

# The Form and Function of the Tricolon in the Psalms of Ascents



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in the Psalms of Ascents

*Introducing a New Paradigm for  
Hebrew Poetic Line-Form*

SIMON P. STOCKS

*Foreword by David G. Firth*

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IN THE PSALMS OF ASCENTS

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## Foreword

THE MEANS BY WHICH we interpret the Old Testament's poetry continues to be a lively debate. This is true of both the aesthetic level at which poetry works and also, of particular importance here, the formal processes by which it produces meaning. Although introductory textbooks sometimes give the impression that the issues of parallelism and the structure of the colon are largely resolved, this is actually a field where there is considerable discussion. Lowth did not, after all, say all that was needed about this important topic, and neither have some of the more recent comprehensive studies. In particular, although scholars routinely discuss a "bicolon" or "tricolon"—and sometimes even a "monocolon"—clear definition of these remains elusive. This is particularly true of the tricolon, something that quickly becomes apparent from a comparison of a few commentaries or translations of the Psalms where poetic lines are actually represented in a variety of forms. We use the terminology, but clear processes for identifying a tricolon have remained elusive.

In light of this discussion I am pleased to commend this careful work to you. Simon Stocks here brings methodological rigour and clarity to this complex area as he provides us with a means of understanding the tricolon while at the same time opening up new vistas on how the poetic line can be formed and function. Of course, such a study can remain simply at the level of theory, but a real strength of Simon Stocks' work is the way he integrates his analysis with the Songs of the Ascents. This means that both his critique of those who have gone before him and also the developing of his own positive contribution to the field can be seen in the light of these sample psalms. We are thus able to see the weaknesses of previous analyses as they apply to specific texts and also how closer attention to the poetic forms provides us with fresh insights into these poems. There is more work to be done, but this clear and insightful study provides us with a way forward in understanding this important area of biblical poetics.

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I hope that this work will make a significant, if modest, contribution to the field of Biblical Hebrew poetics.

Simon P. Stocks

## Abbreviations

### PUBLICATIONS, SERIES, MANUSCRIPTS AND GENERAL

4QPs <sup>b</sup>	Psalms scroll from Qumran Cave 4, represented in DJD XVI
4QPs <sup>c</sup>	Psalms scroll from Qumran Cave 4, represented in DJD XVI
11QPs <sup>a</sup>	Psalms scroll from Qumran Cave 11, represented in DJD IV
AB	Anchor Bible
AER	<i>American Ecclesiastical Review</i>
AJSL	<i>The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures</i>
AOAT	Alter Orient und altes Testament
ASV	American Standard Version
ArOr	<i>Archiv orientální</i>
AV	Authorised Version
BCOT	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.</i> Oxford: Clarendon, 1907
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BThSt	Biblich-Theologische Studien
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>

CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CE	Common Era
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare with
CV	<i>Communio viatorum</i>
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
EBC	The Expositor's Bible Commentary
ET	<i>Expository Times</i>
ETL	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
fn	footnote
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
HB	Hebrew Bible
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HvTSt	<i>Hervormde teologiese studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JNSL	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
JQRSup	Jewish Quarterly Review Supplement
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JTT	<i>Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics</i>
LXX	Septuagint as represented by Göttingen edition
LXX <sup>A</sup>	Codex Alexandrinus
LXX <sup>s</sup>	Codex Sinaiticus
ms(s)	manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic text as represented by BHS
MA	Aleppo Codex
ML	Codex Leningradensis

NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCB	New Century Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMasS	Society of Biblical Literature Masoretic Studies
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
<i>Sem</i>	<i>Semitica</i>
SIL	Summer Institute of Linguistics (Wycliffe Bible Translators)
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
v.	verse
vv.	verses
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
YCS	Yale Classical Studies
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

#### GRAMMATICAL NOMENCLATURE

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
A	definite article
Aj	adjective
c.	common gender

