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XII

METRICAL VERSE IN THE PSALMS

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About fifteen years ago, John McCarthy and I noticed that psalm 137 was composed in accordance with a syllable-counting metrical scheme that is quite similar to that used in many of the modern Romance languages, and we published this observation in Halle and McCarthy, 1981. In the years that have elapsed since, I have continued to study metrical properties of biblical poetry, and I have found a number of additional texts in the Old Testament that are composed in accordance with the same metrical scheme as psalm 137. In addition to psalms 54 and 23, which I discuss below, these metrical texts are psalms 2, 24 and 114, the curse of Lamek (Gen. 4, 23-24), and one of the prophecies of Amos (3, 3-8). I have little doubt that there are additional texts in the Old Testament that are composed with the same syllable-counting metrical scheme, but I have not succeeded in finding them. My metrical analyses of the texts just mentioned except those of psalms 2 and 24 were published in Halle, 1989. Since the latter paper was written well over a decade ago, I have had occasion to revise somewhat my analyses of these texts.¹ I believe, moreover, that I have discovered several further properties of these texts that, if correct, shed provocative light on a number of peripheral topics, such as the influence of Greek models on Hebrew poetry, the use of numerical devices in the Old Testament and, last and most speculative, the date of composition of psalm 137.

* I am grateful to Elan Dresher and Robert Hoberman for general advice, to Alan Prince for a suggestion about a numerical aspect of psalm 137, and to Israel Shahak for critical remarks on realistic vs. ideal representation of objects in classical art. The papers of David N. Freedman (see Freedman, 1980), and especially his study of the structure of psalm 137 provided the original impetus for my study of biblical versification. I am indebted to Professor Freedman also for his kindness in discussing with me by letter most of the matters addressed below. None of the above necessarily shares any of my views, and I alone bear responsibility for errors or other inadequacies in the paper.

1. ON THE NATURE OF METRICAL VERSE

Metrical verse is distinguished from prose in that it obeys special conditions on word sequences above and beyond those that sequences in prose texts must obey.² Some of the additional conditions are illustrated in example (1).

- (1) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 x
Lives of great men do remind (us),
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
We can make our lives sublime,
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 x
And departing leave behind (us),
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Footprints on the sands of time.

Thus, if we stop the count with the last stressed syllable in the line, then as shown above all lines in (1) consist of seven syllables.³ Moreover, the stresses by and large fall on the odd-numbered syllables. And each of lines ends with a syllable (or syllable sequence) that rhymes, i.e. (*sub*)*lime* - *time*; (*re*)*mind us* - (*be*)*hind us*.

1 Poems with a different metre are composed by placing different numerical restrictions on the lines. Thus, in (2) each line consists of ten syllables, the stresses fall on even-numbered syllables, and the lines do not rhyme.

- (2) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
It little matters that an idle king,
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

The distribution of stresses in the line is clearly an important factor in English metrical verse and in the poetic traditions of many other languages, but there are numerous poetic traditions that disregard the placement of stresses and are based exclusively on syllable counting. Such purely syllable-counting metres are employed in the Japanese haiku, in the major verse forms of Polish, Italian, Spanish, French, and - as noted above - in some of the poetry of the Old Testament.

To get some feeling for what poets do when they write syllable counting verse we examine the well-known lines by Verlaine in (3).

- (3) De la musique avant toute chose Music above everything,
Et pour cela préfère l'Impair And for this prefer the uneven
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air, Vague and more soluble in air
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose. With nothing in it that weighs
and that counts.

In standard French pronunciation the reduced *schwa* vowel, which is represented by the letter *e* in the French orthography, is not pronounced in a great many contexts, most notably not at the end of a polysyllabic word. In French grammars this vowel is often referred to as *e-muet* 'mute *e*'. Thus, in (3) the words *musique*, *toute*, *chose*, *préfère*, *vague*, *soluble*, *pèse*, *pose* all end with a 'mute *e*' that is not pronounced. If we now count the syllables that are actually pronounced we find there are eight such syllables in the first three lines and nine in the fourth.

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
De la musique avant toute chose,
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Et pour cela préfère l'Impair
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose.

