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Who Is the "Mighty One" in Psalm 45?
A Textual Commentary

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Abstract: Translating Psalm 45:4–9 presents several significant challenges, centered on participant identification and lexical ambiguities that lead to divergent renderings in modern Bibles. This study serves as a text-critical guide for translators by analyzing key cruxes in the Masoretic Text (MT) in comparison with the Septuagint (LXX), Syriac Peshitta, and other ancient versions. It examines the major interpretive paths available for each difficulty. In doing so, this study explicitly argues that the introduction of a distinct second character—a "mighty one" serving as the king's champion—provides the most coherent framework for resolving key cruxes in the text. While not conclusive, viewing the "mighty one" as a separate figure offers a coherent solution to interpretive problems in verses 4 and 6. This article provides translators with a clear rationale for navigating the complex translational possibilities arising from these variants, offering specific translation recommendations and footnotes to clarify the psalm's narrative and theological progression depending on the chosen interpretive framework.

Keywords: Psalm 45, textual criticism, mighty one, royal psalm, Bible translation

Introduction

Psalm 45, a composition of profound theological and literary significance, occupies a unique position within the Hebrew Psalter. Often categorized as a

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royal psalm, it intricately intertwines themes of kingship, divine authority, and nuptial imagery (Gunkel 1985:140; Trotter 2009; Cheung 2016; Blankesteijn 2021:1–3).[1] This psalm has captivated exegetes and theologians alike due to its complex textual structure, rich metaphorical language, and the interpretive challenges it presents. It has been variously interpreted as a celebration of an earthly monarch, a messianic prophecy, or an allegory of divine-human relationships. Within the extensive reception history of royal psalms, Psalm 45 stands as one of the most contested compositions in the Psalter. Its interpretive complexity has generated significant debate across both Jewish and Christian exegetical traditions, with particular verses eliciting diverse and often conflicting hermeneutical approaches.[2]

The text of Psalm 45 is situated within the broader corpus of ancient Near Eastern royal literature, as well as the specific literary and theological context of the Korahite psalm collection (Pss 42–49). Furthermore, when evaluating the ancient witnesses throughout this study, the Greek Psalter is recognized not merely as a translational tool pointing back to a Hebrew *Vorlage*, but as a literary and theological document in its own right, often reflecting distinct Hellenistic Jewish exegesis. The psalm's opening verses extol the king's physical beauty and eloquence (vv. 2–3), attributes that symbolize his suitability for leadership under divine ordination. The subsequent martial imagery (vv. 4–6) portrays the king as a defender of truth and righteousness, girded with divine strength. This depiction culminates in an affirmation of his eternal throne (v. 7), which has been a focal point for messianic interpretations (Ausloos 2006:239–240; Tournay 1963:212; Blankesteijn 2021:3). The latter half of the psalm then shifts from general marital themes, concerning the king's stature and dynasty, to specific nuptial imagery, focusing on the bride and the wedding ceremony itself (vv. 10–15). This transition underscores the covenantal dimensions of marriage within ancient Israelite culture, where such unions often symbolized alliances and divine blessings. The concluding verses (vv. 16–17) envision a legacy of progeny who will perpetuate the king's lineage and ensure his enduring renown.

When translating Psalm 45, one of the first questions a translator must answer is, "Who is being spoken to?" While the primary addressee is clearly a king, the text contains several ambiguities that make this question difficult to answer consistently. For example, in verse 4, is the command "Gird your sword" addressed to the king, or to someone else? Modern translations differ on this point. The NIV and ESV assume the king is the sole addressee. This article

[1] For an in-depth discussion on defining the genre, see Starbuck 1999. On the superscription of the psalm, see Taghavi and Haghighatkhah 2025.

[2] For a comprehensive examination of the reception history of Psalm 45, refer to Gillingham 2018:268–276.

specifically argues that translation difficulties often arise from interpretive choices regarding a potential second character in the psalm: the "mighty one" (גבור). This study examines key textual variants in the Masoretic Text (MT), Septuagint (LXX), Syriac Peshitta (S), Targum (Tg), Vulgate (Vg), Vetus Latina (VL), Aquila (α′), Symmachus (σ′), Syro-Hexapla (SyrH), Bohairic (Bo), and Sahidic (Sa).[3] By explicitly adopting the hypothesis of a distinct warrior figure, this study demonstrates how this reading provides translators with a more coherent and compelling way to render parts of the psalm,[4] resolving certain tensions in the text and clarifying the relationship between the divine king and his champion.[5]

By examining variant readings across ancient versions, this study aims to equip translators with a robust framework for navigating the textual complexities of Psalm 45:4–9. The discussion will analyze key textual variants to elucidate their implications for translation, exploring how different readings shape the psalm's narrative. It will then provide a set of well-founded options for rendering this difficult passage.

This study employs an eclectic text-critical methodology. As a foundational principle, where ancient versional evidence strongly converges against a difficult or anomalous reading in the MT, this versional consensus is given significant weight. Conversely, conjectural revocalization of the consonantal Hebrew text is treated as a secondary measure, employed specifically as a heuristic tool when it resolves significant grammatical or narrative disruptions that the versions themselves fail to adequately address. The Masoretic Text as presented in the Leningrad Codex is utilized, along with its textual apparatus, unless an emendation is explicitly proposed and discussed. We incorporate textual variants from the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) and the Göttingen Septuagint (Rahlfs 1979), and further include readings from Aquila, Theodotion, SyrH, and Symmachus, as preserved in Field's edition of Origen's Hexapla. Additionally, critical translations of the Septuagint, such as NETS (*New English Translation of the Septuagint*) and *Septuaginta Deutsch*, have been consulted (Pietersma and Wright 2007:569; Field 1875; Karrer and Kraus 2011:1623–1624). Verse numbers follow

[3] Daughter versions are cited primarily to demonstrate the reception and interpretive trajectory of the Septuagint's reading, rather than as independent witnesses to the Hebrew *Vorlage*.

[4] Possible identifications of the king have been discussed by Tournay 1963:169, Harris 1984:65, and Patterson 1985:33.

