

THE DIVINE NAME 'ĒLĪ IN THE PSALMS

In 1935 H. S. Nyberg, in his *Studien zum Hoseabuche*, first pointed out the divine name 'Ēl (he vocalized it 'Āl with the by-form 'Ālū) in the Bible.¹ In addition to discovering it in such texts as Hos. 7:16, 10:5, and 11:8, he found this divine name in I Sam. 2:10, Isa. 59:18, and 63:7. For Prof. E. Sellin, one of the reviewers of the book, the god 'Āl who was brought to light by Nyberg was a "Hirngespinnst," a fabrication of Nyberg's brain, comparable to T. K. Cheyne's *Jerahme'el*.² This mordant criticism was one of the incentives for the lengthy article which appeared in 1938, in which Nyberg collected a considerable mass of evidence from the ancient West Semitic personal names preserved in the Old Babylonian texts, from the Taanach letters, the Aramaic inscriptions from Sujin, the South Arabic personal names, and from the much later Nabatean and Palmyrene inscriptions to prove the existence of the god 'Āl.³ In addition to this non-biblical material, he found this divine name in some ancient passages of the Bible, such as II Sam. 23:1 and Deut. 33:12. Although some of the evidence gathered by Nyberg is contestable, he did prove the existence of the god and the divine name 'Āl.⁴ He failed to mention the ostraca of Samaria, in which

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¹ See especially pp. 58 ff., 90, 120.

² *Deutsche Literatur Zeitung*, 1935, pp. 1413-14.

³ "Studien zum Religionskampf im Alten Testament," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, XXXV (1938), 329-87. Hereafter this article will be referred to as Nyberg, *Archiv*.

⁴ For example, it is very probable that the element *hal-* in the West Semitic names has nothing to do with 'l. Theo Bauer was the first to identify, though with caution, the element *hal-* with Arabic *ḥāl*, "uncle on the maternal side," and this identification seems to be confirmed by the South Arabic names published in 1931 by C. C. Rossini, such as *ḥl'm*, *ḥlyd'*, *ḥlyp'*, *ḥlkrb*, etc. Nyberg opposes this identification of Kültepe *hal-* with South Arabic *ḥl-* on the grounds that in the corresponding forms of the Kültepe texts the strong velar *ḥa* is almost always lacking. Thus Amorite *ḥa-li-wa-qar* finds its equivalent in Kültepe *a-li-wa-aq-ru-um*. He further argues that in the ancient West Semitic names which appear in the Old Babylonian documents the 'ayin is generally reflected by *ḥa*, while the Kültepe texts almost completely neglect the West Semitic 'ayin. On the other hand, since original *ḥa* is always graphically reproduced (e.g., *aḥ*, "brother"), only one conclusion is admissible: Kültepe *hal-* reflects 'al- (p. 330). This appears to be putting too much trust in the orthographic traditions of the Kültepe scribes (cf. the "exceptional" spelling *ša-lim-ḥa-lu-um* for *ša-lim-a-lu-um*). Why could not Kültepe *al-* reflect an original 'al-, 'il- (see F. J. Stephens, *Personal Names of Cappadocia*, pp. 3-4, 76-77)? The very fact that many of the West Semitic names discussed by Nyberg (p. 334) have exact correspondences in Hebrew, but with this important difference, that only 'el, never 'al, appears in these names, should give one pause before accepting Nyberg's equation *al-*

occurs the proper name *Yḥw'ly*, or that the biblical name 'Ēlī is very probably a hypocoristicon of some such name as *Yḥw'ly*.⁵ From this heterogeneous material Nyberg concluded that 'Āl was the god of the universal heavens, "der Gott des allumfassenden Himmels," and consequently also the god of the storm, "der Gewittergott."⁶ This conclusion has been strikingly confirmed by the second tablet of the *Keret Epic*, published after 1938, in which 'ly occurs twice as a synonym of Baal, where the latter is clearly acting as the rain-god.⁷

This new knowledge, combined with a brief examination of two biblical texts which contain the divine name 'Ēlī, yields valuable information which can serve to clear up several difficult verses in the Psalms. A very ancient passage which has been clarified by Nyberg is I Sam. 2:10, which reads:

yahwē yēhattū m'ribāw 'ēlī baššāmaim yar 'ēm
yahwē yādīn 'apsē 'āreš w'ḡyitten-'ōz l'malkō

