

THE STRUCTURE OF PSALM 119: PART II

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This paper is the continuation and completion of an earlier presentation on the structure of Psalm 119. The first part dealt mainly with the acrostic pattern of the poem as a whole, and the number and distribution of key-words in it (Freedman, forthcoming¹). This part will deal with questions of quantity and meter in this poem, along with other related matters.

Before turning to these, however, I wish to consider two textual problems not treated in the former paper that may have some bearing on the metrical analysis below, since they are sufficiently problematic to warrant possible emendation of MT. In both cases we have alternate readings in the 11Q Psalm Scroll (11QPs^a) and the LXX whose evidence, while not identical in either case, tends to support a reading that may well be more original and superior to that in MT.

1) In v 49, MT reads *zēkōr dābār*, while 11QPs^a has *zkwrh dbrykh* and LXX has *mnēsthēti ton logon sou*, reflecting a Hebrew *Vorlage*: *zēkōr dēbārekā*. It seems likely that LXX preserves the original reading of the key-word *dābār*, that is, the singular noun with the second m. s. suffix; MT apparently has lost the suffix, while 11QPs^a modified the singular noun to a plural. LXX and 11QPs^a agree in representing the pronominal suffix omitted in MT. In the whole poem, this is the only instance in which the key-word *dābār* lacks the suffix in MT. The argument is not decisive, and this may be a deliberate exception to the pattern, but the preponderance of the evidence points to the reading of LXX and 11QPs^a.

1. Elucidation of the poem's structure, as well as references to other works, may be found there.

2) In v 128, MT has an extremely awkward reading: *al-kēn kol piqqūdē kōl yiššartī*. The repetition of the word *kōl* is difficult to explain or justify. At this point, 11QPs^a offers a better text, *l kn pqwdy kwl yšrty*, but it still lacks coherence. LXX has the best reading of all: *dia toúto pros pasas tas entolas sou katōrthoumēn*, reflecting a Hebrew Vorlage of *al-kēn lēkol-piqqūdēkā yiššartī*. Certainly, this is the most understandable text, and in all likelihood the second *kōl* of MT was originally the second m. s. suffix. Whether or not we need to restore the preposition *lē* before *kol-piqqūdēkā* is moot in the light of frequent ellipsis in Hebrew poetry.

Nevertheless, in order to avoid even the appearance of adjusting the text to fit metrical theories or presumed requirements, we will follow MT throughout the following treatment of the text, and restrict ourselves to recording possible alternate syllable-counts in cases like the two just cited. Any differences will be slight, almost invisible in the framework of the whole poem, and well within any margin of error or variation that we must allow in dealing with Hebrew poetry generally and with such a lengthy poem in particular.

Regarding the metrical structure of the poem, we begin with a quotation from the Church father and historian Eusebius of Caesarea, who writes in the *Praeparatio Evangelica*, xi.5.5:

There would also be found among them poems in metre, like the great song of Moses and David's 118th Psalm, composed in what the Greeks call heroic metre. At least it is said (*phasi goun*) that these are hexameters, consisting of sixteen syllables; also their other compositions in verse are said to consist of trimeter and tetrameter lines according to the sound of their own language.

So far as I am aware, this is the only statement from antiquity about biblical Hebrew poetry in which the number of syllables in a Hebrew verse or line is specified: sixteen for the lines in the Song of Moses (Deut 32:1-43) and the Great Psalm (Psalm 119 in MT, 118 in LXX). The primary purpose of the present inquiry is to test the statement by Eusebius and determine whether or not the lines of Psalm 119 have sixteen syllables each, as Eusebius states (I intend to examine this feature of Deuteronomy 32 elsewhere). Since even a cursory examination of the MT shows that the statement cannot be precisely true without extensive emendation, is there yet any sense in which the statement might be true? If there is some significant correspondence between the statement in Eusebius' work and the text that has come down to us (or as preserved in 11QPs^a or reflected in LXX), then Eusebius becomes an important witness to a long-standing tradition concerning Hebrew poetry, and to the

fact that the Hebrews did count syllables, after all, like poets in the western Indo-European tradition, and not just accented syllables. It is understood that Eusebius' statement may only reflect circumstances in his own day (4th century C.E.). Because the pronunciation of biblical Hebrew at that time was not the same as in the first millennium B.C.E., Eusebius' observation may not reflect accurately the metrical particulars at the time of composition or first liturgical usage.

Whether or not Eusebius was aware of possible changes in the pronunciation of biblical Hebrew during the post-biblical centuries, he intended his remarks to apply to the time of composition and first usage. We will test the hypothesis by restoring and reconstructing biblical Hebrew of the classical period, specifically for the Second Temple (about the 5th century B.C.E.) when Ps 119 may have been composed and used. Although we rely upon MT, its text and vocalization, for the pronunciation of biblical Hebrew (and therefore for the syllable count), we are reasonably sure that MT incorporates certain subsequent alterations and modifications in pronunciation that affect the counting of syllables. The differences are for the most part rather slight, but if we are to be as accurate as possible and maintain control over the numbers, then this procedure can hardly be avoided. Thus, it is commonly agreed among scholars that such phenomena as *patah-furtive* and helping vowels associated with laryngeals (e.g., *ya'āleh* for an older *ya'leh*) are secondary and were introduced long after the biblical period, and therefore they should not be retained when reconstructing Classical Hebrew. Similarly, it is recognized that two-syllable segholate formations, such as *melek* or *šā'ar*, were originally monosyllabic (*malk* and *šār*) and should be treated as one syllable.² In addition to the tendency in MT to add syllables, there are contrary tendencies to contract words and syllables, and some of these practices also seem to be later than the classical period. Thus, the reduction of short vowels to vocal *shewa* does not mean that they should then be left out of the count, as though there were no difference between vocal and silent *shewa* (as some modern scholars seem to think). The question of

2. Where MT lengthens or extends the pronunciation of a word, it is less likely to reflect actual usage in antiquity, and in most such cases we ignore the datum. The same is true of the resolution of diphthongs into two-syllable combinations (e.g., *mayim* for an older *maym*, or *mawet* derived from diphthongal *mawt*). The traditional explanation is that such expansions and extensions were designed by the Massoretes (or the Rabbis behind them) to ensure the proper Hebrew pronunciation of these words, which was in danger of being contaminated by the prevailing Aramaic pronunciation of the general population. Regardless of the reasoning, these are demonstrably secondary developments in Massoretic Hebrew.

vowel-length, and therefore syllable-length, is very difficult, and it does not seem possible or feasible to deal adequately with this phenomenon. I have made some strenuous attempts at accommodating differences in length of syllables, but there remains considerable uncertainty about many of the syllables. Although I am certain that the Hebrew did make distinctions between long and short syllables (particularly significant for poetry), at this stage of the inquiry we will be content merely to count syllables without regard to syllable length. For the present, we will simply assume that in large units and over whole poems, the long and short (with the very long and very short) vowels and syllables balance out, so that the numbers will correspond on the two sides of any equation. In the end, both the claims and the tests will be limited to the numbers. While Eusebius and others (like Josephus, Origen, and Jerome) made extensive use of analogies with Greek poetry especially, in the end Eusebius settled for a number: sixteen syllables for the lines or verses of Hebrew poetry as exemplified in the Song of Moses and the Great Psalm. We will settle for the same rather crude but specific number: sixteen syllables per line.