[5] For potential parallels to Psalm 45, see Smolarz 2010:297, 333. Mitchell (1997:249–250) also identifies certain affinities between Psalm 45 and Zechariah 9:9. However, Kraus (1988:451–452) contends that "there is no parallel to Psalm 45 in the OT, not even anything approaching it."

the Hebrew text; in the NRSV, quoted at the head of each section below, the numbering is one lower (MT 45:4 = NRSV 45:3).

1 A translation dilemma in verse 4: Whose thigh?

Translation (NRSV): Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, in your glory and majesty.

Proposed text and translation:

חֲגוֹר־חַרְבְּךָ עַל־<יֶרֶךְ> גִּבּוֹר <הֲדָרֶךָ וַהוֹדְךָ>:

[O king!] gird your sword upon the thigh of the mighty one, your glory and your majesty!

1.1 Apparatus

<יֶרֶךְ>] יָרֵךְ MT VL (femur)] יָרֵכֵךְ* LXX (τὸν μηρόν σου) σ′ (τοῦ μηροῦ σου) Vg (femur tuum) S (ܚܨܝܟ) Tg (ירכך) SyrH (ܟܬܡܟ)

<הֲדָרֶךָ וַהוֹדְךָ>* LXX (τῇ ὡραιότητί σου καὶ τῷ κάλλει σου) σ′ (τὸν ἔπαινόν σου καὶ τὸ ἀξίωμά σου) S (ܗܕܪܟ ܘܫܘܒܚܟ) Vg (specie tua et pulchritudine tua)] MT (הוֹדְךָ וַהֲדָרֶךָ) (metath) α′ (ἐπιδοξότητί σου καὶ διαπρεπείᾳ σου) Tg (הודך ושבהורך)

1.2 ירך

The MT reads חֲגוֹר־חַרְבְּךָ עַל־יָרֵךְ גִּבּוֹר. The word יָרֵךְ is in the absolute state, and all major textual traditions (MT, LXX, Vg, S) understand the addressee to be the king, designated as “mighty one”. The common translation, “Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one”, supplies the possessive pronoun, a frequent and valid translation technique for body parts in Biblical Hebrew. An examination of the LXX, σ′, S, Vg, and Tg versions led Kraus (1988:451) to propose emending ירך to ירכך (‘your thigh’), positing a haplography in the MT. Whitley (1986:277–278), however, substantiates the MT’s reading of ירך as an absolute form, citing the parallelism evident in Psalm 45:4 and its purported correspondences in Judges 3:16, Jeremiah 31:19, and Ezekiel 21:17.

Upon closer scrutiny, the validity of these proposed parallels becomes questionable. In Judges 3:16, ירך in the phrase ירך ימינו appears in the construct state, diverging from the absolute form under consideration. The case of the MT’s ירך in Jeremiah 31:19 presents potential ambiguity, as the LXX reflects יום instead, suggesting a possible textual discrepancy. Furthermore, in Ezekiel 21:17, the LXX’s reflection of על־ידך for the MT’s על־ירך implies a potential graphical error in the Hebrew text, casting doubt on its reliability as a parallel.

Dahood (1966:271) has demonstrated that the possessive suffix is often omitted while being implicitly understood with body parts. Trotter (2009:40) concurs with this interpretation, proposing a plausible resolution and offering an explanation for the enduring tradition found in versions that incorporate the possessive suffix. Indeed, the cumulative case for understanding גבור as a vocative epithet for the king is robust, resting firmly on the widespread poetic convention in Biblical Hebrew where body-part nouns frequently appear without possessive suffixes, with the pronoun being naturally supplied by the reader. While the aforementioned justification appears reasonable and remains the majority position in modern translations, a more compelling proposal for resolving the broader narrative tensions of the subsequent verses may be advanced. It will be demonstrated that the addressee in verse 6, גבור introduced earlier in verse 4, appears to be distinct from the king.

An alternative interpretive path, though resting on conjectural revocalization rather than textual evidence, is to read the phrase as a construct chain: עַל־יֶרֶךְ גִּבּוֹר ('upon the thigh of the mighty one'). In this reading, the king is commanded to arm a separate champion. While this reading lacks direct support from manuscripts or ancient versions, it offers a compelling potential solution to the pronominal shift in verse 6.

The construct reading יֶרֶךְ is only a revocalization of the MT's consonantal text ירך. It is plausible that the MT vocalization (יָרֵךְ, absolute) is secondary, perhaps resulting from a later standardization of the vowel to simplify the phrase and assume the common possessive pronoun omission for body parts. This reading construes the verse as a command to the king: "Gird your sword upon the thigh of the mighty one," who is your heroic champion.[6] The proposed emendation can be corroborated by the fact that the predominant biblical attestation of ירך occurs in construct or suffixed forms.

1.3 הדרך והודך

The textual apparatus of BHS indicates potential textual corruption in the MT's reading, הודך והדרך (BHS 1127). The LXX renders this phrase as τῇ ὡραιότητί σου καὶ τῷ κάλλει σου ('in your beauty/bloom and in your majesty'),[7] while σ′ presents τὸν ἔπαινόν σου καὶ τὸ ἀξίωμά σου ('your praise and your honor'). While the LXX translates הדר with a variety of terms, its choice of ὡραιότης here ('beauty/bloom') creates a specific semantic field. This same equivalent is found

[6] The LXX and its derivative versions regard the king and warrior as synonymous, necessitating the addition of a second-person suffix for "thigh", which is absent in the MT.

