

QĪNĀH METER AND STROPHIC STRUCTURE IN PSALM 137

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In his classical formulation on *qīnāh* meter in Hebrew poetry K. Budde (1882, pp. 1–52) presented five propositions for its analysis: 1) the rhythmical unit—the bicolon in our terminology—is divided into two unequal parts and the longer precedes the shorter; 2) the parts (cola) of this unit most commonly consist of three words and two words respectively; 3) variations occur in which the longer part (colon) may consist of four words and the shorter part may consist of three words or simply two words; 4) beyond these features for comparison there are no other constant relations between the two parts of the rhythmical unit. While more modern poetic analysts might describe these metrical relations in different terms and measure them by other standards, the gist of these principles enunciated by Budde have stood the test of time.

Where Budde got off the track was in his attempt to read this form all the way through Hebrew laments. This thorough-going approach was stated in his other proposition, in which he held that the parts of the rhythmic units in laments were *never* evenly divided. For those cases in which both parts appeared to consist of two words each, Budde found it necessary to lengthen the first part by taking its two words as “heavier” than the two words in the second part. This is the principal part of Budde’s formulation that has been rejected by his critics, as it is obviously an inaccurate description of the extent to which *qīnāh* meter was employed in Hebrew laments.

Because of its character the book of Lamentations has played a central role in the discussion and identification of *qīnāh* meter. In criticizing the study of this book by Budde, G. B. Gray (1915, p. 118) utilized the statistics compiled on it by E. Sievers to point out that only one-half of the sixty-six divisions in the acrostic poem of Lamentations I were written in *qīnāh* meter. While accepting the existence of *qīnāh* meter and its common use in laments, Sievers and Gray thus pointed out that it was not as dominant a meter as Budde had made it out to be.

Gray (1915, p. 117) made Lamentations I a test case for the extent of the use of *qînāh* meter because it appeared there less frequently than it did in the succeeding three chapters of Lamentations. We can now address the question of the frequency of *qînāh* meter in this critical chapter with new and up-to-date text-critical information on the passage. In his recent metrical analysis of Lamentations I, F. M. Cross (1983, pp. 151–152) has made use of the form to which this passage is attested by a fragment from a scroll from Qumran. By establishing the text of this passage on the basis of 4QLam^a, Cross has come to the conclusion that fifty-four out of sixty-six of the bicola in Lamentations I were written in the form of a long colon followed by a short colon.

Statistically speaking, the results of this study have come out somewhere in between those of Sievers and Gray on the one hand and Budde on the other in that neither half of this chapter nor all of it was found to be written in *qînāh* meter. In this more recent study, that portion comes out closer to four-fifths of it. Regardless of the exact number of bicola that were written in *qînāh* meter in Lamentations I, all of these studies combine to support the identification of it as a distinct metrical form and that it was commonly employed in ancient Hebrew laments.

Earlier studies on *qînāh* meter in Hebrew poetry made special use of the Ley-Sievers system of scanning stress accents to identify it. More recently the system of counting syllables, as brought out by D. N. Freedman, has been applied to the study of early Hebrew poetry (Freedman, 1960, pp. 101–107) and the metrical content of the book of Lamentations (Freedman, 1972, pp. 367–392). This is also the approach that has been followed by Cross to determine which are the long and short cola in Lamentations I in his study mentioned above. In the study of Psalm 137 presented below, the syllable-counting method appears to yield quite useful results; more emphasis should be placed upon it than upon the older method of scanning stress accents. That older system of analysis has been retained alongside this more recent approach because it is in those terms that the classical definition of *qînāh* meter has commonly been utilized.

My own approach to *qînāh* meter in two previous studies has been mainly to propose that the ancient Hebrew poets applied the *qînāh* pattern to larger poetic units of their laments, those that go beyond the level of mere bicola. In a study on the Lament of David, it was suggested that this pattern could be applied to couplets consisting of a tricolon followed by a bicolon (Shea, 1976, pp. 141–144). On a larger scale, it was suggested in another study that the whole literary structure of the book of Lamentations was adapted to this pattern (Shea, 1979,

pp. 103–107). In this case the first three chapters of Lamentations were written in triplets, and the last two chapters were written in couplets and bicola respectively, as identified by the acrostic of chapter four and the parallelism present in the bicola of chapter five. The idea that the *qīnāh* pattern could be applied to poetic units other than bicola has been taken over from these two previous studies and applied here as a working hypothesis for the structural analysis of Psalm 137.