CC	copulative clause
Cj	conjunction
Cp	copula
D	adverb
DP	adverbial phrase
do	direct object
f.	feminine
io	indirect object
m.	masculine
N	noun
Ng	negative particle
NP	noun phrase
p.	plural
P	particle (including prepositions)
Pn	pronoun
R	relative pronoun
s.	singular
S	sentence
S <sup>i</sup>	incomplete sentence
su	subject
V	verb
V-o	verb with pronominal object suffix
VC	verbal clause
(. . .)	in the phrase structure diagrams, elided constituents are bracketed; where the subject of a clause is elided and its person, number and gender are indicated by the verb inflection, the term V(su) or Cp(su) is used.





# 1

## Introduction

### Background

AS SOON AS BIBLICAL Hebrew poetry is encountered, certain characteristics are apparent: words are used sparingly, creating a terse and semantically dense text; the text is divided into short cola, each typically a three-word phrase; and these cola interrelate, both syntactically and semantically.<sup>1</sup> The cola normally appear in matching pairs, and Robert Lowth used the term “parallelism” to describe this phenomenon. His insight was not a new one, as the colometry of the psalms, and other poetic texts, was clearly attested in the presentation of many ancient manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> The recognition of “parallelism” gives rise to a number of questions about its nature: What governs the formation of cola? Exactly how do the cola relate to each other? What governs the arrangement of cola? Is there absolute regularity in the structure or is it flexible? And upon what principle is regularity based: metre, syntax, or a non-linguistic feature? The answers to these questions are varied, and considerable effort has been expended on developing theories of poetic structure and in particular of “parallelism.”

To the uninitiated reader, it soon becomes apparent that the poetry does not exhibit absolute regularity. The majority of lines of the text

1. Variant terminology is a pitfall of the field; see Cloete, “Colometry,” 15–17. A consistent terminology has been established for the current study and this is defined in the Glossary. The definitions incorporate reference to variant terms used by some theorists in order to help to correlate between them. Terms will be used as they are defined in the Glossary, except in the case of direct quotations from other works, wherein the original terminology of that work will be reproduced.

2. See the overview in Kugel, *Idea*, 119–27; see further the section “Source manuscripts” on pp. 11–17.

consist of two short cola, but there are exceptions. Some lines seem to be significantly longer than others, consisting of three cola and designated tricola. Such lines include three phrases and two caesurae, and stand out from the common line-form of two cola separated by a single caesura (a bicolon).<sup>3</sup> Such exceptional lines could be regarded as aberrations, if it is assumed that the poetry should be regular.<sup>4</sup> If not aberrations, they might simply represent a fluidity of style that allows for irregularity but which has no rhetorical or structural function. On the other hand, it is possible that the variation in style is deliberate and serves a particular purpose in the way the structure of poetry functions. These views are variously represented within the spectrum of theories of Hebrew poetry.

Despite the general acknowledgement of the existence of tricola, and the considerable scholarly enterprise that has gone into expounding the nature of Hebrew poetry, remarkably little work has been carried out specific to the tricolon. In reasonably extensive treatments of “parallelism,” Berlin makes no reference to tricola at all, and Kugel is expressly dismissive of the tricolon having any significance: “We have treated the question of ternary lines somewhat casually because the difference between binary and ternary lines *is not crucial*.”<sup>5</sup>

A less dismissive but particularly unimaginative perspective on tricola was offered by Kissane: “Sometimes, because the thought cannot be adequately expressed in the normal verse of two clauses, or merely for the sake of variety, the poet adds a third member to form a triplet, or verse of three clauses.”<sup>6</sup>

A more nuanced assessment is given by Alter who not only identifies tricola but also hypothesises their function. In reference to Ps 18 he comments, “In some of the relatively long poems, like this one, triadic lines appear to have been used with purposeful selectiveness to mark some special emphasis or to indicate the beginning or conclusion of a segment within the poem.”<sup>7</sup> However, this hypothesis is not tested sys-

3. Short lines consisting of only a single colon, designated monocola, also occur.

4. Seybold, “Anmerkungen,” 111, dismisses many tricola as secondary accretions and not a genuine poetic form.

5. Kugel, *Idea*, 52, emphasis original. Similarly Ryken, *Words*, 181 makes only a passing reference; Petersen and Richards, *Interpreting*, 23–24, are concerned to validate the existence of tricola but ascribe no particular significance to them.