Those who contend with Yahweh will be dismayed when 'Ēlī thunders in the heavens;

Yahweh judges the ends of the earth, and he gives strength to his king.⁸

equals 'al-. Nyberg's vocalization 'Āl, 'Ālū, is also open to question (p. 341 f.). To judge from the Masoretic proper name 'Ēlī and Septuagintal 'Hli, 'Hlei, it seems indicated that we should refer to such Arabic words as 'ilyu, 'ilyahun, 'illiyahun, and vocalize the underlying Hebrew as 'ilyu; 'Ēlī would thus be a pausal form, just as *ḥiṣyu* in pause becomes *ḥēš*. The context of the *Keret Epic* C, where 'ly is an epithet of Baal, the rain-god, the use of 'Ēlī in a very similar context in I Sam. 2:10, and the parallelism between 'Elyōn and 'Ēlī in Ps. 57:3, make it clear that this appellation very probably signified "Most Exalted One." For an extended discussion of the original meaning, see Nyberg, *Archiv*, p. 342 f.

⁵ See W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (1942), p. 202, n. 18, and *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, VII (1945), 31, n. 89.

⁶ *Archiv*, p. 344.

⁷ Arvid Kapelrud, *Baal in the Ras Shamra Texts*, p. 62, correctly treats Ugaritic 'ly as a poetical expression; thus far all occurrences of 'Ēlī as a divine name in the Bible are in poetical sections. Attention should be directed here to the valuable observations of Ginsberg on the epithet 'ly in Ugaritic (*The Legend of King Keret*, p. 47).

⁸ Nyberg, *Archiv*, p. 369. His insistence on the high antiquity of the Song of Hannah is highly commendable. The recent study of Cross and Freedman, "A Royal Song of Thanksgiving: II Sam. 22, Ps. 18," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXII (1953), 15-35, demonstrates the ancient character of another poem which has too often been labeled a piece of late artistry. Among the examples of later revision and modernization to which this ancient song was submitted, the writers might have cited a very neat instance in Ps. 18:14, first noticed by Nyberg. Here we can safely presume that Masoretic 'Elyōn is a late revision of original 'Ēlī, which still appears in the parallel verse in I Sam. 2:10, though incorrectly vocalized 'alāv.

Here the divine name 'Eli stands in parallelism with, and is a synonym for, Jahweh. He is the God of the thunder storm and also the judge of the whole earth. The similarity of this text with some lines of the *Keret Epic* is too noticeable to be overlooked. *Keret C III 5-8*:

<i>l'arš mtr b'l</i>	Unto the earth Baal rained,
<i>wlšd mtr 'ly</i>	and unto the field 'Aliyy.
<i>n'm l'arš mtr b'l</i>	Sweet to the earth was the rain of Baal,
<i>wlšd mtr 'ly</i>	and to the field the rain of 'Aliyy. ⁹

In the biblical reading the parallelism is between Jahweh and 'Eli, while in the Ugaritic passage the balance is between the synonyms Baal and 'Aliyy. Each is the god of the storm, but the biblical reading goes one step further by describing Jahweh as judge of the world, a prerogative deriving from his control of the universal heavens.¹⁰ It is the combination of the parallelism between Jahweh and 'Eli and Jahweh's judgment over the whole earth which provides the clue necessary to arrive at a satisfactory reading and translation of Ps. 7:7:

yahwê yādîn 'ammîm
šoptēni yahwê k'šidqt ak'tummî 'ālāy
 Jahweh will judge the nations.

Judge me, O Jahweh, in accordance with my justice, and in accordance with my integrity that is upon me.