This is a somewhat irregular and implausible distribution of line lengths in this kind of lyric poem. It suggests that there is something wrong in our way of counting syllables. In fact, we can readily regularize the line lengths by assuming that for purposes of French metrics not all *e-muets* count equally. Specifically, as books on French versification standardly tell us, for metrical purposes a word final *e-muet* counts when followed by a consonant, but not otherwise. Hence in the first stanza of (3) the *e-muet* in *toute*, *préfère*, *soluble* counts, but not in *musique*, *chose*, *vague*, *pèse*, *pose*. As a result, the number of metrical syllables in the first three lines of (3) increases from eight to nine, and the stanza is now made up of lines of equal length. To obtain this result, however, we must admit that the rules of French metrics are based not on the facts of pronunciation directly, but on the essentially non-phonetic principle stated just above. To support further the proposition that the rule for counting metrical syllables is not directly based on French pronunciation I cite the lines in (4), which are taken from scene iv, act 1 of Molière's play *Tartuffe*. At this point in the play there is a series of exchanges between the character Orgon, and his wife's maid, Dorine.

- (4)
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|----|-----------|--------|---------|-----------|-------|------------|---------|-----|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | |
| O. Et Tartuffe? | D. | Tartuffe? | Il | se | porte | à | merveille. | | 233 |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 8 | |
| O. Le pauvre homme! | D. | Le soir. | elle | eût | un | grand | dégoût. | | 235 |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 8 9 | |
| O. Et Tartuffe? | D. | Il | soupa. | lui | tout | seul. | devant | elle. | 239 |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 8 | |
| O. Le pauvre homme! | D. | La | nuit | se | passa | toute | entière | | 241 |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 7 8 | | |
| O. Et Tartuffe? | D. | Pressé | d'un | sommeil | agréable. | | | | 245 |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 7 | 8 9 | |
| O. Le pauvre homme! | D. | A | la | fin. | par | nos | raisons | gagnée. | 249 |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 7 | 8 9 | |
| O. Et Tartuffe? | D. | Il | reprit | courage | comme | il | faul. | | 251 |
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 7 8 | | |
| O. Le pauvre homme! | D. | Tout | deux | se | portent | bien | enfin. | | 256 |

Like most French classical plays of the seventeenth century, *Tartuffe* is composed in the *Alexandrin* metre. For present purposes we can say simply that a line in this metre consists of twelve syllables.⁴ Each of the eight exchanges in (4) begins with Orgon saying either *Et Tartuffe?* 'And Tartuffe?' or *Le pauvre homme!* 'The poor fellow!' This is followed by Dorine's response, which makes up the rest of the line. Notice now that both of Orgon's phrases end with an *e-muet*, which, as we know, is metrically ambiguous: it counts if followed by a consonant, but not otherwise. In the present instance, whether or not Orgon's mute *e* counts metrically will depend on whether Dorine's response begins with a consonant or with a vowel. Specifically, Orgon's *Et Tartuffe?* and *Le pauvre homme!* will count as quadri-syllabic if Dorine's response begins with a consonant, but as tri-syllabic if her response begins with a vowel. By the same token, since Dorine's response in lines 239, 249, 251 begins with a vowel, the response should be 9 syllables long, and since in the other five lines her response begins with a consonant, the response must be 8 syllables long. As shown in (4) both of these predictions are correct.

In speaking of Orgon's phrases above I said that they must 'count as tri-syllabic' rather than 'be pronounced as a tri-syllabic sequence'. I used this formulation to bring out clearly that what we are dealing with here cannot be a fact of pronunciation, for at the point of uttering his words, Orgon cannot know whether Dorine will begin her response with a vowel or a consonant

and cannot therefore know whether to pronounce the *e-muet* that ends his response.

In sum, we have in (4) an inside joke that is likely to have been noticed only by a few of Molière's fellow actors, and perhaps by one or two literary critics. We turn next to the metrical verse in the Bible, where, as I shall try to show, 'inside jokes' similar to those just examined can be found.

