

THE POETIC STRUCTURE OF PSALM 93

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Psalm 93 in its traditional form is characterized by a clear dichotomy of microstructure: a series of short statements, organizable either as individual and very short line segments or as longer line segments featuring internal parallelism, followed by three clear tricola containing three words per line segment. I wish to argue that the "metrical" structure of the first two verses is that of the longer line segments (the parallelism is primarily "internal", therefore) and that semantic parallels between vss. 1-2 and vss.5 show that the poet or redactor intended to present this poem as a rhetorical unity.

For a detailed presentation of the form of analysis adopted here, with bibliographical information, see my monograph *Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetic Parallelism* (VTS, 39, 1987).

TEXT

	SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS	QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS	
(1)	S V M V	4/8/24	יהיה מלך גאוה לבש
	V S M V	4/8/22	לבש יהיה עו התאזר
(2)	V S V	3/8/27	אף־חכון חבל בלחמום
	V S M	3/7/22	נכון כסאך מאז
	M S	2/5/17	מעולם אחה
(3)	V S Voc	3/8/23	נשאו נהרות יהוה
	V S O	3/8/24	נשאו נהרות קלם
	V S O	3/8/23	ישאו נהרות דכים
(4)	M	3/7/22	מקלות מים רבים
	P M	3/7/22	אדיר(י) ממשכריים
	P M S	3/7/23	אדיר במרום יהוה

(5)	S V M	3/9/26	עדתיך נאמנו מאד
	M V S	3/9/23	לביחך נאודהקדש
	Voc M	3/7/21	יזנה לארך ימים

The only textual change suggested here is to move the *mem* at the end of the first word of the second line segment of vs. 4 to the following word so as to read 'addā^y_r minmišbā rē^y-yām, "more powerful than the breakers of Sea", rather than 'addā^y rē^y_m mišbā rē^y-yām, "powerful are the breakers of Sea". It is possible that /ī/ is to be retained on 'addā^y_r, giving the form 'addā^y rē^y, with paragogic *yod*.

The quantitative analysis includes only words (excluding particles unless the particle functions as a separate unit in the sentence), syllables, and "vocal count" (one count given to each vowel and consonant, two counts to each long vowel and consonant - the counts are based on the Masoretic text except in the case of the emendation in vs. 4).

This syntactic analysis includes only principal constituents: V = verb, S = subject (of a nominal or a verbal sentence), O = object, M = modifier phrase (including unmarked adverbials, such as *gē'ūt* in vs. 1), P = predicate of nominal sentence, Voc = vocative.

The combination of syntactic and quantitative analysis shows that a division of vss. 1-2 according to syntactic criteria alone would result in four line segments (*yāwh mlk*, *g'wt lbš*, *lbš yāwh*, and *bl-tmwṭ*) which would be significantly shorter than the demonstrably independent syntactic unit (vs. 2a) and shorter, even, than the one short unit already present (vs. 2b). Indeed, in quantitative terms, vs. 1a-b analyzed as a bicolon fits in remarkably well with the rest of the psalm. After a comparison with other poems that begin with the *yāwh mlk* formula, one must conclude that the second colon may either replicate the syntactic structure of the first (as in Pss. 93:1 and 99:1) or show a new form (as in Ps. 97:1: S V V S/V S) and therefore that the analysis as a bicolon is a perfectly plausible one.

TRANSLATION WITH ANALYSIS OF SEMANTIC PARALLELISM

(1) Yahweh reigns , he is clothed with majesty	a b c d	1 ¹ 2I ¹ 3I ¹ 4I ¹
Yahweh is clothed, yea girded, with strength.	d a c' d'	4I ² 1 ² 3II ¹ 4II ¹

The earth is established, it does not totter,	a b a' (≠a)	5 ¹ 6 I ¹ 7 ¹ 8 ¹ 9 ¹
(2) Your throne has been established from of old,	a c d	6 I ² 2 II ¹ 10 ¹ 11 I ¹
You are yourself of ages past.	d' e	10 ² 11 II ¹ 12 ¹
(3) The Rivers did lift up, O Yahweh,	a b c	13 I ¹ 14 I ¹ 1 ³
The Rivers did lift up their voices,	a b d	13 I ² 14 I ² 15 I ¹
The Rivers would lift up their "crushers".	a b d'	13 I ³ 14 I ³ 15 II ¹
(4) Than the voices of the Mighty Waters,	a b ²	10 ³ 15 I ² 14 II ¹ 3 III ¹
More powerful than the breakers of the Sea,	c a' b'	3 IV ¹ 10 ⁴ 15 III ¹ 14 III ¹
More powerful is Yahweh on high.	c d e	3 IV ² 16 ¹ 13 II ¹ 1 ⁴
(5) Your stipulations are very trustworthy,	a b c	17 I ¹ 6 II ¹ 3 V ¹
The Sanctuary befits your palace,	d b' a'	18 ¹ 19 ¹ 6 III ¹ 17 II ¹
O Yahweh, for all time.	e f ²	1 ⁵ 19 ² 20 ¹ 11 III ¹

