This study of Pss 105–106 and 135–136 is an extended exploration of the theme of inner-biblical interpretation, looking specifically at how these psalms make use of and adapt traditions about the Exodus. Emanuel is interested in understanding the sources available to the psalmists, but consideration of sources is only one part of his project. He also explores how the psalms interpret and use those sources for their own purposes, as well as how their location within the Psalter affects their meaning. Through this process he aims to show how the psalmists were themselves exegetes of the existing traditions, creatively adapting them for their own purposes, though these are in turn adapted by the location of each psalm within the Psalter. The authors of these psalms emerge as bards who are also creative exegetes and who in turn create new works to explore the significance of the exodus for later generations.

Emanuel sets out his rationale and methodology in the first chapter. He identifies the exodus traditions as those that describe YHWH actively bringing Israel out of Egypt and into the land, although he is aware that this represents a cluster of related motifs rather than a monolithic whole. However, he quickly notes that there are twenty psalms that have exodus motifs, and this far exceeds the space he has available. Accordingly, he excludes all psalms where this motif is “vague” (3) or where a psalm does not examine
this in terms of YHWH’s active involvement. Finally, to reduce his range of psalms even further he chooses to work with those psalms that unambiguously narrate three events from the exodus and that can be dated to the Second Temple period. Unfortunately, Emanuel never explains the rationale behind this process beyond his Gideon-like attempt to reduce the number of texts available down to just the four psalms considered. A more obvious reason for examining these psalms might be that they are clustered as paired psalms in books 4 and 5 of the Psalms. Indeed, Emanuel is particularly interested in the effect of juxtaposing these psalms, as this is part of his research approach. But his stated rationale for excising Ps 95 is odd in that it arguably says more about the exodus than Ps 136, even if it does not meet the criteria of three separate events from the exodus. Likewise, that Ps 114 does not present YHWH actively bringing Israel out of Egypt and into the land is an odd criterion for excluding this psalm, since the directive to the earth in verses 7–8 to tremble at God’s presence rather suggests that we are to understand the events described earlier in terms of divine activity. Dating could be considered as another reason for excluding them, but since Emanuel dates Ps 106 to the exile, so before the Second Temple period, he was apparently flexible on this criterion. Emanuel obviously had space constraints with which to work, and the reading he offers of the four psalms considered is often rich and suggestive, but the reasons for considering these four psalms in particular needed to be explored more deeply than they were. This would have helped situate the work more thoroughly in the context of Psalms research and might also have enabled the conclusions to be more nuanced.

At other points, although on firmer methodological ground, Emanuel still tends not to lay out the detail of his approach and is open to the charge of sometimes claiming more than he perhaps should. Rather than being constrained by the main Gattungen, he particularly adopts Meir Weiss’s approach of total interpretation, though with awareness of how this is related to the rhetorical approach pioneered by James Muilenberg. He notes that this is not an approach that has been applied to these psalms as a whole, though some individual treatments have been published. However, although they are not using exactly the same methods as he outlines, he seems unaware of Walter Brueggeman’s study of three of these psalms, while Michael McKelvey’s study of the psalms of book 4 would also have provided some important insights. He then weds this approach to the type of inner-biblical exegesis pioneered by Michael Fishbane and others, noting that such treatments have not considered the psalms in detail. Finally, he is concerned with the effect of juxtaposition of particular psalms, suggesting that this is different from the dominant

concerns of those interested in the formation of the Psalter who have been more concerned with the structure of the whole Psalter. Although true to an extent, it ignores such pioneering work as Walther Zimmerli’s discussion of Zwillingpsalmen, while Jamie Grant’s work was specifically concerned with the effect of juxtaposition in Psalms. The overlap of these scholars’ works with that of Emanuel means he could have greatly enriched his own reading of these psalms by engaging with them.

With these guiding concerns in place, Emanuel then reads each psalm with both synchronic and diachronic concerns prominent. Consistent with Weiss’s approach, he divides each psalm into stanzas and strophes before offering an exegesis of each verse in order to meet the goal of interpreting the psalm as a whole. He calls this a “close reading,” though it is more like a reasonably detailed exegesis than something considering a range of literary devices that is perhaps more typical of a close reading. In my judgment, his treatment of each verse is stronger than his assessment of the structure of the psalms, since the detailed exegesis seldom reflects on the effects of the structure on an individual verse. There is no doubt that there is a great deal of worthwhile material here, though Emanuel again tends not to engage with a wide range of secondary sources. However, anyone studying these psalms will want to consider his reading, as it shows great awareness of the detail of each psalm. His diachronic concerns are seen in his identification of the pentateuchal sources employed in each of the psalms as well as his relative dating of them (his order is 106, 136, 105, 135), although he is rightly shy of offering an absolute date for them beyond the fact that they must all be postexilic (in spite of placing Ps 106 in the exile). The close reading also attends to various features of each psalm that indicates the probable sources texts in the Pentateuch, with these assigned to the documents on the basis of two standard analyses of the Pentateuch. Although there are other points where Emanuel can be criticized for lacking clarity in explaining his approach, his approach to identifying sources is much clearer, especially his explanation of pitfalls in identifying allusions. These allusions also assist in his assessment of the juxtaposition of these psalms, considering both the way that each pair works on its own but also how they relate to the larger block of psalms into which they are placed.

One chapter is devoted to each of the four psalms, with the “close reading” constituting the bulk of the study in each case. It is here that Emanuel shows his strengths in attending to the textures of each psalm. As well as offering a structure for each, he also prints the Hebrew text of each verse along with a translation. He is generally content to follow MT

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rather than possible variants, though his reasons for doing so are explained. Since it is the close reading that provides the data for his other concerns, it is appropriate that this section receives the most attention, and his subsequent treatment of meaning, date, sources, allusions, and juxtaposition for each psalm then refers back to this reading. The contrast in length between these sections can sometimes make the treatment feel rather cursory, though this is a function of how the material is developed. But it does mean that anyone who is concerned only with one aspect, such as the pentateuchal sources, will still need to work through the close reading to understand the reasons why sources as allotted as they are. However, in the case of these sources, Emanuel has a helpful series of appendixes that provide a chart of the sources discovered.

All of this is helpfully drawn together in a closing chapter. This summarizes the information in the previous four chapters while also offering some preliminary explorations of why these psalms are arranged as they are and how the psalmists have drawn on the exodus motif, stressing the creativity of the psalmists in addressing their own theological concerns rather than simply reproducing their sources. The psalmists, and the editors of the Psalter, thus emerge from this study as creative theologians who have something to say to the Second Temple community, though the diachronic development within these psalms shows that the concerns that had to be addressed through them also changed. In spite of the methodological concerns noted, this remains a stimulating treatment of these psalms with much to contribute to their study, but its conclusions needed to be tempered by a wider awareness of other Psalms research.