

The Date of the Korah-psalms.¹

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THE difficulties of psalm-criticism are well known: the definite historical references in the psalms are few, the linguistic indications are rarely decisive, and the text is sometimes corrupt; and further the development of the Israelitish literary and religious history has not been so worked out as always to furnish trustworthy notes of date. I do not hope to be able to fix the places of the Korah-psalms with certainty, or to do anything more than state the points involved, mark out more precisely the problem, and thus possibly take one step towards its solution.

This group embraces Pss. xlii.-xlix., lxxxiv., lxxxv., lxxxvii., and possibly lxxxviii., though this last is also ascribed in the title to Heman the Ezrahite. Of the "sons of Korah" given in the titles as the authors of these psalms we know very little. Of an assumed ancestor Korah, a descendant of Levi, we have a history in Ex. vi. 21, 24, Numb. xvi., and his genealogy is given in 1 Chr. vi. 7 ff. [Eng. Vers. 22 ff.] and 18-23 [33-38]; Korahites are described as soldiers, 1 Chr. xii. 6 (but these appear to be Benjaminites, ver. 2), temple-doorkeepers, 1 Chr. xxvi. 1-19, and singers, 1 Chr. xxv., in David's time, and in Jehoshaphat's time as singers, 2 Chr. xx. 19; after the exile they appear as porters, 1 Chr. ix. 19; and as in charge of things baked, 31, but not as singers; in Nehemiah, strangely enough, considering the relation of that book to Chronicles, they are not mentioned, for in Neh. xi. 19, xii. 25 (comp. 1 Chr. ix. 17) there is no sign that the men named are Korahites. Thus the existence of a body of singers of this name depends on the book of Chronicles and the titles of the psalms, two questionable sources. The disposition of Chronicles to embellish its narratives and transfer to early times the institutions of its own would lead us to be cautious in accepting its ritual statements, and a comparison with the book of Kings tends to throw doubt on the rôle assigned by the Chronicler to the Korahites under David and Jehoshaphat. On the other hand there is no

¹ Read in June, 1885.

reason to doubt that Korahite singers existed in the Chronicler's time (c. B.C. 320-300), and if in his time, then probably earlier, though how much earlier it is hard to say, perhaps under Ezra and Nehemiah. The precise form "sons of Korah" does not occur in Chronicles: in 1 Chr. xiv. the Levitical singers are distributed under the three leaders, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthum; but in 2 Chr. xx. 19 the double plural "sons of the Korahites" may be regarded as equivalent to the form in the psalm-title. Probably there was, from the fifth century on, a Levitical family of singers called the "Bene Korah," and they may well have been the authors or collectors and editors of temple-songs; there may have been a song-book arranged by them, containing their own productions or those of others or both of these classes, and called by their name.

But now, as to whether any particular psalm belonged to this collection or was composed by this family, on this point our only source of information is the title. And no one of the titles can be regarded as in itself authoritative, for the reason that so many of them are manifestly incorrect that the trustworthiness of the whole body is thereby impugned. This does not mean that all of them are certainly wrong, but only that we cannot be sure of any one of them, on its own word merely, that it is right. Over the titles of the psalms ascribed to David we have some control from his history as given in Samuel; for example, the situation in Pss. lx., cviii. (serious defeat) corresponds to nothing there narrated. But it may be said that the singer has in mind an incident of the Edomite war not preserved in our historical books. There are, however, other discrepancies not to be explained by a supposed silence of the history. A number of the psalms ascribed to David assume the existence of the temple, for example, lxxviii., cxxii., cxxxviii.; and of these some take for granted the later levitical life, dwelling in the temple, and worshipping with the great congregation, as xxvii., xl., lxv. Others portray such relations to foreign nations as did not exist in David's time, so vii., lvii., lix. Elsewhere we find references or allusions to the exile or to some similar great calamity, as in xiv. (and its duplicate liii.), lxix., cxxiv.; or to circumstances that do not fit into any conceivable scheme of David's life, as lv. These are examples of historical difficulties that lie on the surface; if we went into a fuller examination of the history of the cultus, the case would be made stronger.

Our confidence in the titles is impaired also by the editorial modes of procedure of which we have glimpses, especially the disposition to tack together different compositions; see the appendages to li.

the depression of national humiliation, xliv., lxxxv., or of individual adversity, lxxxviii., the outburst of patriotic exultation, xlvi., xvii., xviii., lxxxvii., an ode to a king and his consort, xlv., and a philosophical reflection, xlix.; and the language is now smooth and flowing, now curt and hard, or enigmatical, here the rhythmical balance is well maintained, here it is lacking. The group may have been composed at one period, if we judge from the style alone, or its composition may have extended over centuries.