I will concede at once that absolute precision is impossible under any circumstances, so I wish to allow for a certain range of possibility in the syllable-counts. The target will lie somewhere between the boundaries established by the lowest and highest counts for lines, stanzas, and whole poems. We can thus accommodate our own uncertainty in various instances as to the exact pronunciation (and therefore the number of syllables) and also allow for flexibility on the part of the poet and even general usage among poets of that time. Concerning the latter, it is well known that English language poets (and presumably this is true of other language groups) exercise considerable flexibility and freedom in making words fit the meter of their poems. Words are often shortened or lengthened, syllables are eliminated or added, so that the lines conform to the underlying pattern of the poetry. Although we will not exercise that freedom at all in dealing with Hebrew poetry, we can assume that it existed, and that in practice the poets achieved greater conformity to their basic patterns than we can ever reproduce. In other words, what we have to regard as departure or deviation from the norms may have been thought of as a small measure of poetic license and well within the general guidelines for poets of that age.

While we will take the words as we find them, we will also allow for different possible vocalizations or pronunciations. The second *m. s.* pronominal suffix is all but ubiquitous in the poem, occurring about 225 times in a poem of 176 lines or verses. In MT this suffix is always written with a

simple final *kap*, while in 11QPs^a it is always written with a final *heh* (קֹה). Curiously, in almost every case, MT vocalizes the final *kap* as though it were written קֹה, i.e., *-kā* rather than *-āk* or *-ēk* (which occurs twice).³ The Massoretes usually followed the consonantal spelling tradition preserved in the great medieval codices (e.g., Aleppo & Leningrad) and vocalized the text in most cases in conformity with the indications and implications of the standard biblical text. Exceptionally, in the case of the second m. s. pronominal suffix (and a few other cases, e.g., second m. s. verbal forms, and third f. s. pronominal forms) they followed another tradition, which may be reflected in the different spelling practices of the Qumran community. The Massoretes apparently believed that the longer pronunciation of the second m. s. suffixes had greater claim to validity than the shorter form reflected in the preferred spelling. At the same time, they clearly recognized that the shorter spelling was acceptable in certain circumstances in biblical Hebrew (e.g., in pausal position).⁴ Our problem is how to determine which vocalization the poet himself used and what he intended when he composed the poem. The short form has been generalized through the consonantal spelling of the manuscripts, while the Massoretes have preserved the longer form in their vocalization of the text. The Massoretic vocalization is rooted in oral tradition and transmission, and if the longer form is more original, then MT in its vocalization may well reflect the actual usage of the poet. The poet himself may well have used both forms under different circumstances, it now being impossible to tell what determined the selection of either in any given locus. We now have inscriptional evidence from the First Temple period showing that both long and short forms were in use concurrently. Therefore, we will give both counts, the long and the short in the case of all of these ambiguous forms, providing thereby a minimum and a maximum count for the poem, line by line and as a whole. We can then presume that the actual accurate count for the lines and the poem lies somewhere between the lower and the higher numbers.

The vocalization of the second m. s. form of the perfect verb is similarly problematic. All seven verbs in the poem with the second m. s. form of the perfect are vocalized with the ending *-tā*, but only one is spelled out in the

3. These two forms are both suffixed to the same preposition: *lāk* (vv 11 and 62; cf. *lēkā* in v 94).

4. See the pausal form *lāk* in Ps 119:11, 62 (cf. *lēkā* in v 94). The distinction in MT seems artificial, and I do not think that the short form was actually limited to the pausal position. I believe that it was more widespread, but less common than the long form.

text with the final *heh* (*swyth*, v 4). The other six are spelled defectively, with nothing after the final *taw*. While the Massoretes employed a uniform vocalization, the actual spelling in MT (here and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible) shows that there were two different forms of the verb, one spelled תת- and pronounced *-tā*, the other spelled ת- and presumably pronounced *-t* (with no final vowel). The actual pronunciation reflected, and was reflected in, the spelling. When the word is spelled in full, there is no question about the vocalization or the corresponding syllable-count. But when the form is mixed with the short spelling and the long vocalization (as in the six other cases in MT of Psalm 119), then we cannot decide the matter and will give both counts, the low and the high.

Finally, we must consider two other classes of variation in counting syllables. In these instances MT presents contractions of normal forms, a reduced count where originally there was an additional syllable in a word or combination with a preposition. We cannot be certain when such contractions took place in the history of the language, and so we include both counts in our reckoning. Most instances occur when prepositions are attached to following nouns, whether verbal (e.g., *lē* + infinitive construct) or substantival. Thus in the case of *lišmōr*, MT has two syllables, whereas originally there were probably three syllables: *lē* + the two-syllable infinitive of the regular verb. Similarly in a phrase like *kid(ē)bar*, scholars used to speak of half-open syllables and debated whether the *shewa* should be pronounced or not. Originally, we may assume that there were three syllables in such a combination, but MT probably reflects a contraction to two syllables (cf. *bid(ē)rākāyw* in v 3, which should be counted as having had originally four syllables but in MT seems to have three). One may say in such instances that there is a minimum and a maximum count: three or at most four syllables. The problem is whether such contractions took place in biblical times, and if they did, when. Because one can not give a definitive answer, it is better to retain the ambiguity and include such cases in both of our counts. It may well be that the poets of biblical antiquity could and did exercise some freedom on their own in using contractions, while the uncontracted forms remained in use in another sector of the Hebrew-speaking population (e.g., such forms as "ne'er" and "e'en" in English poetry did not displace the normal uncontracted forms "never" and "even"). We have counted 31 instances of such contractions in Psalm 119, and all are included in our double-counting system.

In the second of the two final classes of variation mentioned above, there is one clear example in v 41 of an initial conjunctive *wē* attached to a word with the *shewa* merged into the following vowel, resulting in the loss of a

syllable: *wībōʿūni* (four syllables). Originally there was an additional syllable in this complex, but because it is difficult to tell whether the contraction took place in biblical times, we include both counts, short and long. In other words, when MT introduces a contraction in the text, it may reflect an authentic development in the language, or the usage of the poet, and we wish to recognize that possibility.