It is the last word in the verse, vocalized 'ālāy by the Masoretes, that is especially difficult. Those commentators who at least make the attempt to explain the construction *k'tummî 'ālāy* generally set it down that 'ālāy is a strengthening of the suffix in *tummî*. Thus Gunkel¹¹ and most recently Podechard,¹² who cites Jerome's "et secundum simplicitatem quae est in me." The inadequacy of this explanation has been the occasion for a number of emendations at this point in the text (Wellhausen: *'nēni*; Graetz, Dyserinck: *k'iom pō 'lī*; Kittel: *gomlēni*).¹³ The Masoretic consonantal text should be preserved, but the vowels altered to read *k'tummî 'ēlī*, "in accordance with my integrity, O Most Exalted One." Here Jahweh and 'Eli are parallel to one another, just as in I Sam. 2:10 and Deut. 33:12, and

⁹ This is Ginsberg's translation (*Legend*, p. 29), which differs slightly from that of Gordon, Kapelrud, and others, but which seems to the present writer to be the preferable rendition.

¹⁰ Nyberg, *Archiv*, p. 344.

¹¹ *Die Psalmen*, p. 26.

¹² *Le Psautier: Notes critiques* (Lyon, 1949), I, 40.

¹³ See R. Kittel, *Die Psalmen* (5th-6th ed.; *Kommentar zum Alten Testament*, XIII) pp. 22-23, and Gunkel, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

while Jahweh is presented in the Psalm as judging the nations, in the Book of Samuel he is portrayed as judge of the ends of the earth.

It would not be irrelevant to mention briefly here that a number of scholars (Bickell, Cheyne, Duhm, Briggs, Bertholet, Kittel, Podechard) consider vv. 7-12 of Psalm 7 as a separate poem, intercalated into the original Psalm.¹⁴ They argue that from the literary point of view the contrast between vv. 7-12 and the rest of the Psalm is very striking, and that the subject matter, though analogous, is not identical. In vv. 7-12 God is described as seated high on his throne, surrounded by the assembly of the peoples (we should perhaps read *'adat 'lôhîm* instead of the present *'adat l'ummîm*, as in Ps. 82:1),¹⁵ and judging the nations. The similarity between these verses and Ps. 82 has frequently been noted, and this resemblance would justify us in inferring that vv. 7-12 of Ps. 7 have a Canaanite background; this could well be the reason for the presence here of the divine name 'Ēlî.

Another difficult text which has been elucidated by the efforts, first of Nyberg,¹⁶ and later of Cross and Freedman,¹⁷ is Deut. 33:12, which reads:

y'âdîd yahwê yiškôn lâbetah
'êlî hōpēp 'âlêw ûbên k'tepēw šākēn
 The beloved of Jahweh encamps in safety,
 The Exalted One watches over him,
 And between his shoulders he tents.

The poet here portrays the protective care of 'Ēlî, the Exalted One, a characteristic which again appears at Ps. 57:3:

ûb'şêl k'nāpêkâ 'eḥsê 'ad ya'ḇōr hawwôl
'eqrâ lēlôhîm 'elyôn lâ'êl gômēr 'âlāy
yišlah miššāmaim w'yôšf'ênî
 And in the shadow of thy wings I take refuge until ruin pass over;
 I shall cry unto God Most High,
 To the God who perfects for me.
 May he send forth from heaven and deliver me.

The troublesome phrase is the unexampled *gômēr 'âlāy*, which many modern commentators, following the Septuagint, emend to *gômêl 'âlāy*.¹⁸ It seems

¹⁴ See E. Podechard, *Le Psautier: Traduction littérale et explication historique*, I, 40, and *Notes critiques*, I, 39, where a fuller treatment is given to the arguments favoring the division of the Psalm into two poems.

¹⁵ Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, p. 26.

¹⁶ *Archiv*, pp. 372-73.

¹⁷ "The Blessing of Moses," *Journ. of Bibl. Lit.*, LXVII (1948), 194, 204, n. 38.

¹⁸ Thus Hare, Graetz, Duhm, Briggs, and Podechard, *inter alios*.

preferable, however, to retain the *lectio difficilior* and to translate: "I shall cry unto the Most High, to the avenging God, the Exalted One ('*El*')."¹⁹ The Psalmist entrusts himself to the watchful care of God, whom he addresses as '*Elôhîm* '*Elyôn*' in the first half of the verse and as '*El gômêr* '*Elî*' in the latter half. And he immediately adds: "May he send forth from heaven and deliver me." This detail is highly informative because, as we know from the researches of Nyberg, and from such texts as Gen. 14:19-20 and I Sam. 2:10, '*Elî*' is God of the entire heaven. That the Israelite God under the appellation '*Elî*' was a protecting deity is clear from the Samuel text just cited, as well as from Ps. 91:1:

yôšêb b'šeter 'elyôn b'šêl šadday yillônân
As for him who dwells in the shelter of '*Elyôn*,
In the shadow of *Shadday* abides.

