁴ Cf. Deut 26,16-19; Lev 26,18; Deut 8,5; 26,16-19; Isa 11,11-16; 49,8-13; 60,4; Jer 10, 32; 23,3; 31,7-14; Ezek 34,13-14; 37,21-22; Hos 10,10; Zech 8,7-8; 9,6-12; Ps 94,12; Prov 3,12.

⁶⁵ Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 207-209; Werline, "The Psalms of Solomon.", 77-81; Atkinson, *I Cried to the Lord*, 139-144; Pomykala, K. E., *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism: Its History and Significance for Messianism* (=SBLEJL 7), Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 1985, 164-165; Trafton, "What Would David.", 163-173; de Jonge, "The Expectation", 99-102; Collins, J. J., *The Scepter and the Star. The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (=ABRL 31), Doubleday, New York 1985, 53-56.

features in PsSal 17 are ascribed to the messianic king, making of him the model for its audience.

3. Conclusion

The PsSal was the work of a Jewish Jerusalemite group in the 1st century BCE who suffered the impact of the loss of Jewish sovereignty to the Romans. This situation is clearly reflected in the so-called “Historical Psalms” of the collection (PsSal 2, 8 and 17). The Rhetorical Situation theory developed by Bitzer and his followers has been applied to these three hymns in this work, and has brought to light the real historical-rhetorical situation that led to each of them. This step is necessary for a plausible reconstruction of the textual rhetorical situation, that is, the *modus vivendi* proposed to the audience. This proposal aims to help the audience live under foreign domination while remaining firm in their faith, and maintaining their identity in such a critical situation. Both elements must be kept to the fore in recovering the more original rhetorical sense of each psalm.

We have seen a clear evolution in the attitude that the psalms propose to have towards those conquered. In all three, God is exonerated from all responsibility and blame for the present situation is apportioned to the people, especially their leaders, because of their corrupt behaviour and their lack of faithfulness to Torah. In PsSal 8, written at the end of Pompey’s conquest of Jerusalem, the Romans are seen as an instrument in God’s service to correct the people, while hoping that the situation of domination will not continue. In PsSal 2, the conquerors are seen as sinners. Consequently, it seeks divine punishment for them. This punishment has already commenced in the murder of Pompey, which should serve as a warning to all who offend God and his people. In PsSal 17, the stance towards the invaders and their allies, represented by Herod and his supporters, is completely hostile. This attitude is occasioned by the rampant corruption in the country and the consequent suffering visited upon the members of the psalmist’s group. The request of the Davidic Messiah becomes the final resolution that the compiler of the collection envisions for the people’s liberation from the gentiles and re-establishing of their obedience to Torah.

We have seen how the three psalms make a similar proposal in order to maintain their identity in these adverse circumstances. This proposal is

rooted in remaining faithful to the covenant, and waiting with trust and patience for God's intervention, while leaving aside any recourse to violence. The exhortation to be patient is particularly important in PsSal 8 due to the new situation of the recent loss of sovereignty to Rome. The audience is encouraged to consider their suffering as purification, in order to prepare them for a better reception of the divine grace that is expected in the proximate future. In PsSal 2, the punishment of Pompey, interpreted as a manifestation of divine mercy, serves as a stimulus to the audience, which is invited to persevere in their faithfulness to the covenant. This invitation arises from the conviction that their behaviour has served to make God begin to reverse the situation of the people. In PsSal 17, the concluding exhortation is transformed into a detailed description of the Messiah and his action. The Davidic king embodies those virtues which the audience must adopt while fervently asking God to send this divine agent to restore righteousness to his people.

This article has shown that the study of the pseudepigraphic literature provides a more complete picture of the Second Temple period, and of the diverse trends that existed within the Judaism of that time. The analysis of PsSal 2, 8, and 17 demonstrates how the interpretation of historical events by a Jewish sect helped make sense of the severe crisis caused in the group by Roman rule in Judea. At the same time, it shows how they proposed a *modus vivendi* that would guarantee their survival. This study allows us to conclude that investigation of these sources produces a better understanding of the beliefs and relationships between different Jewish groups at the turn of the era.