As soon as we begin to test the statement from Eusebius about sixteen-syllable lines in this Great Psalm, we run into a problem. The first line barely passes:

ʿašrê tēmîmê-dārek hahōlēkîm bētōrat yahweh

Syllable count: $2 + 3 + 1/2 = 6/7$
 $4 + 3 + 2 = 9$

If we follow MT exactly, we have a total of 16, but it is not likely that the word *dārek* was so pronounced in biblical times; the evidence points strongly to a monosyllable **dark*. Nevertheless, the total of 15 (or 16) is close to the standard and one can proceed to the next line or verse:

ʿašrê nōšērê ʿēdōtāyw bēkol-lēb yidrēšūhū

Syllable count: $2 + 3 + 3 = 8$
 $2 + 1 + 4 = 7$

Here the total of 15 is unambiguous, again close but not exactly the prescribed 16. By the third verse, it is unmistakably clear that there is a problem in assessing the Eusebian statement about this poem:

ʿap lōʿ-pāʿāhū ʿawlā bidērākāyw hālākū

Syllable count: $1 + 1 + 3 + 2 = 7$
 $3/4 + 3 = 6/7$

Here the total of 13/14 is substantially less than the standard of 16 specified by Eusebius. As we have seen, not one of these lines is clearly or certainly sixteen syllables long, and one of them is distinctively shorter. When we examine the remaining lines in the poem, the same pattern of non-conformity to a specific pattern will hold. Not all of the lines will be shorter than the

norm. Some will be longer, some shorter, and some will be exactly sixteen syllables long.

The initial impression is that the distribution is random, and one can construct a bell-shaped curve to represent the actual syllable-counts per line and their frequencies. In any case, while there may be some difference of opinion among scholars as to the exact count in each case, regardless of the system used, the result will be in conflict with Eusebius' statement taken at face value. The fact is that the lines of the poem are not each sixteen syllables long. We cannot even say that the great bulk of the lines are sixteen syllables long, nor that that is the predominant number in counting the syllables of the lines of the poem. In an English sonnet, each line is supposed to be ten syllables long. Not all of them may be, for a variety of reasons, but the great majority will be, and the remainder will rarely differ from the norm by more than one syllable. That is not the case with this psalm, or with poems generally in the Bible that have a similar structure. Furthermore, in the case of this poem (and Lamentations 3), each line is carefully demarked and delimited by the use of the alphabetic acrostic feature, so there is no question as to line length and boundaries. While individual lines may be defective or excessive, owing to scribal mistransmission, the poem as a whole is substantially intact. Variations in line length cannot be regarded as a distortion or a disfigurement of the original metrically perfect poem. Given that the number and length of the lines are predetermined, there can be no challenge to the initial conclusion that the lines are not each sixteen syllables long, as Eusebius seems to suggest. The only way a result could be achieved to conform to the statement in Eusebius would be by extensive emendations of the text, by regarding many of the lines as defective (too short) or excessive (too long), and by adding and subtracting words and phrases to achieve the kind of uniformity that may be implied in the statement.

Unless we are disposed (as G. B. Gray was [1972: pp. 12-13]) to dismiss the statement as meaningless or irrelevant, we must interpret it in a different fashion. One can also understand Eusebius to mean that the number of syllables is a norm or average for the poem as a whole, calculated by dividing the total number of syllables in the entire poem by the number of lines (176). We contend that the poet achieved this result by consciously adopting and consistently applying a system of compensation, whereby shorter lines were balanced by longer lines, so that the correct total number, and thereby the average, were reached in this manner. We have already seen this process at work in the much more complicated task of counting and distributing key-words throughout the poem, so it is quite reasonable and in fact easier to

apply the same principles and procedures in the case of syllable-counting. The key number, therefore, is not to have sixteen syllables for each line, but 16×176 (lines) = 2,816 syllables for the poem as a whole.

We now summarize the findings of such an analysis. There are 263 instances in Psalm 119 (MT) in which there is sufficient ambiguity to justify a short count and a long count. These may be categorized as follows:

1.	The pronomial suffix of the second m. s. person:	225
2.	The pronomial suffix of perfect verbs:	6
3.	Prepositions attached to nouns:	31
4.	The conjunction <i>wē</i> attached to verb:	1
	Total:	<u>263</u>

If one takes these cases into consideration in counting all of the syllables in the poem, the result is the following range in the total count: long count 2,902; short count 2,639.

The correct syllable count for the poem as a whole is somewhere between the low and high numbers just given. In the same way one can determine a range for the average number of syllables per line in the poem. Thus, in adopting the low count, one is very close to an average number of fifteen syllables per line (the total would be 2,640 for the poem, whereas our lowest possible count is 2,639). The average for the high count is close to sixteen and a half syllables. If one takes into account the evidence from other poems in the Bible, especially those with an alphabetic acrostic structure (where the line count and boundaries are indisputable) or with the same kind of structure without the alphabetic device, the results are very similar: a spread from fifteen to seventeen syllables for the average line or bicolon. And where the spread is smaller than in the present instance (where the continual recurrence of the second m. s. pronominal suffix is a special feature of the psalm), the average tends to be even closer to the pivotal number sixteen. In this way we return to the statement by Eusebius with which the discussion began. If his statement is interpreted to mean that the "average line" of Hebrew poetry, as seen in the Great Psalm (119), consisted of sixteen syllables, then the statement can be confirmed, for within a certain range, the number sixteen is certainly represented. If the number sixteen is assigned as the average line length for this poem, there would be a total of 2,816 syllables, which is well

within the range determined by other means. There is reason to believe that Eusebius was citing an authentic tradition about biblical Hebrew poetry when he mentioned this number, and that the ancient poet was governed or at least guided by a numerical consideration in the composition of this work. Furthermore, the number applies to many, many more poems than Eusebius listed, and may be regarded as the standard for much of biblical poetry: the typical bicolon in books such as Psalms, Proverbs, and Job has an average line length of sixteen syllables, and there are many other poems throughout the Bible that share the same general format.

In Psalm 119, the extensive use of the second m. s. pronominal suffix has precluded the possibility of exactitude in making this numerical determination, but given the propensity and predilection for precision, especially in symmetrical balancing, one may plausibly infer that the actual syllable count for the poem when composed was very close to the norm established above: 2816. Allowing for the proper exploitation of the options available to the poet, we can adjust the raw numbers derived from the text to a presumed standard or pattern adopted by the poet. There are different ways to arrive at a compromise figure, and while it may not be possible to achieve a mechanically perfect symmetry through these calculations, it comes very close without the use of surgery or force, and without violating the rules or usages of the language.⁵

Before we turn to the tables, charts, and numbers specifically, we will consider one or two possible changes in the text of MT, modest by most standards, but nonetheless emendations of the received text. We are concerned here only with difficulties in the text as they affect the syllable-counts and, in particular, the presence or absence of the almost ubiquitous second m. s.

5. In the discussion that follows, we will make an arbitrary choice, but one with a certain rational justification in the light of the discussion above: we will assume that the long form of the second m. s. suffix was used in all instances of our eight key-words, and in bound constructions involving a key-word in the construct state, with the suffix being attached to the adjoining absolute noun. We will regard all other instances of this suffix (whether attached to verbs, nouns, or prepositions) as short. In addition we will regard as long all cases of the second m. s. perfect verb, in accordance with the single example of the fully written form in v 4 (*swyth*; cf. *swyt*, v 138). Finally, we will read the conjunction *wé* at the beginning of v 41 as a separate syllable, which it almost certainly was at the time of composition or first utterance. We do not claim that this reconstruction reflects the exact set of conditions at the time of composition. All that we claim is that it is a reasonable representation of the original poem with a vocalization and syllable-count consistent with what we know of the language and its transmission in the biblical period and the early post-biblical era, reflecting also a plausible interpretation of the "16-syllable" tradition recorded by Eusebius.

pronominal suffix. Three cases were mentioned earlier and the textual evidence cited. We now review them briefly:

1) Three words in v 48 almost precisely duplicate three words in v 47. Many scholars regard this as a good example of vertical dittography, especially as we have good evidence (from the Qumran Psalms Scroll) that the poem was written stichometrically at an early stage in its transmission.