From such texts it becomes quite clear, as Nyberg has remarked, that '*Elî*' in the Bible is an ancient synonym for '*Elyôn*', which alone was preserved in later writings. To avoid any possible misunderstanding, it should be emphasized at this point that, though the ancient passages in which the appellation '*Elî*' is found may reflect Canaanite usage and ideas, the Hebrew context throughout is monotheistic.

Turning back to Psalm 7, we are confronted with some rather awkward phraseology in v. 11, which in turn has occasioned some equally awkward translations. The Hebrew text reads:

māginnî 'al 'elôhîm mōšîa' yišrê lēb
My shield is upon God who saves the upright of heart.

This is the translation which caused T. K. Cheyne to remark that it was unthinkable that God should be his servant's shield-bearer.²⁰ In recent years the more common rendition has become: "My shield is *in* God who saves the upright of heart," i.e., "my protection is *in* God." After reviewing the various translations which have been attempted and the efforts to justify them grammatically, Podechard concludes that none of them are completely satisfactory,²¹ so it will not be irrelevant to suggest as a mere

¹⁹ The writer is presently preparing a paper in which he will endeavor to show that the root *gmr* in Ps. 7:10, 57:3, and 138:8, is best understood in the sense of "requite, avenge." The usual translation "complete, be at an end" is very unsatisfactory, as is patent from the repeated emendation of these texts, especially 57:3 and 138:8.

²⁰ See C. A. Briggs, *The Psalms* (International Critical Commentary), I, 59. Thus Kittel translates: "Meinen Schild den hält für mich Gott, der Redlichen Heiland."

²¹ Podechard himself (*Notes critiques*, I, 41) prefers to adopt the rather ingenious reading of Herkenne, *māgên yô'îl*, "un bouclier (qui) est efficace."

possibility the reading (which involves no change in the consonantal text) *māginnî 'ēlî 'elôhîm*, "my shield is the Most High God." Since 'Ēlî is an ancient synonym for, or at least closely connected with, 'Elyôn, what we have in this Psalm is an ancient equivalent for 'elyôn 'elôhîm. Against this reading it may be argued that nowhere else in the Bible is to be found the combination 'elyôn 'elôhîm. There occurs 'elôhîm 'elyôn, *yahwê 'elyôn* (in v. 18 of this Psalm), but not 'elyôn 'elôhîm. This is a sound objection, which should be recognized, but it is not insuperable, because Gunkel and Podécharde might well be correct in their treatment of Ps. 46:5-6, where they annex the last word of v. 5, 'elyôn, to the next line, so that they read 'elyôn 'elôhîm *b^eqirbâh bal timmôl*, "The Most High God is in her midst so that she shall not totter."²² Also in support of our reading may be cited the Nabatean proper name 'ly'l,²³ and the following expressions from the Psalter:

18:31 <i>māgēn hū'</i>	A shield is he (God).
28:7 <i>yahwê 'uzzî ūmāginnî</i>	Yahweh is my strength and my shield.
59:12 <i>māginnēnū 'adônāy</i>	Our shield is Adonay.
119:114 <i>sitrî ūmāginnî 'attā</i>	My shelter and my shield art Thou.

In none of these phrases is there found a preposition to express the relationship between the subject and the predicate noun, so it is somewhat unlikely that a poet would introduce an unnecessary preposition, and one that is metrically deficient at that, into a strophe which otherwise is stylistically very compact, as stressed by Podécharde.²⁴ The suitability of applying the metaphor of the shield to 'Ēlî becomes apparent in the light of Deut. 33:12, Ps. 57:3, and 91:1, where 'Ēlî and 'Elyôn is clearly portrayed as a watchful and protecting God.

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²² See especially Gunkel, *Die Psalmen*, pp. 197, 200, where some rather cogent arguments are marshalled in favor of this reading.

²³ *Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum*, II, 222, and Nyberg, *Archiv*, pp. 336-37.

²⁴ *Traduction littérale*, p. 40. The Peshitta translation simply omits the putative preposition 'al.