2. ON SYLLABLE COUNTING VERSE IN THE BIBLE

As remarked above, in Halle and McCarthy, 1981 and other papers, it has been argued that certain poetic texts of the Old Testament are composed in a syllable counting metre that is similar to that of French. Like French, Hebrew has reduced vowels - i.e. *schwas* - which I have represented in the transcriptions below with the capital letter E. Like in French, the *schwas* count for purposes of metre only in certain contexts but not elsewhere. In the transcription of the biblical texts below the uncounted *schwas* have been omitted. The conditions under which vowels are counted for metrical purposes are detailed in (5).

(5)

- i. Vowels following the last stress are not counted.
- ii. Secondary *Hāteḥrim* are omitted; thus, instead of Massoretic *ʔaḡāle ʔ1* 'shall ascend' we read *ʔaḡle*.
- iii. The schwa is omitted in 'doubly open' syllables of the form VC₁__C₂V where C₁ and C₂ are not identical. We therefore read *ʔomrim* 'say' (pl.) and *binʔoi* 'in pastures' rather than *ʔomErim* and *binEʔoi*. If the consonants flanking the schwa are identical, the schwa counts metrically; i.e. we read *lesōrEḏy* 'to my enemies' rather than *lesōrrḏy*.
- iv. The *paiaḥ* associated with word final gutturals is omitted. We therefore read *koH* 'strength' rather than *koah*.
- v. Massoretic *yErišālaim* and *yEḥwāh* is read systematically as *yErišālem* and *yahweh*.

Like in English and in French, the syllable count in biblical verse stops with the last stressed syllable: the syllables that follow the last stress are not counted and have therefore been enclosed in parentheses.

original poem, and I shall assume that the psalm consists of two stanzas each

original poem, and I shall assume that the psalm consists of two stanzas each seven lines long. Below we shall see a modicum of additional motivation for this proposal.

this proposal.

this proposal.

That psalm 54 was subject to later editing is almost certain. It is generally supposed that the psalter is composed of five separate collections. The divisions between the collections are marked by the appearance of the formula

bārūk yahweh ʔelōhē yisrāʔēl mēhāʔōlām wEʔad hāʔōlām ʔāmēn
wEʔāmēn

Blessed be Yahweh God of Israel for ever and ever Amen and Amen'

which appears in this form at the end of ps. 41, and in somewhat modified form, after pss. 72, 89 and 106. That pss. 41-72 represent a separate collection from the rest is made even more likely by two further facts. First, among the texts in pss. 41-72 there are three passages that appear with slightly varied readings elsewhere in the psalter. I have listed these duplicated texts in (7).

(8) 9 8 9 7 7 8 9 8 8 8 7 7 8 8

At this point the fact mentioned in the quoted passage that part of the editing that psalm 54 has undergone consisted of replacing *yahweh* by *ʔēlōhīm* becomes important. It tells us that not all occurrences of *ʔēlōhīm* need to have been in the original text; at least some of them could be replacements of the original *yahweh*. I propose that this is the case in lines 1, 3 and 7 of stanza (6). As a result the three lines in the first that were nine syllables long are now shortened to eight syllables. The emended text will then have instead of (8) the line length distribution below

8 8 8 7 7 8 8 8 8 8 7 7 8 8

With these emendations psalm 54 consists of two identical stanzas composed in syllable counting metre. I also draw attention to the fact that the total number of syllables in each stanza adds up to $54 = 3 \times 18$, a number which, in the light of what follows, may not be altogether accidental.

2.2. GEMATRIA IN PSALM 23

Another syllable-counting poem is the famous psalm 23 'The Lord is my shepherd'. The Hebrew text and a somewhat modernized translation of the King James text is given in (9).

(9)

yahweh rōyī lōʔ ʔeHsār
binʔōt dešeʔ yarbiḥē(nī)

Yahweh is my shepherd, I shall not
want.

gal-mē mEnūHōt yEnahle(nī)
napši yEšōbēb
yanHēni bEma9gElē-ce(deg)

He makes me lie down on grassy
pastures,
He leads me beside still waters,
He restores my soul,
He leads me into paths of
righteousness

lEma9an šEmō
gam kī-ʔēlēk bEgē-calmā(we)

For the sake of his name,
Though I walk through the valley of
the shadow of death
I shall fear no evil,

lōʔ-ʔīrāʔ rā9ā

kī-ʔattā yimmādi
šib TEkā umi9ante(kā)
hēmā yEnahmū(nī)