2. We need not expect to find in the grammar and lexicon of the Korah-group any very definite indication of date; like the rest of the psalter, this group is written in the main in what is called classical Hebrew, the language of the prophets and the earlier historical books, and of such Hebrew we must admit the possibility from David's time to the second or first century B.C. Doubtless there are pronounced linguistic differences between the various Old Testament books: the contrast between the poetic brilliancy of Amos and Isaiah and the prosaic flatness of Haggai and Zechariah is sufficiently well marked; and in the later historical books, as Chronicles, and philosophical works like Koheleth the Aramaizing tendency is distinct. But, apart from Aramaisms, the language changed slowly; and after the exile, and especially after the idea of a sacred canon had established itself, there was a disposition to imitate earlier writers, a disposition that may be supposed to have been especially strong in liturgical productions like the psalms, in which, moreover, the thought is simple and of limited range.

The words of strange appearance that are found in the Korah-group are too few and too doubtful to be decisive guides as to date: **צנור**, xlii. 8, found elsewhere only in 2 Sam. v. 8, where its signification is unknown, has been supposed here to mean "canal," a sense that it has in Jewish Aramaic; but the connection in the psalm seems rather to favor the meaning "waterfall," as Septuagint gives it.

רהש, xlv. 2, appears to be used in the sense "gush or flow forth," as in Syriac. As it is found only here in the Old Testament, and is a common word in Syriac and Jewish Aramaic, there is some ground for supposing that it is an Aramaic loan-word; but it is manifestly difficult to make such an assertion respecting a word which occurs only once, and, if its Aramaic origin were settled, this would merely give the exile as upper limit, since Aramaizing expressions occur as early as that.

שגל, xlv. 10, "queen," is found only here and in late books, namely, Nehemiah and the Aramaic part of Daniel. It is prob-

writings of the prophets. And this is what appears to be the case in our psalter. That a process went on, after the exile, by which "Elohim" took the place of "Yahwe" may be regarded as established from several considerations. First, there is the occurrence in the Pentateuch of double or related narratives, one Yahwistic and the other Elohist, the former bearing marks of being the earlier. Then, we have parallel passages in earlier and later historical books, the latter employing "Elohim" where the former employ "Yahwe"; compare, for example, 2 Sam. v. 19, vi. 17, vii. 27, xxiv. 10 with 1 Chr. xiv. 10, xvi. 1, xvii. 25, xx. 8 respectively. And in certain books, as Ezra, Nehemiah, and Ecclesiastes, known to be late, Yahwe has almost entirely yielded to Elohim. Finally, we know that the Jews ended with entirely abandoning the former, substituting for it the Hebrew Adonai and the Greek Kurios. From the extant literature we may infer that the process of change began at least as early as the fifth century B.C.; it is already visible in the Pentateuch and in Malachi. But it is necessary to note the precise nature of this change. It consists, of course, not merely in the use of the word "Elohim" in connection with the Deity,—this old Hebrew word was necessarily employed abundantly from the earliest times as an appellative; the essential point of the change was that "Elohim" now came to be employed as the proper name of the God of Israel, just as Yahwe was used. If we go through the pre-exilic prophetic books, we shall find few occurrences of Elohim (or of El) where it is not shown to be an appellative by the presence of the article or of an adjective or other qualifying expression, or else is not clearly a general designation of the divine. In two or three cases there is a near approach to the use of the word as a proper name. Amos iv. 11: "as when Elohim overthrew Sodom" is identical in its wording with Gen. xix. 29, and Hos. xii. 4: "he strove with Elohim" with Gen. xxxii. 28. There is a similar use of "Eloah" in Hab. iii. 3: "Eloah came from Teman," though this would decide nothing as to "Elohim." But in certain of the psalms, this employment of the latter as proper name is definite and usual, and seems to show that there had taken place a change in the national feeling in respect to the designation of the God of Israel. Then, it is to be noted that this change of divine name was the result of a change in the general religious outlook. Yahwe was an individual and national name; it distinguished the Israelitish deity from the deities of other nations. There was a time when the Israelites held that the deity belonged to the soil, as the soil to the deity; so thought Jephthah (Judg. xi. 24) and David (1 Sam.