THE STRUCTURAL STUDY OF PSALM 137

Quite a number of past and present commentaries on the psalms make no mention either of strophic divisions or of poetic meter in Psalm 137. These need not be mentioned here. Among those interpreters who have paid some attention to these topics, remarks upon strophic divisions of the psalm are considerably more common than are those upon meter. Quite a variety of interpretations appears from a survey of the strophic divisions adopted for this psalm by commentators. They are described here in order, from the smallest number of divisions to the largest.

One approach to this psalm has been simply to divide it in half, assigning vv. 1–4 to the first half and vv. 5–9 to the second half (M'Caw, 1954, pp. 505–506). Dividing this psalm into three strophes is the most common approach. This has been manifested in two different outlines. In one, the divisions are given as vv. 1–3, 4–6, and 7–9 (Cohen, 1945, pp. 447–448; Kraus, 1961, p. 909; Murphy, 1968, p. 600; Kidner, 1975, p. 459). The other outline of this type retains these main divisions but transposes v. 4 into the first stanza (Maclaren, 1908, p. 370; Buttenweiser, 1938, p. 217; Anderson, 1972, p. 898).

The next largest number of strophic divisions proposed for this psalm is four. This approach also appears in two different forms. The first of these is to identify the stanzas of this psalm as consisting of vv. 1–3, 4–6, 7, and 8–9 (Oesterley, 1939, p. 545). The alternative here is to transpose v. 4 forward to join the opening stanza. This results in outlining divisions of vv. 1–4, 5–6, 7, and 8–9 (Dahood, 1970, p. 269). Proceeding onward, this psalm has been divided into six sections consisting of couplets of bicola (Delitzsch, 1883, p. 330). Finally, this psalm has also been divided into eight couplets of bicola (Cheyne, 1904, p. 210).

What shall we say with respect to this welter of possibilities? The possibilities at the two extremes can be eliminated rather readily. Dividing the psalm into only two halves does not take into account major shifts in scene and theme, much less its internal poetic relations. At the other extreme, all of the poetic units of the psalm have been made into subsections of it. This approach ignores the way in which the poet put these

units together so as to comprise larger sections of the poem. Between these two poles the psalm has been divided into either three or four main sections. The latter view seems more probable because it takes into account the shift in attention from Edom in v. 7 to Babylon in vv. 8–9.

What we have emerged with here is basically Dahood's outline given above, dividing the psalm into stanzas consisting of vv. 1–4, 5–6, 7, and 8–9. But one modification needs to be made in that outline. His first stanza should be subdivided into two stanzas consisting of vv. 1–2 and vv. 3–4. Reasons for this further subdivision are evident in the thematic shift from the setting in captivity (vv. 1–2) to the dialogue with the captors (vv. 3–4) and also evident in the poetic relations examined in more detail below.

From this survey of the literature we have emerged with an outline for this psalm which consists of five divisions; vv. 1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 7, and 8–9. This outline is largely harmonious with the two new detailed studies of Psalm 137 by Freedman (1971, pp. 187–205) and Halle and McCarthy (1981, pp. 161–167). The only difference between this outline and the one used in those two recent studies is the placement of v. 4. In their studies v. 4 has been located at the beginning of the third stanza, while in this outline it has been located at the end of the second. In passing it may be noted that these two different approaches to v. 4 are already well represented in previous studies on Psalm 137, as is apparent from the survey of literature given above.

Remarks on the poetic meter in Psalm 137 are much sparser among commentators. In the analyses of Hebrew poetry performed in the last century there was a strong tendency to divide up such works into quatrains. This approach is reflected in the work of Delitzsch (1883, p. 330) and Cheyne (1904, p. 210), who divided this psalm into even couplets of bicola. They identified these as consisting of unevenly balanced pentameters throughout, and Delitzsch compared this meter with the "elegiac" (= *qīnāh*) meter which is found in the book of Lamentations. While that comparison might be valid for some of the bicola in this psalm, it is unlikely that it is valid for the contents of the entire psalm. In contrast, it may be noted that Anderson—even though he has not provided a full metrical study of the psalm—refers to the meter here as "irregular" (1972, p. 897).