[7] The term ὡραιότης is glossed as "the ripeness of fruits" and "the bloom of youth" (LSJ, s.v. ὡραιότης).

in Psalm 96:6 (LXX 95:6) and Ezekiel 16:14, suggesting that for the translator, this Greek term captured a key aspect of royal or divine splendor. This supports the idea that the Hebrew *Vorlage* underlying the LXX may have preserved an alternative word order where הדרך preceded הודך. However, such a text-critical conclusion must be drawn with caution. The LXX demonstrates considerable lexical fluidity, rendering הדר with κάλλος elsewhere (e.g., Deut 33:17). Furthermore, while the Syriac tradition also presents a reversed order (ܗܕܪܟ ܘܫܘܒܚܟ; see also Bohairic version’s ⲧⲉⲕⲙⲉⲧⲃⲉⲣⲓ ⲛⲉⲙ ⲡⲉⲕⲥⲁⲓ and Sahidic ⲡⲉⲕⲁⲛⲁⲓ ⲡⲉⲕⲥⲁ; Schwartze 1843:67),[8] the Peshitta is well known for frequently inverting word pairs as a stylistic device. Consequently, the variant word order in these ancient versions is more plausibly attributed to translational techniques and stylistic preferences rather than definitively pointing to a divergent Hebrew source text. These variants, intimately connected to the beginning of verse 5, constitute a unified textual phenomenon requiring holistic analysis (Barthélemy 2005:265–266).

2 Translation challenge in verse 5: Bending a bow, reigning, or prospering?

Translation (NRSV): In your majesty ride on victoriously for the cause of truth and to defend the right; let your right hand teach you dread deeds.

Proposed text and translation:

⌈וְהַדֶּרֶךְ⌉ ⌈צָלַח⌉ רְכַב עַל־דְּבַר־אֱמֶת <וְעַנְוַת צֶדֶק> וְתוֹרְךָ נוֹרָאוֹת יְמִינֶךָ׃

May your path prosper! Ride forth for the cause of truth and of righteousness humbled; for your rule[9] is secured by the terrible might of your right hand.

2.1 Apparatus

– ⌈וְהַדֶּרֶךְ⌉] הַדְרֵךְ* LXX (ἔντεινον) Bo (ϭⲱⲗⲕ) Sa (ⲛⲅⲥⲱⲙⲛⲧ) Vg (intende)] הֲדָרְךָ MT σ′ (ἀξιώματί σου) S (ܫܘܒܚܟ) Tg (ושבהורך)

– ⌈צָלַח⌉ S (ܙܟܐ)] צְלַח MT LXX (κατευοδοῦ) Vg (prospere) σ′ (πρόκοπτε) Tg (תצלח)

[8] The complex relationship between this phrase and the start of verse 5 is further discussed by Barthélemy (2005:265–266), who analyzes the variants as part of a single textual problem that spans the two verses.

[9] The term *Torah* is also used in the sense of “rule”, which in this context appears to be the most fitting translation.

– רְכַב MT S (ܪܟܒ) α′ (ἐπίβηθι)] LXX (καὶ βασίλευε) (exeg?) σ′ (ἀκολούθει) Vg (et regna) (exeg?) Bo (ⲁⲣⲓⲟⲩⲟ) (exeg?) Sa (ⲛⲅⲣⲣⲣⲟ) (exeg?) Tg (למרכב על סוסי מלכותא) (exeg?)

– <וְעַנְוַת צֶדֶק> S (ܘܡܘܟܟܐ ܕܙܕܝܩܘܬܐ[ܘ])] וְעַנְוָה־צֶדֶק MT α′ (καὶ πραότητος δικαίας) SyrH (ܘܕܢܝܚܘܬܐ ܕܙܕܝܩܘܬܐ)] MT^{mss} (וְעַנְוָה־וְצֶדֶק) LXX (καὶ πραΰτητος καὶ δικαιοσύνης) Vg (et mansuetudinem et iustitiam) Bo (ⲛⲉⲙ ⲙⲉⲧⲣⲉⲙⲣⲁⲩϣ ⲛⲉⲙ ⲁⲓⲕⲉⲟⲥⲩⲛⲏ) Sa (ⲙⲛ ⲧⲙⲛⲧⲣⲙⲣⲁϣ ⲙⲛ ⲧⲁⲓ ⲕⲁⲓⲟⲥⲩⲛⲏ) Tg (וענותנותא וצדקתא)

– וְתוֹרְךָ MT LXX (καὶ ὁδηγήσει σε) Vg (et deducet te) Tg (וילפינך) SyrH (ܘܐܢܗܪ) α′ (φωτίσει) σ′ (ὑποδείξει)] תורתך* S (ܢܡܘܣܟ) (unc) Bo^{mss} (ⲉⲥⲉϭⲓ ⲙⲱⲓⲧ ⲛⲁⲕ) Sa^{mss} (ⲛⲁϫⲓ ⲙⲟⲉⲓⲧ)

– נוֹרָאוֹת MT LXX (θαυμαστῶς) Vg (mirabiliter) Tg (דחילן) σ′ (φοβερὰ) SyrH (ܕܚܝܠܬܐ) α′ (ἐπίφοβα)] S (ܒܕܚܝܠܬܐ) Bo^{mss} (ⲟⲩϣⲫⲏⲣⲓ) Sa^{mss} (ϩⲏⲧⲕ ϩⲛ ⲟⲩϣⲡⲏⲣⲉ)

2.2 והדרך צלח

A discernible divergence exists among translators and exegetes concerning the interpretation of the term הדרך in Psalm 45, which the MT interprets as "your honor" (HALOT, s.v. הדר). It is critical to note that the variants here are closely linked to the textual problem at the end of verse 4 (הודך והדרך), suggesting a single complex issue involving the metathesis or relocation of a word or phrase between the two verses (Barthélemy 2005:265–266). BHS (1127) suggests that the text is corrupt and proposes an emendation of והדרך צלח to הדר חלציך, which would be relocated to verse 4b, yielding the translation: "May your majesty and splendor honor your hips." This emendation finds support in Kraus's analysis (1988:451). The Talmud offers an exegetical reading of וחדדך ('and he will sharpen you') (b. Shabbat 63a). HALOT describes the phrase והדרך צלח רכב as uncertain.[10] Alternatively, Dahood (1966:271–272) suggests that דרך in Psalm 45 parallels its usage in Judges 20:43 (הדריכהו 'conquered him'). Rejecting Dahood's proposal, Whitley (1986:277–278) contends that "tread" constitutes the

[10] HALOT offers two interpretive possibilities for the initial phrase in Psalm 45. The first suggests that the MT's וַהֲדָרְךָ represents a case of dittography, proposing instead the original reading as "Good luck! Ride on!" The second suggestion reconstructs the phrase as הֲדֹר חֲלָצֶיךָ ('adorn your loins'), presenting it as a call to ceremonial preparation or royal adornment. Both proposals underscore the textual and semantic complexities inherent in this passage, reflecting broader scholarly debates over its original form and meaning (HALOT, s.v. צלח).

fundamental meaning of דרך, with its semantic extensions encompassing "conquer" and "subdue".