For you are with me,
Your rod and your staff
They comfort me,

ta9rōk lEpānay šulHān
neged cōrēāy
diššanā bašcemen rōʔši
kōsī rēwāyā
ʔak Tōb wāHesed yirdEpū(nī)

You prepare a table before me
In front of my enemies,
You have anointed my head with oil
My cup is full.
Only goodness and mercy shall

kol-yEmē Hayyāy
wEyāšabī bEbēi-yahweh

lEʔōrek yāmim

pursue me
All the days of my life,
And I shall dwell in Yahweh's
house
To the end of the days.

I have emended the official (Massoretic) text in two places. In the last line of the first stanza I have replaced the *rd9* 'evil', whose grammatical gender is masculine, by its feminine counterpart *rdʔā*. In the penultimate line of the poem, I have replaced the MT *wEšabī* 'I returned' with *wEyāšabī* 'I dwelled, sat', which fits better not only metrically, but also semantically, and which has also been adopted by many other writers.

The line lengths of the poem are then as given in (10).

(10) 7 7 8 5 8 5 8 5 6 7 5 7 5 8 5 8 5 8 5

As shown in (10) the poem is readily sub-divided into two eight-line stanzas separated by a three-line stanza. The two eight-line stanzas consist of three couplets of an 8-syllable line paired with a line of 5 syllables preceded by a couplet that is composed of two 7-syllable lines in the opening stanza, and of a 7- and a 5-syllable line in the closing stanza. We shall return to these facts below.

Bazak, 1987 has suggested that psalm 23 has a covert structure somewhat paralleling that of Molière's *Tartuffe* passage (4). In order to appreciate Professor Bazak's proposal it is necessary to recall that the Hebrew letters standardly serve as numerals. For example, in the Jewish calendar the present year 5755 < since the creation of the world (= 1994/95 CE) > is designated by the letter sequence *taw šin nun heh*, which respectively stand for 400 + 300 + 50 + 5 and add up to 755. (The millennia are usually omitted.)

Letter sequences representing certain numbers make up recognizable words. For example, 14 is represented by the letter sequence *yod dalei*, which stands for the Hebrew word *yād* 'hand'. Following this procedure we should expect the following integer 15 to be represented by the letter sequence *yod heh*. This letter sequence, however, stands for *yah*, one of the appellations of Yahweh. Since there is a tabu on using the name of Yahweh, the number 15 is represented not with the letter sequence *yod heh*, but with the letters *Ter wāw* i.e. 9 + 6.

The fact that letters also serve to represent numbers has led to certain numbers being replaced by words whose letter sequence has the same value. Thus, the word for 'dog' *keleb* has the numerical value of $20 + 30 + 2 = 52$,⁷ and I recall my father telling me on his fifty-second birthday that he had now reached a 'dog's age'. My father was thus referring to a number by means of a word whose letters add up to the number.

The reverse of this procedure is even more widely used: a number is used as a kind of code to refer to a word whose letters add up to the number in question. The latter type of numerology has a very ancient history. According to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* ('Gematria') its first use 'occurs in an inscription of the Assyrian king Sargon II (727-707 BCE), which states that the king built the wall of Khorsabad 16,283 cubits long to correspond to the numerical value of < the letters in > his name'.

This type of numerology was explicitly recognized also as a valid principle of exegesis in the Mishnah (R. ʔelīʔezer b. Yoṣi Haḡḡeliili, second century CE). 'According to this (principle) words with identical numerical value can be substituted for one another' (Dornseiff, 1925, p. 95). An example commonly quoted is the Talmud's interpretation of Genesis 14:14, which reports that Abram armed 318 of his servants to fight against the kings who had captured his kinsman Lot. The Talmud explains that in fact Abram only sent his retainer named ʔelīʔezer into battle and justifies this assertion with reference to the fact that the numerical value of the letters that make up the name ʔelīʔezer is 318; i.e. that 318 is a code for ʔelīʔezer. *ʔelīʔezer*

Bazak points out that the text of psalm 23 is 55 words long. He notes that if we divide these 55 words into $26 + 3 + 26$, the poem will then consist of two large stanzas separated by a line of three words, which in translation reads 'For you are with me' (cf. (9)). This division, as Bazak notes, has the effect of highlighting the 3-word line 'For you are with me'. This is highly plausible since the line epitomizes the ideological basis of the poem: the author's faith in God. More important for what follows, Bazak remarks that the word beginning the poem is *yahweh*, whose numerical equivalent is 26, and argues that this explains the division of the poem into two 26-word sequences separated by a 3-word sequence.