Oesterley compared the meter of Psalm 137 to that of Psalm 135, and he scanned his first and third stanzas with a 2 + 2 meter and his second and fourth stanzas with a 4 + 4 meter (1939, pp. 545–546). This approach contrasts with that of Delitzsch and Cheyne, and it also contrasts with the more recent scansion of H.-J. Kraus. Kraus has not described the

meter of the entire poem, but he has mentioned the meter of several individual verses. He has scanned vv. 1–2 as 3 + 2 + 2 and 3 + 3; he scanned v. 7 as 3 + 3 and 2 + 2; and he has scanned v. 8 as 3 + 3 + 3 (Kraus, 1961, p. 909). This scansion of Kraus comes considerably closer to that of Freedman which is outlined below.

Only Dahood appears to have studied the meter of Psalm 137 in terms of syllable counts prior to the publication of Freedman's study of it, but Dahood did not carry such observations all the way through the psalm. In his linguistically oriented commentary he only mentioned the meter found in v. 1 (7:4::4:7 syllables for him, by dividing the opening tricolon into a couplet of bicola), and the chiasmic parallelism also present there (Dahood, 1970, pp. 269–270). He did not analyze any of its other verses for their poetic features. As far as *qīnāh* meter in Psalm 137 is concerned, Delitzsch is the only commentator I have located in this brief survey who has commented on such a connection (see above), and he did it incorrectly by finding it in all of the poetic units in this psalm. The lack of such observations seems otherwise rather paradoxical considering the obvious nature of the psalm as a lament.

To find order in the spectrum of opinion on the strophic structure of Psalm 137, to analyze its meter in more comprehensive and current terms, and to determine if *qīnāh* meter exists in it requires further study of this psalm. Before undertaking such a study, however, the two more recently published structural studies of this psalm should be examined separately and in detail.

TWO RECENT STRUCTURAL STUDIES OF PSALM 137

The two recent studies of Psalm 137 that deserve special attention are those of D. N. Freedman (1971, pp. 187–205) and M. Halle and J. J. McCarthy (1981, pp. 161–167). There are many similarities between these studies, and they both come to essentially the same conclusion about the nature of the poetry in this poem. The latter study represents what is mainly an effort to refine the analysis of the former. Both of these studies closely follow the Massoretic text as the basis for their metrical analyses; both have divided this poem up into the same five stanzas.

On a smaller scale, they differ on line divisions in only two instances, in v. 6ab and in v. 7b. Both have employed syllable counting as the main method of measuring meter. The difference arises from the fact that Halle and McCarthy regularly drop final syllables from their counts, for two reasons: MT accents and parallels to the way in which final post-tonic syllables are treated in some European poetic traditions. Our purpose in the present study is neither to confirm nor to deny the accuracy

of the method by which these studies have examined the meter of this poem. It is rather to employ their results as a vehicle for examining other aspects of this poem.

A principal concern here is with *qînāh* meter. Neither Freedman nor Halle and McCarthy utilized their syllable counts in order to look for this type of meter. This poem is, however, one of the more obvious examples among all the poems of the Bible in which to look for its occurrence. *Qînāh* meter is to be expected, in one form or another, in a poem like this. Along with the search for *qînāh* meter Psalm 137 comes the study of its strophic structure. Both Freedman and Halle and McCarthy have divided it up into the same five strophes. They have located these five strophes in a chiasitic pattern according to their function (Freedman, p. 188; Halle and McCarthy, p. 162):

Strophe I: Introduction	vv. 1-2
Strophe II: Opening	v. 3
Strophe III: Nucleus	vv. 4-6
Strophe IV: Closing	v. 7
Strophe V: Conclusion	vv. 8-9

These authors also maintain that the strophes were composed in such a manner as to balance their corresponding strophes in numbers of cola (Freedman, p. 204; Halle and McCarthy, p. 162):

Strophe I	5 cola
Strophe II	4 cola
Strophe III	8 cola
Strophe IV	4 cola
Strophe V	5 cola

I concur with the main points of this outline but would suggest a slightly different structure. Important to this analysis is v. 4. I would suggest transposing it forward to conclude the second strophe. Reasons for this are described below. While this may upset the neat balance outlined above, it may relate this poem more directly to its nature as a lament. The meter of the different parts of this poem should also be examined to see how it balances bicola which are located in corresponding positions in this outline.

By comparing these two previous studies, it is evident that there are two differences between them in line division. These differences affect both their syllable counts and the way in which those lines relate to the poem as a whole. A further examination of this poem is thus warranted for these and other reasons. As a means of verifying the obtained results, I have employed the metrical analyses of these previous studies. Since

this psalm has been seen as a composition with balancing strophes, the strophes that balance have been treated together.