47) ...*bēmīšwōtēkā ʾāšer ʾāhābtī*

48) ...*ʾel-mīšwōtēkā ʾāšer ʾāhābtī...*

The three repeated words in v 48 make it excessively long. They hardly correspond to the context of the verse, whereas they fit quite properly in v 47. If each verse began with a new line, as shown in the printed versions (or the Psalms Scroll), then the possibility of error would be increased, e.g.,

47) ואשתעשע במצותיך אשר אהבתי

48) ואשא כפי אל מצותיך אשר אהבתי

There is unfortunately no textual or versional evidence to support the deletion of the three duplicated words in v 48, which means that the error, if it is one, occurred very early in the transmission of the text. Much hinges on this point, because the first duplicated word, *mīšwōtēkā*, is one of the eight key-words in the poem. The exact counting and arrangement of these words in relation to each other (they occur in pairs, each having a mate) and to the whole complex structure of the poem, depend to some extent on whether the word here, *mšwtyk*, is part the original poem or not. As already noted in the first part of this study (Freedman, forthcoming), without this second *mšwtyk* (v 48, accidentally copied from v 47), the total for the eight key-words of the poem as a whole would be 176, the expected symmetrical number (i.e., one key-word per line in the 176-line poem). This perfect symmetry is disturbed by its presence in v 48. But the case is not that simple, for there are other candidates for dittography, one or two of which make as good sense as this one. Furthermore, the poem is not only not precisely symmetrical in other respects (e.g., the eight key-words do not each occur 22 times, which might be expected in a symmetrical structure), but there seems to be a pattern of distortion, reflected in a series of deviations from the established norms throughout the poem. In view of the numerous instances in which the poet deliberately distorts and deviates from an otherwise symmetrical structure, in which key-words are doubled up or omitted in the different stanzas (and it

would take an almost unlimited amount of emending and restructuring to cure all of these deviations), it becomes more reasonable to suppose that this poet has adopted an asymmetrical pattern, and spread the ensuing distortions throughout the subdivisions of the poem. Therefore, while it is likely that some dittography has occurred, I would be inclined to limit it to the two-word clause, *ʾāšer ʾāhabti*, which should be excluded from v 48 as a scribal error, and retain *mišwōtēkā* in the same line, even if the resulting sentence makes very awkward Hebrew, and any attempt at adequate translation remains extremely difficult. "And I will raise my palms to your commandments..." hardly commends itself. Simply reading *ʾēlēkā* for *ʾel-mišwōtēkā* would make better sense: "And I will raise my palms to you" (cf. Lam 3:41, where the same idiom is used and the object of raising the palms is *ʾel baššāmāyim*). Our conclusion is that while MT is certainly suspect, frequently emended by scholars, it may well reflect the original or at least an earlier stage of text; for statistical purposes and our calculations, we will retain the MT while indicating what difference the alternate reading might make in the numbers, tables, and charts.

2) In v 49, MT reads *dābār*, while the Psalms Scroll has *dbrykh* (for *dēbārēkā*, "your words") and LXX has *ton logon sou* (= *dēbārēkā*, "your word"). The latter two texts attest to the presence of the second m. s. suffix (for "Yahweh" as everywhere else in the poem), while MT omits the suffix. It is clear from the context, and the poem generally, that *dābār* here must refer to "the word of Yahweh," as elsewhere in the poem, and that *dābār* is one of the eight key-words in the poem repeated throughout the stanzas. Thus, there can be little doubt about the intent of the author: the meaning or sense does not require the actual presence of the pronominal suffix, and that it is implied from the context is obvious. All in all, it looks as though MT has the more difficult and hence the more original reading, while both LXX and 11QPs^a represent expansions designed to spell out the meaning of the term more exactly. LXX retains the singular noun, but adds the suffix, while 11QPs^a makes the noun plural in addition to adding the suffix. The order of priority would seem to be the order of expansion: MT has the basic text, on which both LXX and 11QPs^a are based, and which each adapted as generally correct interpretations of MT (certainly in the case of the pronominal suffix, less likely in the case of the plural noun). This is the only case of the use of *dābār* without the pronominal suffix in the category of key-words (i.e., those associated with and assigned to Yahweh), and therefore quite exceptional. That does not mean, however, that it is wrong, the result of scribal error. On the contrary, our poet is very much interested in exceptions and creates a

number of them. The readings in LXX and 11QPs^a can also be explained in terms of a tendency to make all forms conform to the established pattern.

3) In v 128, MT has a reading so difficult that scribal error is the likely cause. A different text is evident in each of the readings found in LXX and 11QPs^a:

MT: *kol-piqqûdê kôl*

LXX: *kol-piqqûdêkâ* (*pasas tas entolas sou*)

11QPs^a: *piqqûdê kôl* (*pqwdy kwl*)

MT makes little sense with the repetition of *kl* before and after the noun *pqwdy*. The simplest emendation is to follow the evidence of LXX and delete the *lamed* at the end of the second *kl*, reading *kol-piqqûdêkâ*. The Psalms Scroll has another reading, grammatically sound, but difficult to understand: "the visitations of all." In this instance, MT looks like a conflation of the two readings in LXX and 11QPs^a, an indication of its secondary and derivative status. LXX seems to reflect the more original reading, while 11QPs^a has a more difficult and perhaps independent reading.

While we have accepted or recommended changes from MT in two of the three cases cited, we will follow MT when making numerical calculations and when constructing the charts and tables to follow, and only in the discussion or explanation of these charts will we deal with the minor differences that changes in the text would entail. While it is important to establish as precise and accurate and original a text as possible (recognizing that MT has no inherent or a priori claim to such a status), we need to avoid any indication or even appearance of altering the data in order to fit some scheme or preconceived structure that we claim to find in the poem. The changes we have considered affect directly certain of the key-words basic to the structure of the whole, although many others could also warrant attention. Our purpose is to show that the surviving text in its present form exhibits very strongly the features to which we have called attention.

We now wish to chart the frequency and distribution of second m. s. suffixed forms in the poem, and add the other variable forms to reach the desired adjustment or compromise between maximum and minimum syllable-counts in the Psalm.