I believe that Bazak's lead can be pursued even somewhat further with results that are at least suggestive. Examining the stanzaic organization in (9), we see that the total number of syllables in the first stanza is $53 = 2 \times 26 + 1$ whereas the last stanza is $51 = 2 \times 26 - 1$. The middle stanza contains 18 syllables.

We know that the number 26 is a code for *yahweh*. The number 18 is an equally well known code, it stands for *Hay*, which is a form of the stem meaning 'life' or 'be alive'.⁸ Thus, ps. 23 can be viewed as encoding the message

Yahweh Yahweh Hay Yahweh Yahweh

a cheer of the sort that was heard at a visit of a pope to France, where the crowd is reported to have spontaneously shouted 'vive Dieu!' (H. Cartier-Bresson *The Decisive Moment*.)

It will be recalled that in the discussion of ps. 54 it was noted that each stanza was composed of 54 or 3×18 syllables. If 18 is the code for *vivat*, 'cheers!' then 3×18 is the equivalent of '3 cheers'.

2.3. GEOMETRY AND GEMATRIA IN PSALM 137

I conclude with a discussion of the formal properties of psalm 137, which, if I am correct, include not only numerological devices quite similar to those of psalms 23 and 54, but also additional covert features of a rather surprising kind. The text of the psalm is given in (11). The text reproduced below is essentially identical with that published in Halle and McCarthy, 1981.

(11)		
9al nEhārōi bEbābel	7	By the rivers of Babylon
šām yāšabnū ʔam bākī(nū)	7	There we sat and wept
bEzokrēnū ʔet ciyyōn	7	As we remembered Zion.
9al-ʔārābīm bEiōkā	7	By laurels in its midst
lālīnū kinnorōtē(nū)	7	We hung up our harps.
kī šām šEʔēlū(nū)	5	For there they asked of us,
šōbēnū dibrē-šir	6	Our captors, words of song,
wEiōlālēnū šīmHā	7	And those who mocked us,
		rejoicing:
širū lānū miššir ciyyōn	8	'Sing for us of Zion's song.'
ʔek nāšir ʔet-širē-yahweh	8	How can we sing Yahweh's songs
9al ʔadmat nekār	5	On alien soil?
ʔim-ʔeškālHēk yErūšālēm	8	If I forget thee, Jerusalem,
tiškāH yEmīnī	5	May my right arm wither.
tiḏbaḡ-IEšōnī JEHikkī	8	May my tongue stick to my palate
ʔim-īōʔ ʔekEreʔ(kī)	5	If I remember thee not,
ʔim-īōʔ ʔaḡle yErūšālēm	8	If I fail to ascend to Jerusalem
9al rōʔs šīmHātī	5	As my chief joy.

ZEKôr yahweh libnê-?êdôm	8	Remember, Yahweh, to Edom's sons
?et yEmê yErûšâlêm	7	The days of Jerusalem,
hâ?ômrim gârû 9a(rû)	6	Who say: 'Strip bare, strip bare,
'9ad hayyEsôd bân	5	To its very foundation!'

bat-bâbel haššEdûdâ	7	Daughter of Babylon, the doomed,
?ašrê šeyyEšallêm-lâk	7	Happy he who renders you
gEmûlêk šeggâmalî lā(nû)	7	The payment you paid us.
?ašrê šeyyô?Hêz wEnippêc	8	Happy he who grasps and shatters
9ôlāyayik ?el-hassā(1a9)	7	Your babes upon the cliff.