LIST OF SEMANTIC PARALLELS

- 1 yhwh (vss. 1bis, 3, 4, 5)
- 2 I MLK (vs.1)
- II KS' (vs.2)
- 3 I G' (vs.1)
- II ^CZZ (vs.1)
- III RBB (vs.4)
- IV 'DR (vs. 4bis)
- V M'D (vs. 5)
- 4 I LBŠ (vs. 1bis)
- II 'ZR (vs. 1)
- 5 'p (vs. 1)
- 6 I KN (vss. 1, 2)
- II 'MN (vs. 5)
- III 'WH (vs. 5)

- 7 tbl (vs. 1)
- 8 bl (vs. 1)
- 9 MṬ (vs. 1) = antonymic parallel of #6, made synonymous by *bl*.
- 10 mn (vss. 2bis, 4bis)
- 11 I 'z (vs. 2)
- II ^cLM (vs. 2)
- III YM ('rk ymym, vs. 5)
- 12 'th (vs. 2)
- 13 I NŠ' (vs. 3tris)
- II RM (mrwm, vs. 4)
- 14 I NHR (vs. 3tris)
- II MYM (vs. 4)
- III YM (vs. 4)
- 15 I QL (vss.3, 4)
- II DKH (vs. 3)
- III ŠBR (mšbr, vs. 4)
- 16 b (vs. 4)
- 17 I ^cD (^cdt, vs. 5)
- II QDŠ (vs. 5)
- 18 l (vs. 5bis)
- 19 BYT (vs. 5)
- 20 'RK (vs. 5)

REPETITIVE PARALLELISM

Nine of twenty semantic categories contain a repetitive element:

- 1: yhwh (five times, no other Israelite divine name is used).
- 3 IV: 'DR (one repetition in regular distribution in vs. 4; semantic parallel with RBB in same verse and with other terms in vss. 1, 5).
- 4 I: LBŠ (one repetition in regular distribution in vs. 1; semantic parallel with 'ZR).
- 6 I:KN (one repetition in regular distribution in vss. 1, 2; semantic parallel with two verbs in vs. 5).

- 10: mn (two repetitions, both in regular parallelism, in vss. 2,4).
 13 I: NŠ' (one three-fold repetition in regular distribution in vs. 3; semantic parallel with RM in vs. 4).
 14 I: NHR (one three-fold repetition in regular distribution in vs. 3; semantic parallel with MYM and YM in vs. 4).
 15 I: QL (one repetition in near distribution in vss. 3, 4; in each case with a semantic parallel).
 18: l (one repetition in vs. 5).

Repetitive parallelism in this work is primarily in regular distribution, i. e., between the line-segments of a single poetic unit (**#1 [first two occurrences], 3 IV, 4 I, 6 I, 10 [both occurrences], 13 I, 14 I, 18). The only exceptions are the multiple repetitions of the divine name *yhwh* (in near distribution in vss. 3-5) and the single repetition of QL (in near distribution in vss. 3, 4). Six of the nine semantic sets (i. e., those categories which consist of two or more elements) contain a repetitive element (**# 3, 4, 6, 13, 14, 15). Two-thirds of these six repetitions are in vss. 3-4 (**# 3 IV, 13 I, 14 I, and 15 I). In so small a sample, however, one cannot claim that repetition is somehow more characteristic of those verses than of another portion of the work, for the first two poetic units are characterized by two repetitions of words from sets (**#4 I and 6 I) and by two of the single-element categories (**#1 and 10, with 10 also repeated in vs. 4 [as emended]).

SEMANTIC PARALLELISM

The high degree of repetitive parallelism in this work has produced the result that nearly half of the semantic categories contain a repetitive element (nine of twenty), while six of the nine semantic sets contain a repetitive element (list in preceding section). The semantic sets which do not contain repetitive parallelism are **2 (kingship), 11 (longue durée), and 17 (sanctuary: part-whole), all three rather disparate groups.