Eight Key-Words
(with and without second m.s. suffix)

Stanza	Bound Expression						Totals
	with -k	without -k	with -k	without -k	with -k	without-k	
I-XI							
אמרה	8	0	0	0	8	0	8
דבר	10 ⁶	1	0	0	10	1	11
חקים	14	0	0	0	14	0	14
מצות	12	0	0	0	12	0	12
משפט	6	1	3	0	9	1	10
עדות	8	1	1	0	9	1	10
פקודים	10	0	0	0	10	0	10
תורה	11	0	1	1	12	1	13
Subtotals	79	3	5	1	84	4	88
XII-XXII							
אמרה	10	0	1	0	11	0	11
דבר	11	0	0	0	11	0	11
חקים	8	0	0	0	8	0	8
מצות	9	0	0	1	9	1	10
משפט	8	2	3	0	11	2	13
עדות	13	0	0	0	13	0	13
פקודים	10 ⁷	0	0	1	10	1	11
תורה	12	0	0	0	12	0	12
Subtotals	81	2	4	2	85	4	89
Totals	160	5	9	3	169	8	177

We begin with the minimum count and add the instances of $-k\bar{a}$ as spelled out in the table, and then those of $-t\bar{a}$, and finally the single case of $w\bar{e}$ (v 41), to arrive at the following totals:

6. If we adopt the proposed emendation in v 49 (*dbrk* for *dbr*), then the chart would be 11 0 0 0 11 0 11.

7. If we adopt the proposed emendation in v 128 (*pqwdyk* for *pqwdy kl*), then the numbers would be 11 0 0 0 11 0 11.

	Min. Count	- <i>kā</i>	- <i>tā</i>	- <i>wě</i>	
I-XI	1308	84	2	1 =	1395
XII-XXII	1331	85	4	0 =	1420
Totals	2639	169	6	1 =	2815

If we were to adopt the proposed emendations, the numbers would come out as follows:

	Min. Count	- <i>kā</i>	- <i>tā</i>	- <i>wě</i>	
I-XI	1309	85	2	1 =	1397
XII-XXII	1330	86	4	0 =	1420
Totals	2639	171	6	1 =	2817

We will provide charts and tables for all three syllable-counting systems: minimum and maximum, and then the calculated compromise described above, or target plan. Comments will be devoted mainly to the last of the three. Reasonable controls are present for the stanzas and lines or verses, as their boundaries are rigidly determined by the alphabetic scheme. As the charts show, the units, whether lines or stanzas, vary widely in length from each other and from the norm or average. The norm for the stanzas is 128 syllables (8 lines X 16 syllables = 128), but as it happens, we have only one stanza (VII in the third column; there are none in the other columns) that comes out exactly at that number (Table A). Nevertheless, there is a general concentration in the range between 125 and 131 (roughly 2.5% variation), with half of the stanzas (11 in all) within this rather narrow range (with the median between 127 and 128). Put another way, the number below 127 (nine) is equal to the number above 128 (nine), leaving four clustered around the midpoint. The remainder are distributed between 112 at the short end and 146 on the high side, with six between 112 and 122, and five between 134 and 146. The distribution is generally symmetrical (like a bell-shaped curve; Table B). What is clear is that there is no way to make the stanzas equal in length or even approximately so without drastic and unjustified surgery. At the same time, the average and median show that the distribution is not haphazard, and that there is a basic recognition of the norm of 16 syllables per line, as well as 128 syllables per stanza. The link between a presumed norm and the widely varying lengths of both lines and stanzas can only be some purposeful and calculated principle and process of compensation: it seems clear that longer stanzas are balanced against shorter ones, with a number in the middle

to establish the norm. The same principle is applicable to individual lines as well, and the whole composition reflects the clear and profound intent of the poet.

We can be quite certain in almost all cases where the lines begin and end, because they are marked in every instance by an alphabetic token (as is true of Lamentations 3). Therefore, except in cases of scribal error, one can be confident about the length of the individual lines as well. In a poem of this length, and with such structural features, there is a high probability that most of the lines are intact and come to us as they came from the mouth or hand of the composer. Once again, it is clear that the lines reflect the same patterns already observed in regard to the stanzas: wide variation in the length of individual lines, but clustering symmetrically around the norm and median (16 syllables for the bicolon or line), with the principle of compensation applied to produce a symmetrical structure. The approach, method, and procedure are very similar to what we have already observed with respect to the eight key-words: a simple structural scheme in which individual items are arranged in a variety of ways with subtle modifications, comparable to musical compositions consisting of a simple theme and then a series of increasingly subtle and complicated variations, both concealing and revealing the original theme and the endless possibilities in developing and expanding it, ultimately revealing a very complex and sophisticated mind at work.

The chart of line-length and distribution shows the following (Table C): Of the 176 lines, 34 have exactly sixteen syllables, while an additional 70 are within one syllable of sixteen (39 have 15 and 31 have 17). Thus we have a total of 104 lines within a range of one syllable of the norm, and that represents nearly 60% of the total. If we extend our range to two syllables from the norm, we add another 38 lines (16 have 14 syllables, while 22 have 18 syllables), making a total of 142 lines out of 176, or well over 80% of the total. If one assumes the cluster in the range of 15 to 17 syllables as the median, then there are the same number of lines below fifteen and above seventeen (36 lines in the range from 12 to 14, and 36 lines in the range from 18 to 23). The wide range from 12 to 23 syllables (we may suspect that the lines over twenty syllables may have been expanded unintentionally and some scribal errors may be involved, as already noted) shows that although the poet felt free to wander far afield from his norm in composing individual lines, he nevertheless was able to integrate everything into the prevailing pattern. It is possible that some of the shorter lines are defective and some of the longer lines are overloaded, but the phenomenon at both extremes is far too extensive to be regarded as a kind of double contamination. The principle of

compensation, on the other hand, will account for both longer and shorter lines quite adequately, and in fact it is precisely the presence of both that points away from accidental error to deliberate planning. Since the same phenomenon in different guises turns up repeatedly in this poem, there is every reason to believe that the same principle and method are at work when it comes to metrical considerations.

When it comes to individual cola or half-lines, we do not have the same rigorous guideposts or markers provided by the letters of the alphabet for the lines (bicola) and stanzas, and certainty in determining where the pause or division occurs in each line can hardly be achieved in all cases. In most instances, however, the presence of the *athnach* (pause) and the grammatical and syntactic structure of the lines make the division highly likely. In the remaining examples, and especially where the *athnach* is not present, we have made what seems to be the most reasonable division (acknowledging in some instances more than one possible division and, in a few cases, no clear division at all). We might infer that run-on lines do exist in Hebrew poetry, and that therefore a metrical division might not conform to a grammatical or syntactic division, as commonly in English poetry. Normally, however, as is clearly the case with full lines, there is a noticeable grammatical break at the end of the metrical unit. Allowing for some slight uncertainty about where half-lines or cola begin and end, one can draw reasonable conclusions from the far greater number in which there is little or no doubt. The principal conclusion is the same as that found for bicola and stanzas: there is a wide range of variation in length for half-lines or cola, accompanied by a pronounced clustering around a center-point with a symmetrical balancing of longer and shorter units by compensation.