6. Kissane, *Book of Psalms*, xxxviii–ix.

7. Alter, *Art*, 35.

tematically, nor carried through and applied in other instances. Similarly, Watson has more recently commented, “Since the couplet is the norm, the presence of a tricolon most probably acts as a marker of some kind. In fact it seems to function largely as a transition marker, to open and/or close units of verse.”<sup>8</sup>

In his original guide to the techniques of Hebrew poetry, Watson gave reasonable attention to tricola and postulated their functions as opening, closing, climax, and merismus.<sup>9</sup> However, this was little more than an observation of the location or semantic content of some tricola. The means by which a tricolon achieves opening or closing was not addressed, and he noted that many other tricola do not fall within any of these categories. Similarly he did not address the questions of how or why the particular line-form of a tricolon should interact with the semantic function of merismus.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding these unsubstantiated and minimalizing explanations, a few specific studies of tricola have been undertaken, of which more extensive appraisal is required.

## Previous Tricolon Studies

Whilst tricola have been incorporated within previous theories of poetic structure, they have received little detailed attention; only one major work, by Mowinckel, has focussed on the phenomenon of the tricolon, and that was as long ago as 1957.<sup>11</sup> A little over twenty years later, Willis commented that, “generally speaking, scholars do not seem to have considered it sufficiently important or fruitful to examine this phenomenon at length in Old Testament poetry.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, most recent theorists have had other concerns, and their treatment of tricola has generally sought to incorporate them within a wider theory of poetic structure.

Mowinckel’s detailed analysis of tricola in the Psalms is based very largely on his proposition that Hebrew poetry is characterized by an iambic metre.<sup>13</sup> His scansion of the text involves introducing additional

8. Watson, “Hebrew Poetry,” 262.

9. Watson, *Classical*, 177–85.

10. *Ibid.*, 183–85.

11. Mowinckel, *Real and Apparent*.

12. Willis, “Juxtaposition,” 465.

13. As detailed in his earlier work, Mowinckel, *Psalms*, 159–75, 261–66 (translated from original 1951).

accents on every alternate syllable in a word going back from the tonal syllable. He does not distinguish between these additional accents and the tonal accent, resulting in very unusual vocalisation. For example, a conjunction at the beginning of a word may receive an accent equal in value to the tonal accent of that word.

Mowinckel seems to have followed the nineteenth-century scholars who sought to impose a rigid metre on the text in a classical style, without embracing the work of Grimme who demonstrated that this could only give a satisfactory result if variations in syllable length were accounted for.<sup>14</sup>

Mowinckel's metrical proposal forms the basis of his colometry and he scans lines according to his iambic metre so that they almost always appear as bicola. However, the consequence of this rigidity is that lines may be split in a way that disregards the syntax. For instance, in Ps 1:1 a verb and its negative modifier are separated between cola.<sup>15</sup>

Thus the rigidity of Mowinckel's metrical scheme fails to cohere with either pronunciation or syntax. His desire to find regularity in psalm poetry is evidenced in his thesis that tricola occur only throughout a psalm or distinct section of a psalm, never in isolation. His analysis of "real" and "apparent" tricola is substantiated on the basis of his metrical theory in order to demonstrate this point. But it seems clear that his theses are taking priority over the actual evidence of the text. In considering textual variants, he adds to the MT an extra colon where this produces two bicola instead of a tricolon, but is equally content to delete a colon from MT if it is omitted in any other witnesses. Some exegetical arguments are offered, but it is generally apparent that any assessment of variant texts is skewed heavily in favor of those that support his proposal, and so the adoption of such variants cannot reasonably be said to validate his thesis.<sup>16</sup>

Does Mowinckel have anything to say about the character of true tricola? According to him they should demonstrate "more or less exact parallelism" between the three cola.<sup>17</sup> Although not explicit, it seems that

14. See Leatherman, "Four Current Theories," 39–41, for a critical summary of Grimme's thesis. A rare endorsement of Mowinckel's proposal came from Segert, "Hebräischen Metrik," 514–16.