A NEW STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF PSALM 137

The Introduction and the Conclusion

Strophe I (Vv. 1–2)	Syllables	Stress Accents
	Freedman/Halle & McCarthy	Freedman
By the rivers in Babylon—	7/6	2
there we sat down, loudly we wept,	8/7	2
when we remembered Zion.	7/7	2
By poplars in her midst	7/7	2
we hung up our harps.	8/7	2
Strophe V (Vv. 8–9)		
Daughter of Babylon, the doomed,	7/7	2
blest be he who renders you	7/7	2
your payment you paid us.	9/8	3
Blest be he who seizes and smashes	8/8	3
your children against the rock.	7/8	2

Freedman adopted the translation of “in” Babylon for v. 1 from 11QPs^a against the MT, and this reading has been followed here (Freedman, p. 191). The translation of *gam* as “loudly” goes back to Dahood’s work in Ugaritic (1970, p. 268). Freedman has translated *šedûdāh* in v. 8 with its normal passive meaning of “doomed” or “destined for destruction”, in contrast to the common emendation to “destroyer” (Freedman, p. 202). This translation has been followed here. I prefer as did Dahood (1970, p. 268) to translate ²*ašrē* as “blest”, in contrast to “happy”, because I see it in the context of covenantal blessings and curses. The cognate accusative based on *gāmal* in v. 8 is but one case of the extensive amount of alliteration present in this poem. A word play based upon *sela*^c occurs in v. 9. This word is used for “rock” there but it was also the name of the capital of the Edomites, who are mentioned in the previous strophe.

As far as the meter of these two strophes is concerned, they consist of relatively evenly balanced cola of medium length throughout. They are evenly balanced within themselves and with each other. No clear-cut case of *qînāh* meter is evident in either of them. The question of the

presence of a *qīnāh* pattern is more complex, however, than just noting that it is not present in individual bicola. In a previous study on *qīnāh* meter I suggested that the 3:2 pattern of *qīnāh* meter could be extended beyond the level of individual bicola to include a couplet consisting of a tricolon followed by a bicolon (Shea, 1976, pp. 141–144). An example of this type of poetic unit occurs in Ezek 26:17–18 where it is specifically labelled as a lament (Shea, 1979, p. 104).

From the identification of the *qīnāh* couplet elsewhere, we may turn to these two strophes to examine them for the possible presence of this kind of poetic unit. To do so requires relating the five cola in these strophes to each other. Freedman did this by identifying Strophe V as consisting of a tricolon followed by a bicolon (1971, p. 201). The picture in Strophe I is a little less certain because of the presence of a quasi-independent statement between two bicola. This statement still ties in best with what precedes it, however, so this strophe should also be identified as consisting of a tricolon followed by a bicolon.

Both Strophe I and Strophe V have thus been defined as consisting of a tricolon followed by a bicolon. These strophes balance, therefore, in terms of the number of their cola, in terms of the meter for their cola, and in terms of the units into which those cola have been distributed—a tricolon followed by a bicolon. Since these balancing strophes are found in a lament, it is appropriate to identify them as *qīnāh* couplets in which the 3:2 *qīnāh* pattern is developed through the use of a tricolon with a bicolon.

The tricolon and the bicolon of Strophe I are set off by the use of the preposition ^c*al* which confirms their division into these poetic units. Alliteration is also present in this strophe. It derives from the five-fold use of *-nu* as a suffix or verbal ending. More alliteration occurs in Strophe V through the use of the relative pronoun *še*. All three of its occurrences are prefixed to the middle words in successive cola. Freedman has identified Strophes I and V as inclusio strophes (1971, p. 188). This function may be seen especially in the use of the name Babylon in both.