The ancient versions exhibit significant variation in their interpretation of הדרך. Several versions align with the MT: the Syriac Peshitta renders it as ܫܘܒܚܟ ('your glory'), the Targum as שבהורך ('your splendor'), and Symmachus's Greek version as ἀξιώματί σου ('your honor'). However, a distinct interpretive tradition emerges in the LXX and Vg, subsequently followed by the Coptic versions (Bohairic and Sahidic), which presents a markedly different reading from the MT. The LXX's rendering ἔντεινον ('stretch/strain/bend [the bow]'; LSJ, s.v. ἐντείνω) suggests a reading of הַדְרֵךְ, interpreting the consonantal text as a hiphil imperative derived from the root דר״ך ('to tread', 'bend').[11] This interpretation finds support in the Coptic translations ϭωλκ and ϲωμντ, both conveying the sense of "stretch" (Crum 2005:340; ʿAbd al-Nūr 1998:385).

However, this reading encounters significant philological difficulties: within the Hebrew Bible's corpus, the verb דרך, when expressing the semantic notion of "bend", takes an explicit object: קשת ('bow'; Pss 7:13; 11:2) or חץ ('arrow'; Pss 58:8; 64:4; see Jer 9:2 and Zech 9:13 for other objects). The conspicuous absence of any such object in Psalm 45:5 thus presents a substantial challenge to the LXX's interpretation, suggesting it may reflect a misapprehension of the Masoretic vocalization tradition rather than preserving an alternative textual witness.

An alternative emendation, though also conjectural, involves reading הַדֶּרֶךְ צָלַח ('the way/path prospers'). The lexeme דרך exhibits semantic polyvalence, encompassing both its primary concrete denotation of "way" and its theologically nuanced connotation as a metaphor for "the Way of Yahweh". The syntactic combination of דרך ('way') and צלח ('prosper/succeed') finds multiple attestations within biblical literature.[12] Thus, this reading presents itself as a philologically sound option, offering linguistic coherence within the broader biblical corpus. This interpretation may resolve multiple exegetical and text-critical challenges that have occupied scholarly discourse.

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[11] HALOT, s.v. דרך. To substantiate this argument, several instances in the LXX and Vg can be cited where the Greek and Latin translators render derivatives of דר״ך in the Hebrew Bible as ἐντείνω and intendere. See Ps 11:2 (LXX: Ps 10:2, Vg: Ps 10:3); Ps 58:8 (LXX, Vg: Ps 57:8); Ps 37:14 (LXX, Vg: Ps 36:14); cf. Jer 51:3 (LXX: Jer 28:3), where the LXX and Vg use the simple verbs τείνω and tendere.

[12] For illustrative examples of this semantic pattern, consider והצליח דרכך 'and he prospered your way' (Gen 24:40). This usage finds parallel attestations in Genesis 24:21, 42, 56; Deuteronomy 28:29; Joshua 1:8; Judges 18:5; Psalm 37:7; Isaiah 48:15; and Jeremiah 12:1, demonstrating the consistent deployment of this phraseology across diverse biblical genres and chronological strata.

2.3 רכב

The imperative form רְכַב (‘ride’) is not a *hapax legomenon*, but its use here is striking. The LXX translates this phrase as καὶ βασίλευε (‘and reign’), suggesting an exegetical or figurative reinterpretation.[13] Similarly, the Vg (*iuxta* LXX) renders it as *et regna* (‘and reign’), and the Coptic translations—Bohairic and Sahidic—along with the Targum, follow suit with analogous terms that align closer to the concept of “reigning”. These variations imply that רכב was challenging or enigmatic to the translators, prompting them to render it exegetically in a manner that aligns with the broader thematic context of kingship. The shift from “ride” to “reign” across these traditions may reflect an attempt to harmonize the term with the surrounding royal imagery of the psalm, where the king is depicted in majestic and authoritative roles. This interpretive approach underscores the exegetical strategies employed by the translators to convey the text’s underlying meaning, despite the lexical ambiguity of the Hebrew imperative רכב.

2.4 ענות צדק

The lexemes ענוה (‘humility’) and צדק (‘righteousness’) demonstrate a syntactical relationship that defies classification as a construct chain, as ענוה is in the absolute, not construct, state (HALOT, s.v. “ענוה”), as evidenced by their transmission in the MT, LXX, Vg, and Coptic versions (Bohairic and Sahidic).[14] This peculiar construction presents two significant philological challenges.

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[13] Tov and Polak suggest that the Greek term βασίλευε represents a figurative translation of the Hebrew רכב, as evidenced in the *CATSS Hebrew/Greek Parallel Text*. This interpretation aligns with the broader exegetical framework of the Septuagint, which often employs metaphorical renderings to convey thematic coherence within its target linguistic and cultural context. The current analysis was conducted using the Computer-Assisted Tools for Septuagint Studies (CATSS; Tov and Polak 2005, as distributed in BibleWorks Software 2015), which facilitates detailed comparative studies of textual variants.

[14] HALOT, perceiving ambiguity in the text, highlights potential orthographic alternatives proposed by other scholars: “For ועניו, it might be construed as ויען (‘And for the sake of’); alternatively, וענו הצדק (‘Defend the poor man!’) could replace וענוה־צדק.” However, substituting ועניו with ועניו appears unwarranted, as it contradicts the renderings of the LXX, Vg, and Peshitta and lacks orthographic substantiation. Furthermore, while replacing וענוה־צדק with וענו הצדק is not typographically erroneous, it remains unsupported by textual evidence in any ancient version. For further details, see HALOT, s.v. “ענוה”.