The apparent norm in this balanced-line poem is eight syllables per colon, one-half of the sixteen-syllable bicolon or verse (as described by Eusebius). Of the 352 cola in the poem, 99 have eight syllables and comprise the largest single group in the entire work, far more verses than for any other single-line length (Table D). In view of the many factors noted above affecting line-length and syllable-counting, if one adds to the central cluster those cola of seven and nine syllables each, there are 68 with seven syllables (per colon) and 66 with nine syllables for a sub-total of 134, resulting in a sum of 233 out of a total of 352, or 66.2% for all those within one syllable of the norm. In other words, almost two-thirds of the total number of half-lines or cola come within one syllable of the norm, reflecting considerable regularity amid all the variety and deviation in individual cases. If one further adds a two-syllable difference at the low and high ends, there are 43 cola of six syllables and 35

of ten syllables. These 78 added to the 233 already accounted for result in a total of 311 or 88.4% of 352. While most of the cola are within what might be called a standard range of variation in metrical poetry, a sizable number are not included, enough to show that very notable deviations from the established pattern were regarded as permissible and belonged to the creative options of the poet. We have cola as short as four syllables and as long as 14 or 15 syllables. This variety raises the question whether grammatical divisions always reflect the metrical intentions of the poet, or whether such lines should be divided in consideration of metrical rather than grammatical or syntactic factors. There is also the question whether in half-lines of such extreme length (14 and 15 syllables) there may be an additional colon in the verse (not uncommon in Hebrew poetry), or whether such lines contain scribal errors (especially dittography). There is often a tension between syntax and meter in poetry generally, and reconciling different analyses may be more a matter of deciding how to place the words on the page, i.e., the appearance of the lines in relation to each other, than any difficulty in the poetry itself.

A provisional judgment is that the poet had certain metrical principles and goals in mind, and these can be defined in terms of the overall length of the work and the average length of the line, along with a clustering or concentration of lines of the same length to form the bulk of the lines in the poem. Along with this central cluster, there will be moderate and even drastic deviations in terms of line length, both longer and shorter, but by and large these will balance off against each other to produce the originally intended and inescapable effect of symmetry. The pattern is the same at all levels (cola, lines, stanzas): clustering around the norm with moderate to extreme deviation at the periphery. No serious effort seems to have been made to achieve strict metrical uniformity at any of these levels; on the contrary, deliberate deviation from an established norm seems to be the norm. The same pattern is repeated: clustering or concentration around the norm, with wide but deliberate deviations, controlled by the pervasive principle of compensation to achieve the goal of balance or symmetry in the overall arrangement. This schema is found repeatedly in Hebrew poetry, and is by no means restricted to artificial alphabetic acrostic poems such as this one, or to late didactic poetry, or to any class or age of poem in the Bible.

We now attempt to interpret Eusebius' statement about the Great Psalm's composition in hexameter as some sort of accentual or stress system in the Hebrew poem. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to deduce from or impose upon Hebrew poetry any sort of regular quantitative metrical structure characteristic of Greek and Latin poetry (i.e., with repeated feet containing the

same sequence of stressed and unstressed, long and short syllables). One can nevertheless speak loosely of a quantitative meter in which lines contain roughly the same number of syllables divided between stressed and unstressed. In this way, we interpret Eusebius to mean that the basic pattern of Psalm 119 contains lines of sixteen syllables, six syllables of which are accented or stressed, with the caesura normally dividing such lines in the middle into half-lines or cola of eight syllables and three accents each.

Having studied the syllable counts, we can now turn to the stress patterns in the poem. To carry out this investigation, we will follow MT as closely as possible, identifying all the accents and including those marked with *metheg*, which at least implies a secondary stress. As is generally known, MT reflects wide variations in the use of accents (the system was intended for chanting and to indicate intonation, but our interest is confined to distinguishing between stressed and unstressed syllables) and a certain lack of consistency. In different contexts, the same words (especially one-syllable particles) may or may not receive an accent, or they may be connected to the next word by a *makkeph* and lose the accent or receive a *metheg* in its place. Generally, content words (nouns and verbs) are accented, but not always, especially when two words are linked by *makkeph*. All in all, the Massoretes exercised considerable freedom in marking accents, no doubt reflecting both the actual practice in chanting the Scriptures in their own day along with a long-standing tradition. It is not difficult to argue that in some cases the accentuation in MT seems arbitrary, and runs contrary to normal practice or even good sense. Overall, however, MT is quite regular and rational, and the differences between what is recorded in MT and what might be regarded as a rational, neutral approach are relatively minor and do not affect general impressions and major tendencies.

The major surprise is that the accentual count, whatever system is used, hardly confirms the statement in Eusebius. Although the syllable counts conform to the tradition recorded by Eusebius, the number and distribution of accents or stresses suggest something at variance with the "hexameters" announced by the Church Father. In this connection we note first of all a marked tendency for the first colon in each line to outweigh or be longer than the second one. Thus, while eight-syllable cola seem to be evenly distributed between A and B positions, longer cola are concentrated in the first position, and shorter cola in the second position. The overall picture can be summarized in the following fashion:

	A (colon)		B (colon)		Total
Stanzas 1-11	737	+	658	=	1395
Stanzas 12-22	742	+	678	=	1420
Totals	1479	+	1336	=	2815

Those are the figures for the target plan or compromise solution. The numbers derived from the short and long counts are comparable:

	SHORT COUNT			LONG COUNT		
	A	B	Total	A	B	Total
Stanzas 1-11	707	+	601 = 1308	762	+	682 = 1444
Stanzas 12-22	710	+	621 = 1331	769	+	689 = 1458
Totals	1417	+	1222 = 2639	1531	+	1371 = 2902

The pattern is the same in both major parts of the poem: the A cola consistently outweigh the B cola, as the numbers show. There is a variation of one syllable per colon throughout the poem. While the difference is not great, it is sufficient to show that it is deliberate. Within the larger numerical symmetry, there is a patterned deviation that lays greater weight on the first colon throughout the poem, confirmed by the number and distribution of the accents. The accompanying tables show that the first cola are more heavily accented than the second cola in the poem, whether one includes the instances of *metheg* in the count or not. If the hexameter pattern were actually applied, one would expect 528 accents in the A cola and 528 in the B cola. The actual range for the A cola is from 509 accents to 538 (including the cases of *metheg*), whose range encompasses the desired total and reflects the three-accent-per-colon meter. For the B cola, however, the range extends from 437 (accents) to 449 (with *metheg*), which is substantially below the expected number of 528. Many of the bicola have a pattern of $3 + 2 = 5$ accents rather than $3 + 3 = 6$, but the overall schema does not conform to a $3 + 2 = 5$ pattern, since that would produce a total of $528 + 352 = 880$, considerably lower than our total. The numbers for the B cola actually straddle the intermediate number half-way between 3 accents and 2 accents for the second colon: 440 (we count 437 accents and 449 if we add the occurrences of *metheg*). In other words, within the standard sixteen-syllable

line, we have a slight imbalance between the A-cola and the B-cola, which is nevertheless reflected not only in the internal syllable counts, but even more markedly in the number and distribution of the accents. The meter is clearly not 3:3 or 3:2, but a mixture of the two, in effect an equal number of lines or bicola that are 3:3 and 3:2. The effect is present, but not as pronounced as it would be if both syllables and accents conformed to one pattern or the other,⁸ but a mixture that, while preserving a balanced syllable count, gives the impression of a slightly falling rhythm.