15. Mowinckel, *Real and Apparent*, 8–10.

16. See Mowinckel, *Real and Apparent*, 32–35. For a similar critique, see for example T. H. Robinson, Review of *Real and Apparent*.

17. Mowinckel, *Real and Apparent*, 17.

Mowinckel's use of the term "parallelism" is limited to semantic parallelism. Yet even Mowinckel's few examples of "real" tricola fail to hit the mark, as he admits in respect of 138:8, "all three cola only have a logical connection between each other, without building any thought rhyme at all."<sup>18</sup> Perhaps his most reliable comment comes from the conclusion of this discussion: "The 3rd (or the 2nd) colon can add a new element of the picture or idea, but never a quite new idea or thought."<sup>19</sup> Here is an axiom worth taking forward, that a tricolon should exhibit a clear connection between its members, for otherwise it is hard to explain or justify its identity as such.

More recent studies of tricola by Willis and Yaron have focussed on the internal structure of the line, without any regard for its place within a poem. Willis, without specifically justifying his identification of tricola, cited a range of tricola that exhibit a partly synonymous and partly chiasmic structure. By chiasmic is meant in this context a chiasmic arrangement of word order, i.e., a surface-level syntactical chiasm. In passing, Willis criticizes Mowinckel's analysis of tricola, suggesting that he is too insistent on regular metre, and noting that he imposes pre-conceived ideas about poetic structure onto the texts he analyzes, rather than addressing the texts on their own terms.<sup>20</sup> The tricola identified by Willis are all broadly synonymous, in that they convey the same basic thought in each colon but without verbatim repetition. He notes that some of these are "fully synonymous," some have synonymous A and B cola with chiasmic B and C cola, whilst others have chiasmic A and B cola with synonymous B and C cola. The weakness of this analysis is that "synonymous" and "chiasmic" are not mutually exclusive categories. The former is a semantic term, the latter (as Willis uses it) a syntactic term. In actual fact, Willis is simply highlighting the technique of poetic defamiliarisation: a change in word order in order to introduce variety and interest. He does offer some comments as to the function of the tricola: "emphatic, climactic effect" (Ps 6:9b–10), "climax in a progression of thought" (Ps 143:5), and "progression of thought leading to a climax" (Ps 7:6).<sup>21</sup> However, he does not explicate how these effects are related to the use of chiasm, i.e., to the variation in word order. Willis also offers some comments on

18. *Ibid.*, 21.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Willis, "Juxtaposition," 466–67.

21. *Ibid.*, 473–75.

the potential purposes of tricola: to convey something that could not be accommodated in a bicolon; as a variation in the scansion to reflect a variation in mood, scene or voice; as an aid to teaching and memory in the cult; and to create a climax.<sup>22</sup>

A similar type of analysis to Willis' is mentioned in passing by Meynet in the process of expounding his overall theory of poetic structure (discussed fully in "Rhetorico-Structural Approaches" on pp. 61–65). He finds examples of tricola having semantic structures ABC, AA'B, ABB', and ABA'. Where there is no symmetry apparent—the ABC structure—he notes that there is usually some form of progression, be it numerical, logical, or chronological. Meynet also notes that in these lines the syntactic relationships between cola do not necessarily match the semantic relationships.<sup>23</sup>

Yaron also made a study of the internal structure of tricola, reading tricola from Proverbs and observing that the final colon is usually "climactic."<sup>24</sup> However, his "tricola" are lines, or groups of lines, that would not normally be read as tricola. Prov 6:27–29 would normally be regarded as three bicola, and lines such as Prov 25:3 as a bicolon with "internal parallelism" (or possibly a merism) in the first colon.<sup>25</sup> Therefore Yaron's work offers no real insight into the identity of a tricolon. However, his analysis of a rhetorical form that takes two similar thoughts and modifies them with a third one could be a device that operates at various structural levels, including the tricolon.