Primarily, the hypothetical presence of a conjunctive ו ('and') preceding צדק in the Hebrew *Vorlage* underlying the LXX, Vg, two medieval manuscripts cited in MT^{mss} (one of which is noted as *forte* in De Rossi 1788:31), and the Coptic versions presents a textual challenge. While the addition of a conjunctive waw in the versions could be a scribal attempt to smooth out a difficult reading, it is equally possible and widely accepted that the LXX and its derivative versions interpolated the conjunction ו as an interpretive clarification, attempting to resolve the syntactical ambiguity inherent in the MT construction (ענוה צדק). This clarification is distinct from the Syriac interpretive option, which is discussed below as the preferred alternative.

The semantic field of ענוה, encompassing "humility" and "meekness", generates additional interpretive complexities in Psalm 45:5 (BDB, s.v. ענוה; HALOT, s.v. ענוה; TWOT, s.v. ענוה; Holladay 1971, s.v. ענוה). The resultant reading would suggest that the divine/royal figure acts to restore אמת ('truth'), ענוה, and צדק. However, this interpretation faces a significant theological-literary obstacle: the biblical corpus lacks attestation of a divine/royal figure initiating revolutionary action specifically to restore ענוה. Rather, the contextual framework consistently presents this figure as an agent for reestablishing משפט ('justice') and צדק.[15] This absence of parallel attestation substantially diminishes the probability of such an interpretation.

A more philologically satisfying solution emerges from the textual evidence preserved in the Syriac and select manuscripts of the MT suggesting a reading of ענות צדק. While the textual support for this reading as the archetype is limited, it stands as a powerful ancient exegetical solution that resolves the aforementioned difficulties. A translator could reasonably conclude, like the Syriac translator perhaps did, that this reading best fits the context. Within this interpretive framework, the phrase indicates that the divine/royal figure's martial action serves not only to exalt אמת but, crucially, to prevent the suppression or degradation (ענות) of צדק.

2.5 ותורך

The text-critical analysis of ותורך presents significant interpretive challenges across ancient versions. While the majority of versions, excluding the Syriac,

[15] See the occurrence of the terms משפט and צדק in connection with the king in passages such as Psalm 72:2; Isaiah 9:6; 16:5; 32:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15. Notably, in Psalm 45:5, the pairing of אמת and צדק forms a conceptual parallel to the combination of משפט and צדק, emphasizing the thematic interplay of truth, justice, and righteousness within the royal and divine framework.

render this term consonant with the MT as "and will lead you" (derived from the hiphil of ירה), several philological considerations warrant examination.

The collocation of ימינך ('your right hand') with ותורך represents a syntactical construction that lacks parallel attestation in the MT.[16] The conventional rendering, "Let your right hand teach you" (RSV), is strange when considering the agency implied—the incongruity of a divine figure's appendage serving as instructor!

This interpretive difficulty led ancient translators to seek alternative solutions. The Syriac version, for instance, offers ܢܡܘܣܟ ('your law' or 'your rule'), presenting a compelling exegetical path. The hypothesis of a Syriac *Vorlage* reading תורתך ('your law') appears improbable, given the unanimous witness of other versions to ותורך ('and it will show you'). Likewise, the possibility that the Syriac translator conflated תורך and תורתך seems unlikely, given the Syriac's consistent and precise rendering of ותרך as ܘܬܠܦܟ ('and teach you') in parallel contexts, such as Job 12:7–8. The most cogent explanation posits that the Syriac translator deliberately rendered תורך as ܢܡܘܣܟ ('your law' or 'your rule'), which aligns with תורתך, through contextually informed exegesis.[17]

This choice may reflect an ancient judgment that the MT's syntax—where the king's right hand *teaches* him terrible deeds—was theologically and syntactically awkward. For a translator, this exegetical tradition offers a powerful alternative. Adopting this interpretation—which can be justified as an exegetical clarification rather than a textual emendation—yields a thematically coherent text: "for your rule is secured by the terrible might of your right hand," suggesting that the king's efficacy derives from reverential fear of his might.

This exegetical tradition finds significant resonance within rabbinic hermeneutical circles, particularly in their association of divine law with the Holy One's right hand (b. Shabbat 63a; Yalqut Shimoni, Psalms § 750; Midr. Teh. 1:14; Loew ben Bezalel 1872, *Netiv ha-Torah* ch. 6, 12; Edels 1680/81, fol. 21a, ad b. Shabbat 63a). The paradigmatic parallel appears in Deuteronomy 33:2, which explicitly links divine law with the right hand ("in his right hand, a fiery law"). Ultimately, the Syriac rendering preserves a sophisticated theological synthesis, making it a well-supported and attractive option for translation.

2.6 נוראות

The lexeme נוראות, derived from the niphal of יראה, occurs eight times in the MT, denoting "terrible (deeds)". The ancient versions exhibit notable semantic

[16] The term ותורך ('and will teach you') appears exclusively in the form ותרך in Job 12:7–8. This unique occurrence underscores its rarity within the Hebrew Bible.

[17] One Kennicott manuscript (Kenn. 255) reads ותורתך.

variation in their renderings of this term in Psalm 45. The LXX and Vg interpret the term as "wonderfully", while the Peshitta provides syntactic clarification through the addition of the prefix ܒ ('by' or 'in'), yielding the reading "in fear". The Targum opts for an adjectival rendering, "frightening", whereas an ancient Sahidic manuscript in the Freer Collection presents the nuanced interpretation "your fear associated with wonderings" (Worrell 1923:95). The Bohairic version expands the semantic range further: "with signs and wonders".