In the poem overall, there is a preponderance of accents in the first colon, and that is true also of the syllable counts (Table A). The difference is that the total number of syllables corresponds to the expected norm, whereas the accent count remains unbalanced and does not. What all this means for the present investigation is that syllable counts are more reliable and more indicative of the underlying structure of a poem than accent counts. In other words, all syllables were regarded as of approximately equal value without regard to accent, and an eight-syllable colon with two accents was considered equivalent to an eight-syllable colon with three accents (i.e., that discrepancy was either ignored or an accent was arbitrarily added to the colon with only two natural accents). Often, as in this poem, MT simply does not provide the expected third accent. The effect is to weight the cola in favor of the first unit rather than the second. Our poet does not go as far in this direction as the poet of Lamentations 1-3, where line-length is modified in the direction of the 3:2 pattern of accents by the 8:5 (some 7:6) syllable counts. In Ps 119 the largest single group happens to have the 3:2 accent count: 64 (Table E, Proposed Count). The expected standard 3:3 rhythm occurs only in 54 bicola, while the count for other balanced bicola is 2:2 = 4 and 4:4 = 1. Unbalanced lines go both ways. Those with the added weight or length on the first colon are the dominant group with 95 occurrences (4:2 = 14; 4:3 = 13; 5:2 = 1; 5:3 = 2; 5:4 = 1; 6:2 = 1; 6:3 = 1; 3:2 = 62). Those unbalanced in the opposite direction number 22 (2:3 = 13; 2:4 = 3; 3:4 = 6).

As expected, the three-beat colon is dominant in this poem. The surprise is the number of cola with only two beats, almost half as many as the three-beat cola. Four-beat cola are much less frequent, and five-beat cola are very rare. The dominant three-beat cola are fairly well balanced with a modest but significant majority in the first colon (122:83; Table E, Proposed Count). With respect to two-beat cola, the ratio is heavily weighted in the

8. This appears in Lamentations 1-3, where the meter is predominantly 3:2 and the syllable count is 13 overall (representing 8 + 5 = 13 and 7 + 6 = 13).

opposite direction (20:82). The four-beat and five-beat cola are predominantly in the first position as expected (four-beat [28:11] and five-beat [4:0]). The data can be summarized in the following table:

	COLA		ACCENTS	
	A	B	A	B
2)	20	82	40	164
3)	122	83	366	249
4)	28	11	112	44
5)	4	0	20	0
6)	2	0	12	0
TOTALS	176	176	550	457

In the A-colon the dominant number is three beats, and the higher counts more than balance the lower ones: the norm would be 528, and the evidence shows 550, slightly more than expected. In the B-colon, we would expect the same number (528) in a balanced meter or rhythm, but the actual count is considerably below that figure: 457. The B-cola are almost equally divided between two-beat and three-beat units, with a very slight preference for the latter, reinforced by a handful of four-beat cola. What is unusual is the large number of two-beat cola in a poem with an essentially balanced rhythmic structure, the hypothetical norm for which is a syllable count of $8+8=16$ and an accentual count of $3+3=6$. The divergence or modification is too pronounced to be regarded as the result of inadvertence or happenstance. At the same time, the poet has not adopted the falling rhythm (the so-called *qinah*-meter, or 3:2) so characteristic of the book of Lamentations (chaps. 1-4). Instead, he has tipped the balance metrically (syllables regardless of accent) in favor of the first colon as opposed to the second, so that there is a clear impression of first-colon preference, but it is just as clearly within the framework of the standard balanced meter that is typical of the greater part of Hebrew poetry. The poet has taken advantage of the principle of equivalence, whereby cola with the same number of syllables may well differ in respect to the number of accents but still be regarded as metrically equal. While there are a number of exceptions, the charts show that there is a preponderance of accents and syllables in the A-colon compared with the B-colon. The only constant is the total number of syllables (for the poem), whose total is as

anticipated, although the range between minimal and maximal counts is so great (about 10%) that fixing the number is somewhat arbitrary. At least it can be said that the projected number (176 lines X 16 syllables = 2816 syllables; our resultant number is 2815) falls between the extremes, and might well be regarded as the poet's target, if not the standard, in composing this piece. Put another way, one might say that given the poet's clear intention to modify the standard, evenly-balanced, metrical structure in this poem, he felt that it was obligatory to meet the syllable-counting requirement overall, while not regarding the accentual norm as binding. As a result, the total number of accents or beats in the poem is (A) 550 + (B) 457 = 1007 (an approximation, including most accents and *methegs* in MT), which is substantially lower than the expected total of (A) 528 + (B) 528 = 1056. It is possible that the difference (about 5%) was not regarded as significant, although given the greater precision in most other matters, including syllable-counting, I would doubt that the difference in accent-counting was negligible. Or it may be that the poet used accents on words and syllables that are not indicated in MT, and so imagined that the presumed accent requirement was fulfilled. My own impression is that the accentual norm was not regarded as firm or binding, and that poets, like the Massorettes, allowed themselves considerable leeway in placing or not placing accents on the same words and syllables, contingent upon context, euphony, or other criteria. While it is convenient and helpful to identify different rhythmic and metrical structures by a supposed accentual system (3:3, or 3:2, or 2:2, or the like), a system adopted traditionally and almost universally by scholars as though it actually were the system used by the poets of the Hebrew Bible, the fact remains that it is not very accurate or precise, that MT reflects wide disparities in the use of accents (and *methegs*), and that the resulting numbers do not balance out very well. It should be recognized as a very imperfect way of describing the poetic phenomena under consideration. Counting all syllables and not just accented ones gives a better picture of the principles and procedures employed in biblical Hebrew poetry, and attests more reliably to the interest in and concern for symmetrical structures on the part of the Hebrew poet.

Summary

We may now summarize the findings of the investigation of Psalm 119. The poem is structured in a highly intricate way, beginning with the alphabetic acrostic pattern: each of the 22 stanzas corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet has eight lines, each of which begins with the same letter appropriate to that stanza. This structure is linked emphatically to the central

theme of the poem: the celebration of "the Law of the Lord" (תּוֹרַת יְהוָה, v 1). In keeping with the eight-line stanza,⁹ the poet has chosen eight key-words, beginning with *torah* (*primus inter pares* as shown by the varying frequencies) and supplemented by seven others, all roughly synonymous or sharing an extended semantic field. These eight words are then repeated systematically throughout the poem, on an average of one per line, 22 times per word, for a total approximating the total number of lines in the poem (176). The actual total is 177, a discrepancy of one from the ideal and expected number. The difference may be due to scribal error in transmission, or it may represent a deliberate distortion of a presumed perfect number. There is enough evidence of deliberate departure from or modification of the ideal numbers to make firm judgments in this area precarious, and it may well be that along with the simple, symmetrical, and perfect underlying pattern, there is an equally deliberate and intentional pattern of variation and even distortion. Nevertheless, in keeping with the persistent pattern of bilateral symmetry, four of the eight words are feminine and four are masculine. While the evidence is less decisive, there may also have been an equal division between singular and plural (in the surviving manuscripts of MT, there is some confusion between singular and plural forms, especially in the case of the words *dābār* and *mišpāt*). Thus, one expects and does find the eight words divided by pairs into fem. sing. and plural, and masc. sing. and plural. As we observed in comparing the actual numbers (which vary from a low of 19 to a high of 25 in frequency), the two words sharing number and gender form a pair, and the total number of the two in every case is 44 (e.g., אִמְרָה [f.s. 19] + תּוֹרָה [f.s. 25] = 44, but the case with the masculine nouns is different). Throughout, there are other minor variations in usage, showing that the poet was not the slave but the master of the system.