This combination of repetitive and semantic parallelism has resulted in there being very few major elements in the entire poem that do not have a semantically or repetitively parallel correspondence somewhere in the work. There is no such element

in the first bicolon nor in vss. 3 and 4, there are two in the second poetic unit (*tōl* and *'th*) and two in vs. 5 (*byt* and *'rk*). On the level of expression of this psalm, however, none of these four terms stands truly alone: the positional parallelism of *tōl* and *ks'k* recalls the metaphor "The heavens are my throne and the earth my footstool" in Isa. 66:1, *'th* is the pronoun equivalent of *yhwh*, the *byt yhwh* is a *qdš*, and *'rk ymym* forms a compound phrase parallel to *'z* and *°wlm* in vs. 2. This remarkable concentration of semantic similarities forces one to the conclusion that this form of the work was produced as a unity, whatever the prehistory of the elements may have been. If, for example, vss. 3-4 constituted a pre-existing unit, the "author" of this form of the poem tied that unit into the preceding verses by the repetition of the divine name and by the semantic set denoting power (*3). Moreover, verses 3-4 were enclosed into the larger work by repetitive and semantic parallels between vss. 1-2 and 5. This will become clearer in the following section.

DISTRIBUTION OF PARALLELISM

Internal: 4 (LBŠ + 'ZR, vs. 1)

6 + 9 (KN positive + MṬ negative, vss. 1-2)

17 II + 19 (QDŠ in sense of "sanctuary" + *bytk* = *byt yhwh*)

The first three line segments are characterized by a strong syntactic caesura.

Regular: 1 (*yhwh* in vs. 1)

3 I + II (G' // °ZZ in vs. 1)

III + IV (RBB // 'DR in vs. 4)

IV ('DR // 'DR in vs. 4)

4 I (LBŠ // LBŠ in vs. 1)

I + II (LBŠ // 'ZR in vs. 1)

6 I (KN // KN in vss. 1-2)

II + III ('MN // 'WH in vs. 5)

10 (mn // mn in vss. 2 and 4)

11 I + II ('z // °LM in vs. 2)

13 I (NŠ' // NŠ' // NŠ' in vs. 3)

14 I (NHR // NHR // NHR in vs. 3)

II + III (MYM // YM in vs.4)

15 I + II (QL // DKH in vs.3)

I + III (QL // ŠBR in vs.4)

17 I + II (^CD // QDŠ in vs.5)

18 (1 // 1 in vs.5)

Near: 1 (yhwh in vss.3, 4, 5)

2 (MLK, KS' in vss.1, 2)

3 III + IV, V (RBB // 'DR, M'D in vss.4-5)

13 I, II (NŠ', RM in vss.3, 4)

14 I, II + III (NHR, MYM // YM in vss.3, 4)

15 I (QL, QL in vss. 3, 4)

15 I, II, III (QL, DKH, ŠBR in vss. 3, 4)

Distant: 1 (yhwh, vss.1,3,4,5: combination of regular,near and distant distributions)

3 I + II...III + IV, V (words for power in vss.1,4,5: regular, near and distant distributions)

6 I...II + III (words for solidity in vss.1,2,5: regular and distant distributions)

10 (mm, vss.2 and 4, in regular and distant distributions)

11 I + II...III (words for longue durée in vss. 2,5: regular and distant distributions)

It is clear from these lists that the strongest internal bonds are within those units that share a common syntactic and quantitative structure: vss. 1-2 and vss. 3-4 with vs.5 as the odd unit out (the structure of vs.5 is similar to that of vss. 3-4 but it has only a weak semantic link with those verses [M'D]).

Two strands bind all units together: the divine name (this strand becomes unbroken if 'th in vs.2 is added to the repetition of *yhwh* in all other verses) and the words for power (#3 - though it must be recognized that the link to vs. 5 is weak, being constituted by the adverbial *m'd*). There is, moreover, one distant repetitive parallelism that links vs.2 to vs.4, albeit a weak semantic one, the particle *mm*, as well as two much stronger distant parallelisms that link vss.

1-2 to vs.5, viz., the words for solidity in vss.2 and 5 and the words for extension of time in the same verses.

One may conclude that the author or redactor of this poem produced a macrostructure of three principal units: (1) a bicolon and a tricolon (vss.1-2) most segments of which are characterized by a strong caesura near the middle of the line segments and which deal with Yahweh's power in creating and keeping the earth firm; (2) two tricola (vss.3-4) each segment of which has a three-word structure; there is extensive repetitive parallelism; the subject-matter is Yahweh's superiority to the Sea and its allies; (3) a final tricolon (vs.5) which imitates the structure of vss.3-4 and the terminology of vss. 1-2 in order to express the idea that the cult of Yahweh is as firmly established as is the earth (*bytk* refers either directly or by inference to the earthly temple [cf. the identification of the earthly and heavenly dwellings of Yahweh in I Kings 8] and the combination of that term and *qdš* is meant to lay explicit claim to the centering of the cult in that edifice). One may infer from the imitation in vs.5 of both preceding macrostructural units that the author wished the hearer to understand that the solid establishment of the cult in the earthly temple was an immediate consequence of Yahweh's ability to found the earth and to defeat the Sea.