The Intermediate Strophes

Strophe II (Vv 3–4)	Syllable Counts	Stress Accents
For there they asked us—	6/5	2
our captors, words of a song;	6/6	2
And those who mocked us, a joyful song:	7/7	2
“sing to us from a song of Zion!”	8/8	3

"How can we sing a song of Yahweh on a foreign soil?"	7/7 5/5	2 2
Strophe IV (v. 7)		
Recall, Yahweh, to Edom's sons the day of Jerusalem;	8/8 6/6	3 2
Who said, "strip bare, strip bare to her foundation."	6/6 7/5	2 3

The principal translational problem in Strophe II is how to translate the hapax form *tôlālênû*. Since it is in parallel with captors a meaning reflecting action by those captors is appropriate. I have followed Dahood and Freedman in taking it as probably related to *hll*, 'to boast' (Dahood, 1970, p. 271; Freedman, 1971, p. 192). On the basis of parallelism with the word for "song" in the preceding colon, the following word for "gladness, rejoicing" has been translated as applying to a song of that nature, as Freedman has noted and Dahood has translated (Freedman, 1971, p. 192; Dahood, 1970, p. 268). I have followed Freedman in interpreting the opening imperative of the fourth strophe with the idea that Yahweh would call to mind the past behavior of the Edomites.

In this strophic division v. 4 has been located at the end of Strophe II. This location upsets the previously proposed neat balance which resulted from dividing this poem into five strophes with the same number of cola in the balancing strophic pairs. There are two main reasons for this location of v. 4 and they have to do with its relationship to what precedes it and to what follows it. By both form and theme v. 4 fits better with what precedes it.

In v. 4 the exiled Judahites answer their Babylonian tormentors who urge them to sing a song of Zion in v. 3. Their answer is that they cannot sing such a song while they are on foreign soil. Both of these statements come in the form of direct address. The command of the Babylonians is quoted in v. 3 while the answer of the Judahites is quoted in v. 4. Verse 5, on the other hand, begins a new section which takes up the subject of the remembrance of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is thus the focus of the next two verses, while v. 4 concludes the picture of the plight of the exiles in the preceding strophe. Verse 4 fits best, therefore, as the conclusion to Strophe II.

The meter of Strophe II is a relatively straightforward 5:6::7:8::7:5 syllable count. This might be a crescendo pattern, but it is uncertain what degree of stress should be placed upon these minor increments. The meter of Strophe IV is less clear because of a question over line division there. The question involves what to do with the pair of imperatives

in the last half of v. 7. Any decision on this matter is bound to be somewhat arbitrary, and the present analysis is no exception.

At least one imperative should follow the participle in the first colon which introduces what the Edomites said. On the other hand the presence of a verb—the second imperative—to accompany the prepositional phrase in the second colon also seems preferable, since it makes it more of a whole statement. For this reason and for purposes of poetic symmetry, I have divided this pair of imperatives and distributed one to each of the two cola.

An important way in which these two balancing strophes are linked is by means of their forms of address. Both of these strophes conclude with cola which quote a direct address from one of the parties involved. In the first case, a direct address is first quoted from the Babylonians, and then the answer from the Jews is quoted. In the second instance, the Edomites are quoted as urging the Babylonians on in their destruction of Jerusalem. In both of these cases the initial statements set the stage for the quote of a direct address in the concluding cola. These are also the only strophes in the poem in which direct address appears.

These two strophes are also linked by the reference to Zion in the first and to Jerusalem in the second. Just as references to Babylon link Strophes I and V, so references to Jerusalem link Strophes II and IV. The Babylonians are also tied indirectly in to both of these references to Jerusalem. In the first instance, the Babylonians do the talking, taunting their captives to sing about Zion. In the second instance, it is the Babylonians who are addressed by the Edomites, urging them on in their work of the destruction of Jerusalem. Imperative verbs occur in both of these cases. The alliteration found in Strophe I continues in Strophe II. The ending *-nu* that appeared five times in Strophe I appears four more times in Strophe II.

The final points for comparison between these two strophes deal with meter and overall structure. The first bicolon in Strophe IV scans at 8:6 syllables and 3:2 stress accents. This is sufficient to qualify it as written in *qīnāh* meter. The final bicolon of Strophe II was written in a similar meter when that meter is measured by its syllable count, 7:5. Its stress accents, however, scan at only 2:2. This may be a case in which the syllable count provides more information on line length than the stress-accent scan does. On the basis of its syllable count this bicolon is taken here as probably written in *qīnāh* meter. Strophe IV thus opens with a *qīnāh* bicolon and Strophe II appears to end with the same feature. Just

as these two strophes balance in the several ways described above, they also appear to be balanced in their use of opening and closing *qīnāh* bicola.

