

Parallelisms in Ancient Hebrew Verse

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In the wake of Robert Lowth's pioneering investigation, a few varieties of parallelism found in ancient Hebrew verse have been intensively researched. Other varieties have by and large gone unnoticed. For example, apposition, syndetic coordination, and hypotaxis sequences form series in parallelism, and reinforce other forms of parallelism. No one has studied the phenomenon in depth.¹

The propaedeutic step of describing the continuously repeated prosodic frames ancient Hebrew verse instantiates is passed over in most research on parallelism. The text model assumed here describes the prosodic frames in question in terms of a "general rule".²

Ancient Hebrew verse is confined within a system of "twos and threes": two to three "stress units" make up a "verset"; two to three versets a poetic "line"; two to three lines a "strophe"; two to three strophes a "stanza"; two to three stanzas a "section"; and two to three sections a poem, or a more extensive section thereof.

The extent to which a text model fits the corpus is consequential. The effects parallelisms in verse were meant to have will be misidentified if the subdivision of the text that is followed is out of sync with the formal conventions ancient Hebrew poetry adhered to.

The dynamics of parallelism in ancient Hebrew verse may be described as follows:

Prosodic, semantic, syntactic, morphological, and sonic parallelisms recurrent across versets, lines, and strophes are the chief hallmark of ancient Hebrew verse. Prosodic parallelisms alone are obligatory. The fundamental prosodic obligation is the following: a verset of two to three stress units is unfailingly followed by another verset of two to three stress units, until a poem's conclusion. The obligatory parallelisms occur within the framework of the general rule.

¹ For Lowth's mature understanding of parallelism, see *Isaiah: A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation and Notes* (London: J. Dodsley for J. Nichols, 1778; repr. with introd. by David Reibel; Robert Lowth [1710-1787]: The Major Works; London: Routledge / Thoemmes Press, 1995; 10th ed.; London: T. Tegg, 1833) 12-26. For discussions of parallelism and bibliography, see Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985), idem, "Parallelism" in *ABD* 5 (1992) 155-62; George B. Gray, *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry: Considered with Special Reference to the Criticism and Interpretation of the Old Testament* [revised and expanded versions of previously published articles] (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915; repr. with "Prolegomenon" by David Noel Freedman [Library of Biblical Studies; New York: Ktav, 1972]; repr. of 1915 ed., Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2002) 37-83; 87-120; *passim*; Michael Patrick O'Connor, "Parallelism," in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (gen. ed. Alex Preminger and Terry V. F. Brogan; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 877-79; Dennis Pardee, *Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetic Parallelism: A Trial Cut ('nt I and Proverbs 2)* (VTSup 39; Leiden: Brill, 1988); overview in "Appendix I: Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetry: Parallelism" and "Appendix II: Types and Distributions in Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetry," 168-192; 193-201; Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (2d ed.; JSOTSup 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986; repr. with corrections and supplementary bibliog. London: T & T Clark, 2005) 114-59; 457-58; §6 in the concluding unnumbered pages, and in the final "Supplementary Bibliography." For sequences of structures in apposition, syndetic coordination, and hypotaxis, see the present writer's "Isaiah 1:2-20," www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com, 26.

² For a brief introduction to the text model assumed here, see "Regularities in Ancient Hebrew Verse: An Overview" at www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com. Alternative text models include those of Jan Fokkelman, Harm van Grol, Marjo Korpel and Johannes de Moor, and Michael Patrick O'Connor. For salient references, see "Annotated Bibliography" at www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com.

If the general rule get things right, a foundation is in place for the study of parallelisms recurrent in ancient Hebrew verse. A database for the study would ideally have the following features. Components of texts presumed to be poetry would be tagged at the prosodic, semantic, syntactic, morphological, and sonic levels. Each of the five levels, to be sure, is multidimensional.

At the level of prosody, a given component of text occupies a slot in various levels of the hierarchy simultaneously. Semantic relationships might be mapped in accordance with the terms and concepts of WordNet or VerbOcean.³ Maps appropriate to each prosodic level would mark an improvement over the current tendency to classify parallelisms as, for example, either close, near or distant. At the level of syntax, the distribution and ordering of particles, prepositions, nouns, verbs, and so on across the levels of the prosodic hierarchy, and according to more than one overlapping scheme of constituent analysis (e.g., subject, predicate, other; subject, verb, object, other; prepositional, non-prepositional phrase), requires description. At the level of morphology, congruence/incongruence across the levels of the hierarchy might be mapped for number, person, gender, conjugation, and theme (G, D, H, etc., for nouns as well as verbs). At the level of sound, a typology of rhymemes requires description (initial, medial, final; onset, rhyme, coda, or syllable-inclusive; stress congruent or incongruent). Plans for the creation of a database of this kind remain preliminary.⁴

In lieu of a like database, mapping the panoply of parallelisms that are the warp and woof of ancient Hebrew poetry will remain a piecemeal enterprise. The research project of which this essay is a part is exploratory. It maps no more than a subset of the parallelisms characteristic of ancient Hebrew verse. The obligatory parallelisms of the prosodic hierarchy are the chief focus. Semantic, syntactic, and morphological parallelisms are a secondary focus. A study of sonic parallelisms is left for another day.⁵