xxvi. 19). But, with broadening and deepening views of the absolute oneness of the Deity and the nullity of all pretenders to deity except the One, there doubtless came the feeling that an individual name for God savored of the old polytheism; and so the private name would give way to that general term which identified the God of Israel with the absolutely Divine. The history of the development of the religious thought would thus lead us to regard the Elohist writings as in general later than the Yahwistic. But the value of this canon is impaired by the consideration above-mentioned, that it is conceivable that, after the one name had established itself in a certain circle, a psalm-writer should use the other, or both together; the lyrical, devotional feeling might cling to the old name after the philosophical thought had dropped it. And this is not all the difficulty. The utility of this canon is further weakened by the fact that we must admit the possibility of two recensions, Yahwistic and Elohist, of the same psalm. Such a double recension exists in xiv. and liii., and may exist elsewhere. We cannot be sure, in the case of any Elohist psalm, that an editor has not changed the divine name; and therefore, we are practically debarred from pressing this point. In one place, at least, there is ground to suspect editorial change; in xlv. 8 the expression "Elohim, thy Elohim, has anointed thee" would sound more natural if it read: "Yahwe, thy Elohim, has anointed thee." Whether the change has actually been made here or not, it is possible; and all that we can with some positiveness infer from an Elohist psalm is the date of the possible recension.

5. There is another point which, if taken in connection with the preceding, may lead to more definite results: it is the ritual-ecclesiastical tone that appears in certain of the psalms; for example, in xlii., xliii., lxxxiv., where a Levite or priest mourns his absence from the temple-service in which he finds his real life.

The question of the growth of the ritual, a part of the question of general Pentateuch criticism, is too wide a one to be discussed here. If, as it seems to me, we find in the closing chapters of Ezekiel the indication of the rise of the separate Levitical order, then this will be the upper limit for the composition of such psalms. The value of such a canon will depend on the definiteness with which it can be applied. The psalms above mentioned show a considerable development of temple life; the singer is at home in the house of God as he is nowhere else. He has a defined liturgical rôle, such as does not appear in Deuteronomy, and could hardly be expected earlier than the legislation of the middle books of the Pentateuch. Of this

advanced temple life there is no trace in Kings, but it appears fully formed in Chronicles. This latter book felt it to be necessary to supplement the earlier by long histories of Levitical procedures on all occasions; and the natural inference is that, between the books, the Levitical life had established itself so firmly, that it was looked on by the Chronicler as something that must always have existed. The first of the prophets who shows sympathy with the priestly cultus is Ezekiel; the first who speaks of it as established is Malachi, after whom came Joel and the second Zechariah. In connection with this we must take into account also the churchly tone that we see in xlvi., xlvi., lxxxv., lxxxvii. In the preëxilian prophets, the political conception of the people is the most prominent one; it is the nation crowned with glory and happiness by the favor of Jahwe; but above all, the nation as a political unit, with its king and territory, and all the accompaniments of sovereignty. But in later writings we find that this conception is modified. The national idea is never given up; but the nation has come to be regarded more as a community whose main life is religious, whose political position is chiefly valuable as furnishing a secure basis for the worship of God and the maintenance of his law. The contrast between the two conceptions is obvious if we go down as far as the Maccabean time; in First and Second Maccabees the ecclesiastical feeling is clear, and it appears also in the earlier books, Esther and Judith. The old hopes of military supremacy are gone; when the Jews came to realize the power of the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans, they felt the impossibility of those visions of a Hebrew world-monarchy that had cheered the hearts of the earlier prophets. They began to content themselves with the consciousness of religious superiority, — they had the divine law, theirs was the promise of divine favor in the nobler sphere of ethical-religious supremacy. This feeling, the initiation of which appears in the Second Isaiah, was formulated by the devout scribes and doctors of the second century B.C. It would naturally show itself in a peculiarly tender feeling towards Jerusalem as the centre of the national life. Zion — this was a name that the poets specially loved, a name consecrated by the memories of the poet-king who had taken it from the aliens and made it his capital — is no longer the royal capital; it is the centre of the church; it is invested with unearthly beauty, and has become the object of passionate affection. Such a feeling as this appears in some of our psalms. See xlvi. 5-8, xlvi. 2-7, 13, 14, lxxxv. 9-14, lxxxvii. This last psalm is an ode to the sacred citizenship: Yahwe, the poet declares, loves Zion (obviously as

the seat of the cultus) more than all the dwellings of Jacob, and, in the final estimate of the nations of the earth, the determining consideration will be birth, that is, citizenship, in the sacred spot. The writer seems to have proselytes in view, — a fact that would suggest a late date.

6. The historical references are few, and far from being always definite. The mention of service in the temple gives as upper limit the building or the temple by Solomon, and excludes the period B.C. 587–515, during which it was not standing, but there then remains a sufficiently long space of time; so xlii.–xliii. (doubtless substantially one psalm, or parts of the same psalm), xlvi., lxxxiv., and probably also lxxxvii. (“sacred mountains”).