The psalm is thus made up of five stanzas in a chiasmic arrangement: ABCBA. The first and fifth stanzas consist each of five lines that with one exception are all 7 syllables long. The second and fourth stanzas are made up of four lines that increase in length in the second stanza and decrease in length in the fourth: 5-6-7-8 vs. 8-7-6-5. Finally the middle, third stanza is composed of four couplets of two lines each, of which one is 8 and the other 5 syllables long. I have summarized these findings in (12).

(12) 77777 5678 85858585 8765 77787

I conjecture, following a suggestion made to me by John Hollander, that the extra syllable in the last stanza is an irregularity introduced by the poet on purpose, reflecting his belief that only God can create a perfect thing and that all things made by men must therefore be imperfect.

In addition to the symmetries already noted, to which we return below, the poem has a number of numerical properties that rather resemble those noted above in psalm 23. First, the total number of lines in the poem is 26, which, it will be recalled, is the code number for *yahweh*. The syllable count in the three innermost stanzas is 26 + (52 = 2 x 26) + 26 = 104. Disregarding the extra syllable in the last stanza the total number of syllables in the poem is 174, which equals 18 + 156. We already know that 18 is the code for the blessing *Hay* - 'vivat!' 156 is the sum of the letters of the word *cymn* 'Zion'. These numbers therefore encode the message 'long live Zion!'

The number 174 may also be analysed as 34 + 140. 34 is the sum of the letters in the word *bbl* 'Babylon'. If this is correct then 140 must encode some curse, but unfortunately I have been unable to find a plausible biblical curse word whose letters add up to 140.

The preceding does not exhaust all formal properties of psalm 137. In Halle, 1987, I posed the question as to the motivation of the verse lengths in the poem. Why would a poet choose to assemble lines with such odd

numerical properties? One part of the answer was given above: the numbers were chosen for numetological reasons. A second part of the answer might be found, I suggested, in the graphic interpretation (13) of the metrical structure of the poem.

(13)

	X	X	X	X	X	X
XXXXXX	XX	X	X	X	X	XXXXXX
XXXXXX	XXX	X	X	X	XXX	XXXXXX
XXXXXX	XXXXX	XX	XX	XX	XXXXX	XXXXXX
XXXXXX	XXXXX	XX	XX	XX	XXXXX	XXXXXX
XXXXXX	XXXXX	XX	XX	XX	XXXXX	XXXXXX
XXXXXX	XXXXX	XX	XX	XX	XXXXX	XXXXXX
XXXXXX	XXXXX	XX	XX	XX	XXXXX	XXXXXX

In (13) each column of X's represents the metrical syllables in a line of the poem. The poem has been rotated through an angle of ninety degrees so that the seven X's of the first column in (13) represent the seven syllables that compose the first line of the poem; the seven X's of the second column stand for the seven syllables of the second line, etc. In Halle, 1987 I conjectured that the graphic shape (13) represents a building with two wings, a sloping roof and a façade with columns, and I speculated that it might be the Temple in Jerusalem. We return to this speculation below.

'Pattern poems', i.e. poems whose graphic shape represents a physical object, were known already in classical antiquity. The direct antecedents of 'pattern poems' were formulas of Orphic magic of classical Greek antiquity whose graphic shape imitated specific objects. Most frequent among them are instances of wings ... (Wojacek, 1969, p. 60) Subsequently the idea was adopted by the poets of the so-called Bucolic group, of whom the best known is Theocritus, (c. 310-250 BC). The technical term for such poems in Greek literature was *technopaïgnia*. This word means 'playful creations in which the art of the poet is shown off ... Often these poems were called simply *païgnia*, i.e. literary jokes (*literarische Scherze*)' (Wojacek, 1969, p. 56).

In view of the existence of the formulas of Orphic magic whose graphic shape imitated the shape of particular objects there is no reason to suppose that the Bucolic poets borrowed the idea of composing pattern poems from a Jewish source, especially since except for psalm 137 no Hebrew pattern

poems from that time has been found. That, on the other hand, the Greek poems should have provided a model for a Jewish poet is fully to be expected in view of the tremendous Greek cultural influence over all peoples living in the area that was (to be) occupied by the Roman empire, and this included the Jews, both in Palestine and elsewhere, both before and after the Maccabean uprising.¹⁰

For matters under discussion here perhaps the most striking of all is the statement in the Palestinian Talmud quoted by Rosén, 1979, p. 47.