Finally, there is the matter of relating strophic structures. These two strophes do not appear to be in balance because Strophe II is longer than Strophe IV. Strophe II consists of a triplet of bicola while the balancing Strophe IV consists of a couplet of bicola. This unbalanced correspondence is thus measured out in a specific quantitative relationship. The ratio of this relationship once again manifests the *qīnāh* pattern of 3:2. I would suggest that this is no accident but rather that it is the result of a deliberate design on the part of the poet. This 3:2 or *qīnāh* pattern is employed in several different ways throughout the poem. The different manifestations of the *qīnāh* pattern are summarized in the conclusion to this study. Here we have simply found one more way in which it could be developed.

The Central Strophe

Strophe III (Vv. 5–6)	Syllable Counts	Stress Accents
If I forget you, Jerusalem,	9/8	2
may my right hand atrophy!	5/5	2
May my tongue stick to my palate,	5/8	3
if I do not remember you!	9/5	2
If I do not go up to Jerusalem	9/9	3
with joy on my head.	5/5	2

There is a difference in the syllable counts given above for the central bicolon in this strophe. This difference derives from the different ways in which this line has been divided. Since the verb “to stick” connects the tongue and the palate, and the statement about remembering Jerusalem in the second colon differs considerably by thought content, the tongue and the palate belong together with the verb “to stick” in the first colon.

A chiasm by theme and a chiasm by form should not be confused here. A chiasm by theme is clearly present in this couplet of bicola:

5a) A - remembrance of Jerusalem

5b) B - curse upon anatomical part (right hand)

6a) B' - curse upon anatomical part (tongue-palate)

6b) A' - remembrance of Jerusalem

Just because one has a chiasm by theme, does not necessarily mean that one has a chiasm by form. The two can operate independently, as they have in this case. Thus the 9:5 syllable count appears preferable here. This thematic chiasm continues on through this central strophe, as Freedman has noted (1971, p. 195). This can be seen by continuing to follow this outline:

- 6a) B' - curse upon anatomical part (tongue-palate)
- 6b) A' - remembrance of Jerusalem
- 6c) A'' - ascent to Jerusalem
- 6d) B'' - blessing upon anatomical part (head)

The chiasmic pattern of the alternating themes employed through this central strophe is thus—A:B::B':A'::A'':B''. This links up two consecutive chiasms by theme and together they cover the whole of this strophe. The successive elements in this chiasmic series are set off by their particles. The series begins with ³*im* in 5a, it shifts to ³*im-lo*³ in 6b, and it continues with ³*im-lo*³ in 6c. The reversal involved in shifting from the verb “forget” to the verb “remember” accompanies the introduction of the negative into these statements. Freedman refers to this whole arrangement as “a tightly interlocking pattern” and “the striking double chiasm” (1971, p. 195).

With v. 4 transposed forward to the end of the previous strophe, it can now be seen that the word “Jerusalem” forms an inclusio around this central strophe, occurring in its opening and concluding bicola, but not in its central bicolon. This overall arrangement provides a further argument why v. 4 does not belong to this strophe. If it were part of this strophe then it would be discontinuous with the chiasms that run through the rest of this central strophe.

With the central bicolon of this strophe divided in the manner described above, it can be seen that the meter of all three of the bicola in this strophe is identical, 9:5. All three of these bicola thus qualify as having been written in *qināh* meter. Our conclusion here then is that while this strophe is chiasmic by theme on the order of A:B::B':A'::A'':B'', it is *qināh* by form on the order of 9:5::9:5::9:5.

Among other features of this central strophe, there is a progression in the anatomical parts referred to here; from the right arm, to the tongue and palate in the mouth, to the (top of) the head which will be crowned with joy at the ascent to Jerusalem. The occurrence of the tongue in the mouth in the central bicolon of this central strophe is of interest, since it was with his tongue and mouth that the poet spoke or sang his poem. If this self-imposed curse came upon him, however, he would no longer be able to speak or sing this poem or any other.

There is a thematic transition at this central focal point, from the negative emphasis of the self-imposed curse to the blessing of the experience to come in being among those who were to ascend to Jerusalem. This curse-blessing transition also follows a *qīnāh* pattern. The self-imposed curse comes in two bicola, while the blessing to come with the ascent to Jerusalem comes in only one.

CONCLUSION

Psalm 137 records a lament uttered by the exiles from Judah during their Babylonian captivity, and it describes the setting in which they uttered it. As such, one would expect to find lament or *qīnāh* meter present somewhere within it. This examination of its meter and strophic structure has attempted to provide evidence which supports the conclusion that *qīnāh* meter and *qīnāh* patterns are present within this poem. These manifestations of *qīnāh* meter and *qīnāh* patterning occur on several different levels.