Banishment or absence from the temple, as in xlii.–xliii., lxxxiv., may, so far as it in itself is concerned, relate to various periods. In the first place, it is not certain that the absence in these cases was effected by enemies; it may have been occasioned, particularly in lxxxiv., by private circumstances having no connection with the general national history, and may thus be quite beyond our reach. And then, if it does connect itself with some public event, some persecution by native or foreign oppressors, we have the choice between such widely separated persons as Manasseh and Antiochus Epiphanes, and possibly Bagoses (Joseph. Antiq. xi. 7); we may add, perhaps, the deportations that took place just before the destruction of the city.

The apparent mention in xlv. of the marriage of a king to a foreign princess has seemed to some critics to furnish a definite note of date. In connection with such a marriage, one might think of Solomon and the Egyptian princess, of Joram of Judah and Athaliah of Israel, or indeed, of Ahab and Jezebel. Solomon is not certainly excluded by the fact that the king is described as warlike, for that feature would naturally find place in a panegyric of any ancient king; nor by the non-mention of Egypt as the bride's country, for the home of the bride is not named at all (in ver. 13, where the text is probably corrupt, the “daughter of Tyre” seems to designate the city and not the bride), and this objection applies equally to all suppositions. Athaliah's later rôle was not such as to procure her so cordial a celebration at the hands of a Judean poet, but in the beginning it may have been different. The objection to Ahab as the hero of the psalm, that the idealizing messianic portraiture could apply only to a Davidic king, is founded on a double misconception; it is an importation of later ideas into this period; there is no good ground for denying that a northern poet might have invested a northern king with the “mes-

sianic" character; and then there is no specifically messianic picture in this psalm, nothing but praise of the king, and wishes of prosperity for him and his consort. It is possible that the mention of "ivory palaces," ver. 9, may make Ahab the upper limit, since he is the earliest king who is described as having such a palace; but it must be confessed that this is a somewhat precarious note of time. It is not certain that we have here the description of a marriage, nor is it clear whether the "queen" of ver. 10 is identical with the "king's daughter" of ver. 14, for the latter is to be brought to the king, ver. 15, while the former already stands at his right hand. The "king's daughter" need not be a queen, for the royal harem contained such princesses, ver. 10. Still, the impression made on us is that of a royal marriage, and it is not impossible that the personage of ver. 14 may be identical with her of ver. 10. Her nationality, however, is not given; the reference to Tyre, ver. 13 (supposing the text-reading correct, which is doubtful), shows not that the princess was a Tyrian, but that Tyre was in friendly, possibly tributary, relations with our king, which may have been true at almost any period from David to Zedekiah, and from Alexander Jannæus to Herod (an interruption of friendly relations is indicated in Am. i. 9; Joel belongs after the exile). But a marriage, such as that here described or involved, would not necessarily be mentioned in the often meagre narrative of our historical books, and we cannot restrict the possibilities to the cases actually mentioned. Any time, so far as these historical allusions go, when there was a king in Israel, the psalm may have been composed. We have to confine ourselves to kings of Israel; we have no warrant for supposing that such expressions as these would be employed of a foreign sovereign.

The group xlvi.-xlviii. seems to have in mind some splendid national deliverance: in xlvi. there is reference to mighty movements of nations brought to naught, comp. ii.; in xlvii. to Israel's subduing the peoples, who are called on to clap their hands and shout to Elohim with the voice of joy; in xlviii. more definitely to kings who assembled themselves (apparently against Zion), saw, were amazed and dismayed. It is not easy to attach these conditions to any known event of the history. Sennacherib's overthrow, 2 Kgs. xix., has naturally been thought of, but does not very well agree with the burned chariots, xlvi. 10, the subduing of peoples, xlvii. 4, or the hostile confederation of kings, xlviii. 5. There are verbal resemblances between our group and Isa. xxxiii., which seems to have been written during an Assyrian invasion. Comp. ver. 14 of that chapter with our xlviii. 7, ver. 20