- (14) Four languages are appropriate for the world's use: the language of the foreigners (192) for poetry, the language of the Roman for combat, the *swry* for lamentation, and the Hebrew (*šbr̥y*) language for conversation. (SoTa 21c14).

Rosen comments: 'That "the language of the foreigners" to be used for poetry is Greek, has never been in doubt, if only because Greek is not otherwise mentioned and it is clear that it should have been.' We thus have it on the authority of the Talmud that Greek was at one time the language of poetry for Jews. In light of this it should hardly be surprising to find a Hebrew poem - i.e. ps. 137 - imitating a Greek model.

As I noted in Halle, 1989 additional corroborative evidence for the suggestion that ps. 137 represents the Temple in Jerusalem is provided by the existence of coins with representations of the façade of the Temple. One such coin has been reproduced in (15) and it shows a façade made up of four columns. It is not far-fetched to suppose that each of the four columns is represented by the 8-syllable line in each of the four couplets that constitute the central portion of the psalm.

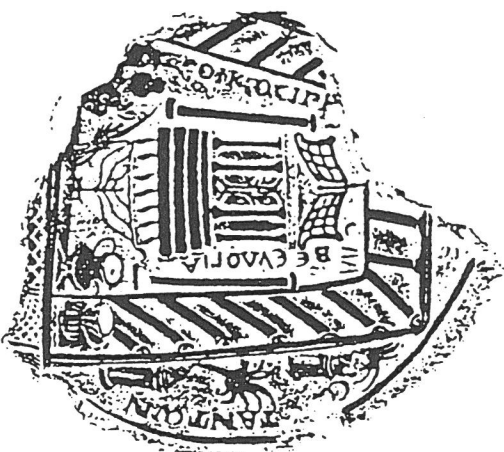
(15)



The coin in (15), reproduced from Williamson 1894, is a silver tetradrachm struck by the organizers of the Bar Kokhba uprising between 132-135 CE. Several thousand specimens of this tetradrachm have been found. Many

writers have assumed that the façade of the building shown on the coin is that of the Temple destroyed by the Romans; e.g. Muehsam, 1966 and Avi-Yonah, 1968. Mildenberg, 1984, the author of the definitive study of the coinage of the Bar Kokhba revolt, is somewhat less categorical: 'In AD 132 ... the Temple was only a memory, but a memory to be cherished and kept alive until the Temple stood again. The rebels of the Bar Kokhba revolt, therefore, chose to propagate with their new tetradrachm design ... the plan of the Temple to be re-erected in the future, a plan that conformed either to their memory of the old Temple or to their dream of a new Temple.' (p. 68 - emphasis supplied).

(16)



In (16) I have reproduced from Rossi 1882 a fourth century (CE) gold glass fragment of a Jewish drinking cup that was found in the catacomb of SS. Pietro and Marcellino in Rome and is now in the Vatican.¹¹ What is especially interesting to us about this representation of the Temple is that it suggests that each of the six 8-syllable lines in the psalm - cf. (13) - stands for an actual pillar in the Temple. In the words of Narkiss, 1974 the fragment 'gives a bird's eye view of the Temple surrounded by the Tabernacle curtains (Exodus 26). The sanctuary in the centre symbolizes that of Solomon with the two pillars, *Jachin* and *Boas*, on either side (1 Kings 7:21).' Rossi, the scholar who first described the glass fragment, concluded that 'the glass reproduces in a summary and very imperfect fashion a picture

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or model of the Jerusalem temple preserved by the Jews after the destruction of the holy city and represented in accordance with the memories and traditions of their ancestors. That it was not altogether imaginary (*fantastique*) is shown by the two isolated columns and their position relative to the building, for we never find these shown in this way in the representations of the temple that is furnished to us by ancient Christian art ... (p. 153).

The pattern in (13) therefore reproduces salient features of the Temple found also on the Bar Kokhba coins and on the Vatican glass. In all of them we find a façade with four columns. Moreover, if we assume that each of the six eight-syllable lines in the psalm represents a column, then both the psalm and the Vatican glass fragment show the two additional columns that were originally in Solomon's Temple.