Van Grol made a study of pairs of lines of the form bicolon plus tricolon (or vice versa) where the central colon links the two lines by relating to both the preceding pair of cola and the following pair of cola. As such the central colon does double-duty, either semantically or syntactically, in order to form what Van Grol terms "paired tricola."<sup>26</sup> Whether the central colon of the pair acts as an intermediate phrase in a narrative sequence, as a pivot, or as a climax, the key aspect is that it

22. Ibid., 480.

23. Meynet, *Rhetorical Analysis*, 224–29.

24. Yaron, "Climactic," 153.

25. Ibid., 153–54. For "internal parallelism" see Watson, "Half-line Parallelism" and the section "The Problem of Four-Word Cola" on pp. 44–46.

26. Van Grol, "Paired Tricola," 55–57. The basis for the underlying colometry that allows identification of such lines is explicitly stated as following "the delimitation of the cola in BHS."

stands distinct in some way from the adjoining cola whilst cohering the two lines into a unit. Some form of matching between the initial two cola and the final two cola is also preferred in identifying such “paired” lines.<sup>27</sup> Van Grol investigated the place of such “paired tricola” within their broader structural context. Employing the strophic analysis of Van der Lugt (see the section “Strophic approaches” on pp. 56–60), he found that paired tricola often form an entire strophe; that where there are other lines in the strophe, the paired tricola usually come at the end of the strophe; and that such strophes are usually found at the beginning or end of a higher textual unit.<sup>28</sup> He therefore determined their function as either an “impressive, solemn or festive introduction” or an “expanded conclusion.”<sup>29</sup> Alternatively, a strophe of paired tricola occasionally was found as the middle strophe of a poem and functions “as a core.”<sup>30</sup>

Bringing all these studies together, a contrast is apparent between Mowinckel’s insistence on “exact parallelism” between the three cola of a tricolon, and the consistent observation amongst others of the variety of relationships between the three cola. Willis, Van Grol and Yaron each observed that two of the cola are more closely connected and that one, usually the third, whilst still being connected also carries a distinction. Alter made the same observation in relation to Ps 39:1–3, commenting on the “element of imbalance in the semantic parallelism,” whereby he identified that, “in each of these three lines the third verset stands in some relation of tension to the two preceding versets, retrospectively casting a new light on them.”<sup>31</sup> However, there is no consensus or uniformity about this: both Willis and Watson identify tricola that exhibit synonymy between all three cola.<sup>32</sup>

Much more recently, Van der Lugt has addressed the question of the function of the tricolon within psalms, following a reasonably rigorous methodology. His study is based on strophic analysis of the psalms that divides the texts into units within a hierarchy of levels. The division is determined by the identification of “transition markers” and the pat-

27. *Ibid.*, 59.

28. *Ibid.*, 66–67.

29. *Ibid.*, 67–68.

30. *Ibid.*, 69.

31. Alter, *Art*, 69.

32. Willis, “Juxtaposition,” 467; Watson, *Classical*, 178–79.

tern of verbal repetitions within the psalm.<sup>33</sup> Based on his analysis of the entire Psalter, he tested the hypothesis that tricola function as transition markers, indicating either the closing of a strophe or the opening of a higher rhetorical unit.<sup>34</sup> The result of his analysis, that the data do not fit his hypothesis, leads him to the conclusion that no general statement can be made about the transition marking function of tricola. Whilst this is apparent, it remains the case that a tricolon *may* act as a transition marker in some instances, but the presence of tricola with other functions obscures the data.