A close examination of these variant readings suggests a particular semantic affinity between the Syriac's "in fear" and the Coptic rendering. This emphasis on the aspect of dread is further reinforced by Symmachus (φοβερὰ) and Aquila (ἐπίφοβα), whose precise lexical choices align closely with the Targumic "frightening". This interpretive convergence merits attention, as it potentially reflects an early exegetical tradition that emphasizes the causative aspect of divine awe rather than merely its descriptive qualities. This reading demonstrates superior precision in capturing the contextual nuances of Psalm 45.

3 An interpretive crux in verse 6: The king's enemies

Translation (NRSV): Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; the peoples fall under you.

Proposed text and translation:

חִצֶּיךָ שְׁנוּנִים עַמִּים תַּחְתֶּיךָ יִפְּלוּ בְּלֵב אוֹיְבֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ׃

[Identical to NRSV] Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; the peoples fall under you. No emendation is proposed; MT is retained.

The textual analysis of Psalm 45:6 reveals significant interpretive complexities that merit careful examination. The phrase חציך שנונים ('Your arrows are sharp') is rendered in the Targum as גיררך שליפין ('your arrows are drawn'). The LXX's introduction of the vocative δυνατέ ('O mighty one'), reflecting the Hebrew גבור, appears to be an intentional incorporation in harmonization with the epithet found in Psalm 45:4 (Field 1875(2):162).[18] The verse exhibits syntactic disruption, with segment 6b (עמים תחתיך יפלו) disrupting the natural progression between 6a (חציך שנונים) and 6c (בלב אויבי המלך). The Qumran manuscript (11QPs[d]) has additional text at the verse's conclusion, of which only the word אלף (perhaps 'thousand') survives (Ulrich 2010:642).

[18] For a detailed discussion on textual harmonization within the Hebrew Bible, see Tov 2017.

A key decision for the translator emerges from the pronominal shift in the phrase חִצֶּיךָ … בְּלֵב אוֹיְבֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ ('Your arrows … in the heart of the king's enemies'). The verse explicitly combines a second-person address ("Your arrows") with a third-person reference ("the king"), creating an interpretive choice.

A translator can resolve this ambiguity in two primary ways. The first is to read the king as the sole addressee, understanding the third-person reference as a conventional honorific, a well-attested feature of biblical courtly language (cf. 2 Sam 3:21; 4:8; and indeed in Ps 45 itself at vv. 2, 15, and 16). In this case, a footnote might clarify the stylistic device for the reader. The second option, which avoids a jarring shift in person, is to adopt the hypothesis of a second warrior figure. This reading maintains a consistent addressee (the warrior) who acts on behalf of the king. Following this path clarifies that the "mighty one" (גבור) introduced in verse 4 functions not as an epithet for the king, but as his distinct martial champion.

4 Verse 7

Translation (NRSV): Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity.

Proposed text and translation:

כִּסְאֲךָ אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם וָעֶד שֵׁבֶט מִישׁר שֵׁבֶט מַלְכוּתֶךָ׃

Your divine throne endures for ever and ever. The tribe of uprightness is the tribe of your kingdom.

4.1 כסאך אלהים

The rendition of כסאך אלהים presents a major interpretive crux that has engendered considerable scholarly debate.[19] Syntactically, the most straightforward reading is to take אלהים as a vocative: "Your throne, O God …" This is reflected in Aquila's θεέ and is a common interpretation. This forces the translator to decide if the psalm momentarily shifts to address God directly, or if the human king is being addressed with a divine title (cf. Exod 4:16; Ps 82:6).

An alternative, reflected in translations like the RSV and TNK ("Your divine throne"), is to understand אלהים as a modifier indicating the throne's divine nature or backing. While this reading is grammatically more complex, it is supported by two recognized phenomena in Biblical Hebrew syntax. First is the

[19] Mulder 1972:33–80; Harris 1984:65–89; Ausloos 2006:244–246; Edwards 2007:185–186; Lim 2017:172–174; Krusche 2019:259–260.

principle of qualitative apposition (or "apposition of characterization"), where a noun functions adjectivally to describe a quality of the preceding noun (see GKC § 131b–c; Joüon–Muraoka § 131b–c). Just as נַעֲרָה בְתוּלָה (Deut 22:28) means 'a virgin girl', it is plausible that אלהים here specifies the quality of the throne as being divine.

Second, and more broadly, is the semantic use of divine names to express a superlative (the so-called "divine superlative"; see IBHS § 14.5; Thomas 1953). Additionally, the Peshitta's rendering, ܟܘܪܣܝܐ ܕܐܠܗܐ ('the throne of God'), provides a parallel ancient exegetical witness that treats the divine name in construct rather than as a direct vocative. This reading is grammatically complex. It is critical to note that the presence of the pronominal suffix (ךָ) on כִּסְאֲךָ creates a syntactic anomaly that is not present in standard examples of the divine superlative (e.g., הַרְרֵי־אֵל, 'mighty mountains', Ps 36:7, a construct chain in which the divine name functions as a genitive of quality). However, the semantic use of divine names to express a superlative is a broadly attested phenomenon. The primary argument for preferring a nonvocative interpretation remains contextual: it maintains the king as the most consistent addressee of the psalm, interpreting the phrase either as an anomaly of superlative expression or as a direct, hyperbolic address to the human king ("O God") in line with the elevated language of the entire psalm and the explicit address of אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֶיךָ in verse 8.

A translator opting for this reading should include a footnote explaining the grammatical ambiguity and the theological choice being made.

4.2 שבט מישר

The collocation שבט מישר is a *hapax legomenon*.[20] The lexeme שבט is polysemous, meaning either "scepter/staff" or "tribe". While the immediate context of כסאך ('your throne') and מלכותך ('your kingdom') certainly favors the meaning "scepter", a reading that aligns with other royal psalms (cf. Ps 2:9), this interpretation is not without difficulties. The primary challenge is syntactic: the deployment of מישר as an adjectival modifier of שבט ('staff') lacks any parallel in the MT, making the common reading grammatically unique.

The ancient versions, however, offer no support for "tribe" here: the LXX (ῥάβδος εὐθύτητος), the Vg (*virga directionis*), and the Targum (חוטרא תרצתא) all read "rod, scepter", while the Peshitta's ܫܒܛ is as ambiguous as the Hebrew.