On the lowest level that of poetic units, *qīnāh* meter has been identified in five different bicola of the poem. All three of the bicola in the central strophe (III) were written in this meter (9:5, 9:5, 9:5). In addition, the last bicolon of Strophe II and the first bicolon of Strophe IV were written in a similar meter, also *qīnāh* in type (7:5, 8:6). Thus we have found a series of five consecutive bicola at the center of this poem that were written in *qīnāh* meter. The *qīnāh* bicola present in Strophes II and IV can be considered as serving as a framing device which focuses attention upon the central strophe between them, which in turn was written in *qīnāh* meter throughout.

The second level on which *qīnāh* patterning may be detected as operating in this poem is on the level in which two individual poetic units are combined, the couplet. In looking for *qīnāh* patterning in such combinations, one should look for a combination in which the longer element appears first and that is then followed by a shorter unit. The longer poetic unit available is the tricolon and the shorter unit is the bicolon. *Qīnāh* couplets occur at two points here, in Strophe I at the beginning of the poem and in Strophe V at the conclusion to the poem. Previous studies of this psalm have emphasized the balancing nature of these two strophes. To this should be added the observation that these two balancing strophes contain balancing poetic patterns, that of *qīnāh* couplets. Thus they both manifest the *qīnāh* pattern on the next poetic level above the bicolon. These two strophes contain, incidentally, the only tricola found in the poem.

The third level on which the *qînāh* pattern may operate in this poem is on the level of a more extended number of poetic units, three in this case as compared with two in the previous case. The central strophe of the poem (III) is composed of three bicola. Thematically speaking these divide into two groups: the first two relate potential future curses while the last one relates a future blessing.

The fourth level of *qînāh* patterning present comes from a comparison between balancing strophes. The formal balance between Strophe I and Strophe V is based on the fact that they both consist of *qînāh* couplets. The formal balance between Strophe II and Strophe IV, on the other hand, is derived from the fact that each strophe contributes its share to the overall pattern. With v. 4 transposed to the end of Strophe II it has come to consist of a triplet of bicola, while Strophe IV is composed of a couplet of bicola. Thus the 3:2 pattern appears again when these two balancing strophes are compared and connected with each other. In the *qînāh* couplet, the 3:2 pattern manifests itself on the basis of the number of cola; 3 from the tricolon plus 2 from the bicolon. The same pattern operates in the comparison of Strophe II with Strophe IV, but it is based instead upon the number of bicola, not cola.

The fifth and final level on which the *qînāh* pattern operates in this poem derives from a consideration of the overall pattern of its five strophes and the thematic nature of their contents. Is it just an accident that this very evenly balanced poem just happened to be written in precisely five strophes? When one compares the contents of those five strophes with each other, it appears that their arrangement is more by design than accident. From such an examination it is evident that the first three strophes deal with God's people, the exiles from Judah, and their current fate at the time at the time the poem was composed. The last two strophes, on the other hand, deal with the enemies of God's people—the Edomites in the first case and the Babylonians in the second. Once again the 3:2 pattern is evident. In this case the people of God receive the larger share of attention involved in this pattern. Their enemies who had afflicted them so grievously, however, were yet to receive their justly deserved punishment, and this punishment is described in the balance of the poem. When those judgments would come they were to produce conditions for which their enemies would lament and mourn in their own turn.

As a conclusion to this study on lament meter and patterns derived from it in Psalm 137, the five observed levels on which these patterns operate may be outlined in the following chart:

Fig. 1: *Qīnāh* Patterns in Psalm 137

	Level 1 <i>Qīnāh</i> Bicola	Level 2 <i>Qīnāh</i> Couplet	Level 3 <i>Qīnāh</i> Strophe	Level 4 <i>Qīnāh</i> Strophic Pair	Level 5 <i>Qīnāh</i> Strophic Group
Strophe I (Vv. 1–2)		tricolon + bicolon			Judah ¹
Strophe II (Vv. 3–4)	last bicolon 7:5			triplet of bicola	Judah ²
Strophe III (Vv. 5–6)	9:5 3 bicola: 9:5 9:5		2 bicola of <u>curses</u> 1 bicolon of blessing		Judah ³
Strophe IV (V. 7)	1st bicolon 8:6			couplet of bicola	Enemy ¹ : Edom
Strophe V (Vv. 8–9)		tricolon + bicola			Enemy ² : Babylon

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