Since the Bar Kokhba coins and the Vatican glass are posterior to the destruction of the second Temple it is most probable that they represent features of the second Temple. We recall that the first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Upon the return from the Babylonian exile seventy years later, the second Temple was constructed, but because of the difficult conditions that prevailed at the time the reconstructed Temple was a rather 'unpretentious building' (*Encyclopaedic Judaica*, 'Temple') and remained such for many centuries. It is unlikely to have had the magnificent four-column portico present in the representations under discussion here.

Concerning the structure represented in the glass fragment (16) Rossi 1982 wrote that 'even admitting that these (two) famous columns were erected by Solomon ... our glass represents them as they were in the temple of Herod' (emphasis supplied, p. 148). Thus, if the structure represented in psalm 137 is the same as that depicted on the glass fragment, then psalm 137 represents Herod's Temple. This would date the composition of ps. 137 after 19 BC, i.e. after Herod's reconstruction of the Temple got under way. Such a late date of composition for the psalm, however, goes counter to generally held views. The fact that psalm 137 is included in the Psalm Scroll of Qumran Cave 11 (Sanders, 1965) would not of itself cut the ground out from under the proposed late dating of the psalm, since many of the Qumran documents are of the first century CE and even later. More problematic, perhaps, is the fact that psalm 137 is included in the Septuagint, which is generally held to have been produced before Herod's time. In view of the great complexity of the issue the date of composition of psalm 137 must be left open here.

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Notes

1. Halle, 1989 unfortunately contains a number of typographical errors of which the most important are corrected herewith:
 p. 112: replace the two lines above ex. (4) reading 'Since there ... to read' with 'I have emended the second line of couplet IV to read'.
 p. 112: in the second line below ex. (4), replace 'seven' with 'eight'.
 p. 112: in the third and fourth lines below ex. (4), delete 'and in the fourth couplet the second line has 10 syllables.'
 p. 118: in the last line of the quoted text insert 'roar' after 'the forest'.
 p. 119: in the quoted text move the three lines 'wÉlérép ?én lô ... if he have taken nothing?' to the top of the page.
2. For a general treatment of poetic metre, see Halle and Keyser, 1980.
3. Parentheses enclose the syllables after the last stress in the verse. These syllables are extra-metrical, do not count for metrical purposes.
4. See also Halle and Keyser, 1980, where the passage in (4) was first analysed.
5. I have omitted vv. 1-2, because these are clearly introductory remarks in prose. They read in the King James Version: 'To the chief musician on neqinoth maschil, a psalm of David when the Ziphim came and said to Saul: 'Doth not David hide himself with us?'' I have enclosed the last line of the psalm in parentheses for reasons to be detailed below.
6. The *Briannica* follows the verse numbering of the King James Version, whereas in (7) I use the verse numbering of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. This accounts for the difference in the reference to the verses of ps. 40 in (7) and in the quoted passage.
7. Since the vowels of this word are not represented in the Hebrew orthography, only the consonants are taken into account.

8. The significance of the number 18 is further highlighted by the fact that the prayer that is 'the core and main element of each of the prescribed daily services' of the Jewish liturgy is 'known popularly among Ashkenazim as *Shemoneh-Esreh* ('Eighteen') because of the 18 benedictions which it originally comprised.' (Quotations from the article 'Amidah' in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*).
9. Mark Aronoff has pointed out to me that 156 is also 6 x 26 (=yhwh), but I think my guess above is to be preferred.
10. Indications of the extent of this influence are provided not only by the fact that the Gospels were written in Greek, but also by such additional facts as that in Palestine, of 168 grave inscriptions of this period 114 are exclusively in Greek, that some of the letters from leaders of the Bar Kokhba rebellion found in the Qumran caves are in Greek, that Jews widely adopted Greek names, so that even rabbis had names such as Alexander, Antigonus, Pappus, Symmachus, Tarphon, etc. (For additional information see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, articles 'Hellenism'; 'Greek and Latin Languages, Rabbinical Knowledge of', 'Symbolism, Jewish (in the Greco-Roman Period)' and also Bickerman, 1989.)
11. I am indebted to Mrs. Robert Hoberman for drawing my attention to this material.