In the light of these previous studies of tricola and their possible functions, a clear scope can be established for a study that identifies tricola on a consistent basis and seeks to assess their function both in terms of their internal structure and their location in the broader context of poetic structure.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze on a consistent basis certain exceptional lines of Hebrew poetry—initially identified as tricola—and to explore their function.

While much study has been made of the form, structure and functioning of Hebrew poetry, and these studies have incorporated the tricolon, very little has been asked of the significance of this variation in line-form. The review of previous studies above (“Previous Tricolon Studies” on pp. 3–8) reveals that where there has been an effort to examine the specific function of the tricolon, this has been hampered by at least four factors. First, the basis for the colometry of the source text has been undefined, inconsistent or based upon specific theories that have obvious weaknesses. Therefore the identification of tricola has been misleading or contingent upon other, sometimes unidentified, theories. Secondly, studies have tended to highlight selected texts that fitted the author’s thesis, rather than a systematic appraisal of a well-defined corpus. Thirdly, some studies have examined either the internal structure of a tricolon or its place within its poetic context, but not both. Fourthly, the function of a tricolon has not been disambiguated from other poetic

33. See the section “Strophic Approaches” on pp. 56–60 for a more detailed exposition of the method.

34. Van der Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes*, 522–35.



features that contribute to the same function.<sup>35</sup> It may also be noted that, with the exception of Van der Lugt, almost no contribution has been made to the topic in over twenty years.

Therefore a systematic and detailed study of the tricolon is a valuable contribution to the field of Hebrew poetics, especially in the context of the theories of poetic structure of the last twenty years or so. A synthesis of the most reliable aspects of metrical, syntactical, stylistic and semantic theories of Hebrew poetic line-form will facilitate a consistent means of colometry and therefore identification of tricola. By setting out an explicit rationale for this process, the results can be appraised objectively, and their sensitivity to underlying assumptions will be apparent for any who wish to adopt variant colometry. A syntactic and semantic analysis of the internal structure of each tricolon thus identified will contribute to an understanding of the defining features of tricola and characterization of the variation they offer. Engagement with a variety of theories of broader poetic structure will then allow the purpose of the placement of the tricolon within that structure to be postulated.

The initial assumptions for the study are minimal. It is taken as given that the dominant line-form in Hebrew poetry is a bicolon and that variations from this norm do occur. In focusing on the specific variation that presents as a tricolon and questioning its function, at the outset of the study there is no presumption that the tricolon has a consistent function, only that it does indeed have an identifiable function of some sort in each particular instance.

The key questions therefore that this study seeks to answer are:

- What specific function does each tricolon achieve?
- Can such lines be characterized in terms of their internal structure?
- Why did the conclusions of previous studies disagree on these points?

The results of the study should inform and nuance other extant theories of Hebrew poetic structure. The internal structure of tricola will add an additional dimension to studies of “parallelism” and the nature of syntactic and semantic relationships between cola. The place of tricola

35. For example, see the comments on Watson in the section “Background” on pp. 1–3.

within rhetorical and prosodic structures of a poem may reinforce or highlight the way in which a rhetorical skeleton is realized in poetic form. In both of these ways, the study seeks to generate an enhanced appreciation of this particular aspect of Hebrew poetry and therefore a more nuanced and better-substantiated literary reading of the text.

With these aims in mind, the study begins with a clearly stated and objectively defined methodology.