[20] HALOT, s.v. "שבט." It is noteworthy that the Hebrew Bible predominantly employs מטה ('staff')—occurring approximately 251 times—rather than שבט ('scepter') to denote similar concepts. This preference underscores a significant lexical distinction within the Hebrew Bible's portrayal of authority and leadership.

The "tribe" reading must therefore be argued on other grounds. It finds thematic parallels in texts where שבט denotes the people as a divine inheritance (e.g., Jer 10:16; Ps 74:2).[21] In this framework, שבט מישר would not be a physical object but a poetic description of the king's domain: a "tribe of uprightness" or a "righteous dynasty". This interpretation shifts the focus from the symbols of power to the moral quality of the kingdom itself. Given these thematic parallels and the syntactic rarity of the alternative, translators may consider "tribe" a viable alternative rendering, although it runs counter to the testimony of the ancient versions.

5 Verse 8

Translation (NRSV): Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.

While the primary text-critical cruxes of this section reside in verses 4–7 and 9, the intervening verse 8 requires brief comment, as its phrase עַל־כֵּן מְשָׁחֲךָ אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֶיךָ ('Therefore God, your God, has anointed you') directly impacts the interpretation of the preceding verses. The explicit mention of the king having a divine patron strongly contextualizes the address of אלהים in verse 7. If verse 7 addresses the human king as "God" (or refers to his "divine throne"), verse 8 immediately grounds this hyperbole by clarifying his subordinate status to Yahweh, who anoints him. Furthermore, within the two-character framework proposed for verses 4–6, verse 8 serves to recenter the psalm's focus unambiguously on the primary royal figure, emphasizing his unique election 'beyond his companions' (מֵחֲבֵרֶיךָ), a group which could conceivably include the very champion (גבור) previously armed for his cause.

6 Examining a translation choice in verse 9: Ivory palaces or an ancient temple?

Translation (NRSV): Your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad.

Proposed text and translation:

מֹר־וַאֲהָלוֹת <וְקִצִיעוֹת> כָּל־בִּגְדֹתֶיךָ מִן־⌜הֵיכַל יָשָׁן⌝ מְנִי שִׂמְּחוּךָ׃

All your robes (are fragrant with) myrrh and aloes and cassia; from the old temple of Minni, they make you glad.

[21] It is noteworthy that the term שבט ('tribe') should not be exclusively interpreted as referring to the Israelite tribes. For a biblical reference to שבט in a context beyond the Israelite tribes, see Isaiah 19:13.

6.1 Apparatus

– <וְקִצִיעוֹת>* LXX (καὶ κασία) Vg (et cassia)[22] S (ܘܩܨܝܥܬ) Tg (וקציעתא)] α′ (κασία) MT קְצִיעוֹת

– ⌜הֵיכַל יָשֵׁן⌝ ≈ S (ܗܝܟܠ ܫܢܝ ܬܪܥܐ) SyrH (ܗܝܟܠ ܫܢܝ ܬܪܥܐ)] MT הֵיכְלֵי שֵׁן LXX (βάρεων ἐλεφαντίνων) Tg (היכליא דמכבשין בשין־דפיל) (exeg) Vg (domibus eburneis) α′ (ναῶν ὀδόντος) σ′ (ναῶν ἐλεφαντίνων)

6.2 וקציעות

The textual apparatus of BHS indicates a proposed emendation to וקציעות to harmonize the list of spices. The addition of the conjunction (waw) is textually preferable because it conforms to the syntactical pattern of the preceding items (מר ואהלות) and is strongly attested by the LXX (καὶ κασία), Vg (*et cassia*), and S (ܘܩܨܝܥܬ) versions, thereby ensuring translational consistency for the three items.

6.3 היכל ישן

The MT's phrase הֵיכְלֵי שֵׁן is most often translated "ivory palaces", a reading adopted by most ancient and modern versions. This interpretation is well supported, evoking images of royal wealth and opulence (cf. 1 Kgs 22:39; Amos 3:15). For a translator, this is the most straightforward and defensible rendering.

However, an intriguing alternative is preserved in the Syriac witness, ܗܝܟܠ ܫܢܝ ܬܪܥܐ ('the chief/best temple').[23] This suggests a different Hebrew word division: היכל ישן ('old temple'). This reconstruction, while conjectural, finds philological support in 1 Samuel 7:12, where the LXX's παλαιᾶς ('old') reflects an underlying Hebrew ישן ('old'; HALOT, s.v. "ישן") in contradistinction to the MT's השן (cf. NRSV, "Jeshanah") (Vayntrub and Hardy 2014:281). It must be conceded, however, that arguing for this reading based strictly on the Peshitta posits a highly idiosyncratic translation choice, as the Syriac standardly renders Hebrew ישן with ܡܨܦܬ (e.g., Neh 12:39; Isa 22:11; Lev 25:22; 26:10). The sanctity of this location is further evidenced in 1 Samuel 7:5, where Samuel establishes it as a site of communal worship and divine intervention: "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and

[22] The Vulgate is cited from Weber and Gryson 2007.

[23] It is highly pertinent to note that in the manuscript photo of 4QPs^{c} (4Q85), the script is compressed with indistinct word divisions as היכלישן—a material reality not indicated in standard transcriptions such as Ulrich 2010:643, underscoring the ambiguity of the variants.

I will pray to the LORD for you."[24] This presents the translator with a compelling, albeit less textually certain, alternative. Translating "from the old temple of Minni" would ground the psalm in a specific sacred geography, offering a different nuance from the general opulence of "ivory palaces". A footnote explaining both options would be highly appropriate.