with *xlvi.* 13, 14, and *ver.* 21 with *xlvi.* 5; but these resemblances are not very striking, and do not decide whether we have here only one author, or two authors independent of each other, or one copying from or imitating the other; nor does the general situation in Isaiah closely resemble that in the psalms, though this might be explained in part from the difference between prophetic and lyric thought. Others refer these psalms to the destruction of the Moabite-Ammonite host under Jehoshaphat, narrated in 2 Chr. xx. (not mentioned in the book of Kings). But, apart from the doubtful trustworthiness of the Chronicler when he is unsupported by Kings, there is the objection to such a reference that the event in Chronicles took place at a distance from Jerusalem, and would not agree with *xlvi.*; it might agree with *xlvi.* and *xlvi.*, though here there are other objections to be mentioned presently. It may be that no special contemporary event is referred to in these songs, that we have only a poetical, idealizing outburst of rejoicing and gratitude over the peaceful and religiously exalted position of Israel. This view is supported rather than opposed, by a comparison with *xcvi.*–*xcix.*, to which, as critics have pointed out, our group bears a marked resemblance. The tone of this other group is post-exilic, and would so far supply a note of time for ours; but to establish this point would require an examination of *xcvi.*–*xcix.*, and I will not pause for that. It may be observed that the “ships of Tarshish,” *xlvi.* 8, does not help us. Apart from the somewhat indefinite signification of this term, the psalmist’s expression seems to be a general one, not relating to a particular occurrence. If, however, it should be supposed to refer definitely to the destruction of a hostile fleet, we should have to regard it as probable that the scene was Eziongeber, and the time somewhere between Jehoshaphat, 1 Kings xxii., and the Maccabees; if it was an Israelitish fleet, the reference might be to that of Jehoshaphat.

The only specific mention of other nations is in *lxxxvii.*, where we have Rahab (Egypt), Babylon, Philistia, Tyre and Cush (Ethiopia). This particular group of peoples was hardly possible for an Israelitish writer before the latter part of Hezekiah’s reign (see *Mic.* iv. 10, 2 Kgs. xx.). It is found in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and would be possible for some time later. Certainly the omission of Persia in this connection might lead us to exclude the post-exilic period, but for the fact that we find Assyria named along with Egypt in *Zech.* x. 10 in the Grecian period (*Zech.* ix. 13), whence we may surmise that Assyria and Babylon remained as designations of the Tigris-Euphrates valley and its dependencies after the Semitic empires that once existed

there had vanished ; and we should be by no means shut up to B.C. 608-599, when Judah passed from Egyptian to Babylonian control. But in the introduction of these nations here there is another element of at least equal importance with the enumeration of names and the political relations—it is the religious attitude of the writer towards other peoples. He joyfully welcomes them to citizenship in Israel. Now, in the Second Isaiah, c. B.C. 540, the submission of the nations to Israel is looked to as one feature in the glorious consummation, but their relation is one of subordination, and their function is mainly to minister to the glory of the chosen people ; see Isa. lx. In the psalm there is a more cordially friendly tone, and also, more of the social, every-day tone in comparison with the heroic, idealizing coloring of the prophecy. The psalm thus seems to indicate more familiar acquaintance with foreign nations, and to belong to a later period than the prophecy.

The expression, “turned the captivity of Jacob,” in lxxxv. is generally taken as determining a post-exilian date for the psalm, as indeed it could not, from the connection, be well taken otherwise. The sin of Israel has been forgiven and the people have returned to their land. But new calamities, ethical and physical, have befallen them : they are lacking in faithfulness and justice, and the earth does not give its increase ; the psalmist’s hope is that Yahwe will bestow these blessings. It is a state of things that corresponds with a good deal of exactness to the picture given in Haggai and Zechariah ; but it is so general a description that we cannot say it may not equally correspond to a dozen later periods, only it is true that the remembrance of the exile is fresh in the writer’s mind, and we must not go too far from that point.

In xliv. there are two notes that enable us to fix the date with some precision : on the one hand, the nation is crushed by its enemies, its armies defeated in the field, itself a by-word and derision, and cast off by God ; on the other hand, there is a national consciousness of faithful allegiance to God’s covenant. The second of these conditions did not exist before the exile—from the earliest times to the destruction of the city by the Chaldeans there may be said to be an unbroken record of idolatry : of the period of the early kings there can be no question, and of the prophets, from Amos to Jeremiah, there is not one (except Nahum, who speaks only of Assyria) who does not give such a picture of contemporary national defection as makes it inconceivable that a devout poet of those times should say of his people what our psalmist says ; the only period not covered by

these prophetic utterances is B.C. 700-630, under Manasseh, Amon, and Josiah, on which see 2 Kgs. xxii. If then the confidence with which the singer asserts in the presence of God the nation's fidelity to the divine covenant points to the post-exilian time, the second note, overwhelming defeat of armies, as certainly points to the Maccabean period, the only time after the exile, as far as the preserved history informs us, when the Jews undertook independent military enterprises. For a picture of national defeat and desolation answering to that of our psalm, see 1 Macc. ix. 23-27, or xiii. 1-6.