## Methodology

### *Corpus*

The study has confined itself to the Psalms of Ascents (Pss 120–34) as a textual corpus in order to provide a manageable scope. The Psalms of Ascents are an identifiable collection within the Psalter by means of their common superscription.<sup>36</sup> Theories of the meaning of the superscription abound, mostly reading a reference to a particular context for composition or use, occasionally to a description of a certain poetic form.<sup>37</sup> Such theories do not influence this study's approach to the text, but it is worth noting that a number of readers have recognised a relatively high degree of "terrace-pattern parallelism" in the collection, i.e., words at the end of one colon being repeated at the beginning of the next.<sup>38</sup>

Along with all of the psalms, the Psalms of Ascents are clearly identifiable as poetry, and they are quite discrete, with no ambiguity over their beginnings or endings. As such they provide a useful sample of well-defined poems as a basis for analysis. They are mostly quite short which has the advantage that considerations of their macro-structures are likely to be less complicated than longer psalms. Grossberg has classified them all as having "centripetal" structures, by which is meant that the emphasis in each psalm is on the unity of the psalm as a whole rather than on the distinction of the individual parts. They have clear themes and strong structure markers.<sup>39</sup> They are thus well suited to analysis of

36. With a minor variation in Ps 121.

37. For surveys of interpretations of the superscription see Crow, *Songs of Ascents*, 1–27; Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalmen*, 392–400; Keet, *Psalms of Ascents*, 1–17; Vesco, *Psautier de David*, 1161–67.

38. Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 259; Hunter, *Psalms*, 182–91. On "terrace-pattern" or anadiplosis, see Watson, *Classical*, 208.

39. Grossberg, *Centripetal*, 5–7 and 19–47; see also Viviers, "Trust and Lament" and Viviers, "Coherence."

their structure. Wilson also finds significant thematic coherence in the collection, commenting that they “join in an almost unbroken song of reliance on YHWH alone.”<sup>40</sup>

The dating and provenance of the Psalms of Ascents cannot be verified conclusively, but they are likely to be exilic or post-exilic.<sup>41</sup> Their original life-setting may be as pilgrim songs or in the return from exile.<sup>42</sup> Crow believes them to have an agricultural northern Israelite provenance, with a Zionist redactional layer.<sup>43</sup> However, this study is not concerned with the history of the text but adopts a canonical approach, taking as its starting point the final form of the text.

### *Source Manuscripts*

The analysis will be based principally on the Masoretic text presented in BHS, taking note of variant readings where these are apparent. Some theories of poetic structure make appeal to an earlier form of the text, with reconstructed vocalisation and removal of material identified as redactional. That approach is not adopted in this study, for two reasons. First, the reconstruction of an original text can only be speculative and would, in the case of ambiguous colometry, generally serve only to substantiate a particular theory, thus creating a circular argument. The identification and removal of redactional material is usually done in support of a theory that is being substantiated, and so actually demonstrates very little. Secondly, it is the canonical form of the text that would have been used during the second temple period (and subsequently) and which therefore was identified and used as a poetic text.<sup>44</sup> Therefore this study seeks to understand the way the canonical text functioned at that

40. Wilson, *Editing*, 224. On the structure of, and thematic development within, the collection see also Barker, “Voices”; Hunter, *Psalms*, 229–48; Mannati, “Psaumes Graduels”; Prinsloo, “Role of Space.”

41. Hunter, *Psalms*, 181–82; Viviers, “Why?,” 804.

42. Exemplified in Seybold, *Die Wallfahrtspsalmen* and Goulder, *Psalms of Return* respectively. Deurloo “Gedächtnis” suggests that they were deliberately developed with both settings in view.

43. Crow, *Songs of Ascents*, 159–81. See also Seybold, “Redaktion” and Willi, “Zion” on the significance of Zion in the collection.

44. According to Flint, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 238–39, Book V of the Psalter stabilised relatively late, and so strictly we should speak of a proto-Masoretic text being in use at that time. See also the section “Masoretic accentuation in a canonical approach” on pp. 16–17.

time, whilst noting indications of the redactional history of the text in order to qualify any conclusions as appropriate. Dependent upon the outcomes of the present analysis, a future study could potentially consider the extent to which its conclusions are still valid when applied to a reconstructed original text.