Remarks on the Notes Provided with the Scansions

In the notes on parallelisms to the left of the text in the scansions offered in this research project, the notation used to describe prosodic parallelisms is deliberately incomplete. The scansions signal counts and boundaries at seven prosodic levels: the (prosodic) word, the verset, the line, the strophe, the stanza, the section, and the composition. In the context of a study of Lam 1-5, two other levels are notated: the syllable and the foot. Length constraints for the verset and line are measurable in syllables, but variations in the length of prosodic strings are not directly relevant to typologies of parallelism and the obligatory regularities of ancient Hebrew verse. Syllable counts are thus not usually noted. Counts and boundaries at the level of foot, based on a preliminary analysis of Lam 1-5, add nothing to the more consistent regularities

³ A study of verbs, nouns, and more complex semantic unities that co-occur in parallelism in terms of a typology of semantic sets like those offered by WordNet or VerbOcean would lead to interesting results. For WordNet, see <http://wordnet.princeton.edu>; Christiane Fellbaum, ed., *WordNet: An Electronic Lexical Database* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998). For VerbOcean, see <http://semantics.isi.edu/ocean/>; Timothy Chklovski and Patrick Pantel, "VERBOCEAN: Mining the Web for Fine-Grained Semantic Verb Relations," online at <http://acl.ldc.upenn.edu/acl2004/emnlp/pdf/Chklovski.pdf>.

⁴ For a thorough but still piecemeal mapping of a wide range of parallelisms, see Dennis Pardee, *Ugaritic and Hebrew Poetic Parallelism*.

⁵ For a discussion of sonic parallelisms, see Adele Berlin, *Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 103-126; and the present writer's "Isaiah 1:2-20," www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com, 25.

observable in verse at other levels of the prosodic hierarchy. For that reason foot counts are not usually provided.

A third prosodic level whose boundaries and counts are left unindicated is what might be termed that of the minimal phonological phrase (φ_m). The line in ancient Hebrew verse may be conceptualized in at least two different ways. The first schematization is one element of the general rule cited above. The second schematization goes back to Paul Vetter and is part of the grid representation of the line I offer elsewhere:

[1] $(\omega = 2 \text{ or } 3) + (\omega = 2 \text{ or } 3) +/- (\omega = 2 \text{ or } 3)$ where $\omega =$ a prosodic word

[2] $(\varphi_m + \varphi_m) + (\varphi_m + \varphi_m) +/- (\varphi_m + \varphi_m)$ where $\varphi_m = 1$ or 2 ω 's, 2 or 3 total per verset

There is no doubt that φ_m is an identifiable level of the prosodic hierarchy subject to distinct phonological rules over its domain. In the scansion offered, φ_m counts are not provided but may be obtained in all cases by doubling verset counts. φ_m boundaries are implied by the hierarchy of masoretic accents. Agreements in analysis vis-à-vis the accents are not indicated. Differences are signaled by the notation “vd.”⁶

The notation devised to signal cases of *ssm* (semantic, syntactic, and morphological) parallelism is meant to be serviceably compact. It is intended to capture cases of matching ranging from verbatim repetition across higher prosodic levels to cases of words and expressions which match in one or more morphological and one or more syntactic dimensions but parallel each other at the semantic level in paradigmatic terms only, i.e. in the occupation of equivalent slots in an internal frame of semantic reference.⁷ The match is italicized if it is concomitant with a mismatch in one or more fundamental semantic, syntactic, and/or morphological dimensions. Repetitions are noted as such in addition to being captured by the abc:abc notation. The more important cases of uni- and multi-dimensional *ssm* parallelisms across lines, strophes, and above are also noted.

Finer grained typologies of *ssm* parallelism are a desideratum, but the multidimensional notation required for description would be very cumbersome.

The notation used to quantify the density of *ssm* parallelism in a given text is termed a “*p*” index. All x^x 's score 1; $x|x$ structures score 1 (not 2); repetitions of x y times score y . Parallelisms are significantly undercounted; a word matching another on 4 discrete morphological levels (person, number, gender, *binyan*), 2 syntactic levels (grammatical function, order), and 1 semantic level (hypernym / troponym) scores 1 [$a^1:a^2$ in Isa 1:10], and so does a word matching another on 1 morphological level (form), 2 syntactic levels

⁶ Paul Vetter described the line in terms of two minor and one major caesura if bipartite, and three minor and two major caesurae if tripartite long ago (*Die Metrik des Buches Job* [Biblische Studien II.4; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1897] 17; cited by Édouard Dhorme, *Le Livre de Job* [Paris: Gabalda, 1926]; ET *A Commentary on the Book of Job* [tr. Harold Knight; London: Thomas Nelson, 1967] clxxxv, n. 3). For a description of the poetic line in terms of a metrical grid, see the present writer's “The Poetic Line in Ancient Hebrew: A Grid Analysis,” online at www.ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com. For a re-analysis of ancient Hebrew verse in which φ_m 's are treated as the fundamental building blocks, see Vincent DeCaen, “Theme and Variation in Psalm 111: Metrical Phrase and Foot in Generative Perspective,” 2006, www.chass.utoronto.ca/~decaen/papers.

⁷ Words and constructions in a literary text derive their meaning from both text-internal and text-external frames of reference. See Benjamin Harshav (Hrushovski), “An Outline of Integrational Semantics: An Understander's Theory of Meaning in Context,” *Poetics Today* 3/4 (1982): 59-88; “Poetic Metaphor and Frames of Reference,” *Poetics Today* 5 (1984) 5-43; “Fictionality and Fields of Reference: Remarks on a Theoretical Framework,” *Poetics Today* 5 (1984) 227-51.