6.4 מני

The lexeme מני presents significant interpretive challenges, with various scholarly propositions regarding its semantic range. The rendering "stringed instruments", advocated by BDB, HALOT, and contemporary translations (NRSV, TNK), demonstrates congruence with the form מנים ('instruments'; BDB, s.v. מן; HALOT, s.v.מן). This interpretation gains additional support from the BHS apparatus's suggestion of מנים and finds parallel attestation in Psalm 150:4. The LXX's ἐξ ὧν ('out of which') and Symmachus's ὅθεν ('whence'), followed by the Vg's *ex quibus*, present syntactical difficulties, particularly in light of the parallelism between ἐξ ὧν and אשר ('which') in comparable contexts.[25] Similarly, Aquila's ἐξ ἐμοῦ ('from me'), paralleled in SyrH's ܡܢܝ ('from me') and the Syriac's ܡܢ ܠܘܬܝ ('from my side'), proves contextually problematic (Field 1875(2):163 n. 37).[26]

The Targum's interpretation as 'land of Minni' (ארע מני), a name that BDB identifies with a region of Armenia (Assyrian Mannai), finds support through its parallel usage in Jeremiah 51:27 (BDB, s.v. "מִנִּי"; but note that Field 1875(2):163 n. 37, dismisses the Armenian sense). This reading gains additional credence through the attestation of Minnit[27] in Judges 11:33, where it appears alongside Aroer in the account of Jephthah's campaign against the Ammonites, whose land had formerly been inhabited by the Rephaim, called Zamzummim by the

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[24] According to Genesis 31:47–49 and 1 Samuel 7:5, Mizpah is identified as a sacred site where a dispute arose between Jacob and Laban (Gen 31:47). The two parties resolved their conflict by erecting a heap of stones as a witness between them, naming it Galeed or, alternatively, the Pillar of Mizpah. This "heap of witness" also appears in *Tg Ps 60:1*, where it is rendered as עתיק סהדותא ('old testimony'), paralleling the Greek παλαιᾶς ('old'). This connection may further hint at the "old temple" referenced in Psalm 45. For a comparison of παλαιᾶς with עתיק, see the MT and LXX in Daniel 7:13 and 22.

[25] For a comparative analysis, observe the rendering of ἐξ ὧν in the LXX and אשר in the MT across the following passages: Numbers 23:13; Ruth 2:18; Job 4:19; Micah 2:3; 6:12; Jeremiah 11:11; Ezekiel 16:17.

[26] The Peshitta manuscripts exhibit notable variation in rendering the term, presenting it as ܠܘܬ ('toward'), ܘܡܢ ('and from'), [ܡܢ[ܠܘܬ ('from [beside]'), and ܠܘܬܝ ('toward me') (Walter, Vogel, and Ebied 1980:66).

[27] Minnit is likely an altered form of Minni.

Ammonites, who dispossessed them (Deut 2:20–21); the Valley of Arnon is named at this point only in the LXX B-text. Read against this geography,[28] the construction היכל ישן מני may be cogently interpreted as "the old temple of Minni", providing a coherent geographical and historical framework for understanding this challenging phrase.

7 Conclusion: A coherent translation strategy for Psalm 45:4–9

The text-critical evidence examined in this study offers translators a clear path for navigating the interpretive cruxes in Psalm 45. The primary challenge is whether to read the king as the sole addressee or to recognize the "mighty one" (גבור) as a distinct figure. While the latter thesis is not without its own difficulties, it provides a compelling framework for resolving tensions in verses 4–6. A translator's decision on this central point will determine the rendering of several subsequent phrases. This guide has laid out the evidence for each position, allowing translators to make an informed choice that best aligns with their project's goals.

This guide presents translators with key decision points. For verse 4, one can either render the traditional "on your thigh, O mighty one", or adopt the hypothetical "upon the thigh of the mighty one" to resolve later tensions. For verse 5, the choice is between the MT's martial "Ride forth!" and the LXX's regal "and reign". Similarly, in verse 9, the translator can choose between the conventional "ivory palaces", evoking opulence, or the text-critically suggestive "old temple of Minni", which offers a specific geographical context. Each choice carries different narrative and theological implications, which this study has aimed to elucidate.

Explanation of Apparatus Symbols

Note: To accommodate a broad readership of translation practitioners who may not utilize standard BHS/BHQ conventions daily, this apparatus employs a simplified set of symbols to maximize clarity and accessibility.

- ⌜ ⌝: "ceilings", used in the critical text to mark a reading not in MT^{L}.
- < >: conjectural emendation.

[28] The statement that Aroer stood on the edge of the Valley of Arnon is well attested in several biblical passages, including Deuteronomy 2:36; 3:12; 4:48; Joshua 12:2; 13:9, 16. However, in Judges 11:33 the B-text of the LXX (Codex Vaticanus) reads ἄχρις Αρνων where the MT has מנית; the A-text reads εἰς Σεμωιθ.

- *: retroversion from Greek, Aramaic, etc., where there is no equivalent Hebrew text.
-]: separator in apparatus entry (primary reading to left, secondary reading/readings with comment to the right).
- ≈: approximately equal; close enough so as not to indicate a different text.
- exeg: exegetical.
- unc: uncertain.
- metath: metathesis (reversal or transposition of letters or words, AB → BA).

Abbreviations

4QPsc	Qumran Psalms manuscript 4Q85
11QPsd	Qumran Psalms manuscript 11Q8
α′	Aquila
BDB	*Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1996)
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHQ	*Biblia Hebraica Quinta*
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Elliger and Rudolph 1997)
Bo	Bohairic
Bomss	Bohairic manuscripts
ESV	English Standard Version
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Kautzsch 1910)
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner 1994–2000)
IBHS	*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Waltke and O'Connor 1990)
Joüon–Muraoka	Joüon 1996
LSJ	*Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell, Scott, and Jones 1996)
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text

MTL	Masoretic Text, Leningrad Codex
MTmss	Masoretic Text manuscripts
NETS	*New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Pietersma and Wright 2007)
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
S	Syriac Peshitta
Sa	Sahidic
Samss	Sahidic manuscripts
σ′	Symmachus
SyrH	Syro-Hexapla
Tg	Targum
TNK	Tanakh (Jewish Publication Society, 1985)
TWOT	*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Harris, Archer, and Waltke 1980)
Vg	Vulgate
VL	Vetus Latina (Old Latin)

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