The relationship between the text of BHS and the original Masoretic manuscripts is made apparent in the BHS apparatus, but the relationship between the presentations of the text in each case is not. The editors of BHS have made decisions regarding colometry and presented the text accordingly, but no basis or explanation of this is provided. Therefore, a worthwhile exercise is a review of the manner of presentation of poetic texts in some of the principal Masoretic, Qumran and Septuagint<sup>45</sup> manuscripts.

#### ALEPPO CODEX (M<sup>A</sup>)

Poetic sections of the text, including Psalms, are set out in two columns per page rather than three, in order to better facilitate the presentation of a full poetic line on each page-line. As far as possible the presentation of the text follows the Masoretic accentuation. Each verse is written on a single page-line, with a gap after the mid-verse accent. In the case of slightly longer verses the text runs right through without a mid-verse gap due to lack of space on the page.<sup>46</sup>

Where a verse is too long to be written on a single page-line, the usual solution is that the verse fills one page-line, with or without a gap, and continues on the next page-line without any apparent attention paid to the point at which the text is split between page-lines. Even words joined by a *maqquph* may be split between page-lines (so 120:5). The text then continues with a pair of full cola per page-line, separated by a gap, as normal. If a verse has taken up one and a half page-lines, the consequence is that subsequent page-lines consist of the second colon of one verse and the initial colon of the next verse.

In a few cases, a long verse is spread over two page-lines, with the introduction of an additional gap. When this happens, the division of the verse into four cola matches its syntactic structure (thus 125:5; 126:2, 6; 127:1, 2; 128:3; 129:8; 131:1).

45. Note that Codex Vaticanus does not include texts studied here.

46. See also the comments of Sanders, P., "Colometric," 246–48.

In the Psalms of Ascents, the only exception to these principles are in 126:3 and 128:4, where the mid-verse gap does not follow the mid-verse accent (*rebia* in both cases); and in 127:1 where the final word of the first (poetic) line (יָבֹא) has carried over to the next page-line.

#### CODEX LENINGRADENSIS (M<sup>L</sup>)

The layout of the text appears to follow similar principles to those described for M<sup>A</sup>. However, the physical width of the column is less, resulting in more page-lines that do not exhibit a gap in the text. Additionally, the scribe of M<sup>L</sup> seems to have been more concerned about using the space on the page efficiently, and so often commenced a verse at the end of a page-line, even if only the first word of the verse, rather than add/increase a gap in that page-line and commence the next verse on the next page-line. Consequently, there is less correlation between verses and page-lines when compared with M<sup>A</sup>. Once the page-lineation has departed from the verse division, due to a long verse, the correlation of subsequent page-line divisions with verse or mid-verse divisions is much less consistent than in M<sup>A</sup>.<sup>47</sup>

In a few instances a gap is not introduced into the text at the mid-verse accent but is introduced elsewhere. Some of these are at syntactic pauses: 120:1, 127:2 (at a *paseq*), 130:2 (indicating a bicolon with v. 1), 130:5 (after the tetragrammaton) and 133:2a (as reflected in BHS). Others are not at syntactic pauses: 122:1 (after the tetragrammaton), 128:5, and 133:2c (as reflected in layout of BHS).

#### QUMRAN SCROLLS

The main psalms scroll, 11QPs<sup>a</sup>, has almost no evidence of colometric presentation. Each psalm begins on a new page-line, but thereafter the text is generally continuous, written in a single column without gapping. Occasional gaps do occur, but not necessarily coincident with the mid-verse pauses of MT. The lineation of the acrostic Ps 119 is respected (col. VI) but again without evidence of any division of the line into cola.

Similarly, 4QPs<sup>c</sup>, which contains portions of Pss 120, 125, 126, 129, and 130, has no evidence of colometric presentation, but in contrast, 4QPs<sup>b</sup> does. For example, Ps 94 is presented with one colon per page-line of the scroll, in a single column. The cola definitions match the ac-

47. See also the comments of Norton, "Diplomatic," 198.