Most, but not all, of the lines of the poem have one and only one of these key-words (as observed above, four of the lines of the poem do not have any of the key words, while four or five have two of them). We deplore the persistent efforts of scholars to improve upon the original by emending the text to supply the missing words in the four lines that do not have them, and to force perfection (or monotony) on the poem in spite of the clear indications that the poet did not wish to achieve that kind of precision, or transcended

9. The selection of the number eight may result from the notion that the eight acts of creation in Genesis 1 reflect the perfection of the universe as created by God, and the resulting correspondence between the law as the perfect expression and the universe as the perfect creation of the same God.

simple symmetry by invoking higher laws of aesthetic variation and complexity. In fact only 167 (or possibly 168) lines correspond to the rule or expectation, enough to show what the underlying principle was, but not enough to rule out deliberate deviation from that norm in the case of eight (!) or nine lines. As noted, four of the lines (vv 3, 37, 90 and 122) do not have any of the key-words, while four or five of them (vv 16, 48, 160, 168 and 172) have two key-words each, thereby reaching or exceeding the desired total. What is manifest here is the fundamental and pervasive principle of compensation, whereby a deficiency in one place is made up for in another place by an addition. When it comes to the distribution of key-words in the stanzas, we find an even greater diversity in the actual placement of the different words. To begin with, not one of the key-words occurs in every stanza; at the same time, some occur twice in some stanzas to make up for their omission in others. One (תורה) even occurs three times in one stanza (in this way exploiting some of the surplus that it enjoys in the pairing with אמרה, which occurs fewer times and is lacking in several stanzas). The stanzas themselves vary in the number of key-words they contain. While the largest single group has the expected eight (one per line), the actual distribution of a different one in each of the eight lines is relatively rare; several have only seven, while the remainder have nine, again illustrating the principle of compensation. Surprisingly, only five of the stanzas have each of the eight words only once, the optimum and ideal arrangement, while all of the others have omissions and/or duplications. Even among the few that have the eight different key-words once each, there is a difference in the order and arrangement. The result is that although the basic structure is simple and repeatable, no two stanzas are identical in selection, number, arrangement, and order. If they agree in one or two respects, they will differ in at least one of the others. So in the larger picture they are the same, but they vary in detail. The variety is unending, but always carefully contained in and constrained by the overall symmetrical pattern. Undoubtedly there are many other mechanical and technical features in the poem, such as the selection and distribution of other nouns and verbs, which deserve to be studied for evidence of symmetrical planning and deliberate deviation. We will leave those for future study at another time and no doubt for other scholars to pursue.

When it comes to metrical analysis and considerations, we believe that the same basic principles hold: that there is an underlying or overriding pattern, and with it considerable deliberate variation and deviation controlled by target numbers, the goal of symmetry, and the principle of compensation. We began with the statement of the Church Father Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, that

this poem along with the Song of Moses (Deut 32), which we hope to discuss in another place, consists of hexameters of sixteen syllables. On the basis of careful counting and checking, we have determined that the statement should be taken seriously, may be based on authentic tradition if not direct knowledge on the part of Eusebius, and can be defended as objectively true if understood in a specific way. The rule cannot be applied rigorously to each line of the poem, although in fact many of the lines actually have sixteen syllables, and many more are only a syllable away from that number. There remain too many others that deviate significantly from that key-number for it to be the rule for every line of the poem. Nevertheless, these deviations themselves are not random or haphazard, but form a pattern of their own. To explain this we invoke two principles, which are themselves interlocking and overlapping: 1) if we understand the statement to mean that the *average* line length is sixteen syllables, then by adding up all of the syllables in the lines and dividing by their number, we find that the most reasonable conclusion conforms to the ancient statement; and 2) correspondingly, there seems to be a deliberate effort to match up long lines with short lines, so that they pair off at the mean or average, just as we have already observed regarding the eight key-words. Thus we can identify the principle of balance, and the method of compensation or pairing, to achieve symmetry.

Regarding the "hexameters" mentioned by Eusebius, we interpret the Greek terms as referring to or reflecting the accentual system in Hebrew. While as in the case of the overall syllable counts there are many lines with six accents (often dividing in the middle, i.e., 3:3), there are many others (too many to accommodate easily) that have fewer accents, and some that have more accents. In the case of accents, we cannot invoke the principles and procedures we used in counting all the syllables, and therefore cannot conclude that the divergences from the presumed norm balance out, or that lines with more accents compensate for lines with fewer accents. In short, we cannot confirm the statement by Eusebius. On the contrary, we have to state that according to our present knowledge, too many lines do not conform to the stated pattern, and we cannot invoke the principles of symmetry and compensation to account for the divergence from the presumed norm. Overall, there is a notable preponderance of accents in the first colon of bicola in the poem, and often a lower number in the second colon, so that alongside the expected 3:3 pattern, there are almost as many lines with a 3:2 pattern. The remaining lines vary in a different fashion, and clearly do not suffice to correct the apparent imbalance created by the numerous 3:2 lines in the poem. This overbalance or extra weight on the first colon in contrast with the second

colon is also reflected in the overall syllable count, confirming the shift away from the presumed norm. In the latter case, we were able to invoke the principles and procedures of balance and compensation to reflect the sixteen-syllable norm. That is not the case with the accentual patterns.

In sum, the poem is a mechanical and technical marvel, with an intricately worked structure, within which the poet exercised considerable freedom to express his originality and creativity, while keeping within the self-imposed boundaries of the overall construction.¹⁰

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10. This paper was prepared with the assistance of Andrew J. Welch.

TABLE A

SYLLABLES BY STANZA

Stanza	Low Count			High Count			Proposed		
	A	B	Total	A	B	Total	A	B	Total
I	52	55	107	55	61	116	54	58	112
II	58	48	106	64	57	121	62	53	115
III	60	56	116	63	64	127	62	63	125
IV	61	53	114	64	61	125	64	58	122
V	70	48	118	78	53	131	76	49	125
VI	82	51	133	89	58	147	87	56	143
VII	67	54	121	71	59	130	69	59	128
VIII	68	54	122	72	64	136	68	62	130
IX	52	59	111	55	67	122	54	66	120
X	78	60	138	85	68	153	80	66	146
XI	59	63	122	66	70	136	61	68	129
Subtotals	707	601	1308	762	682	1444	737	658	1395
XII	65	54	119	70	60	130	68	59	127
XIII	68	54	122	73	57	130	73	57	130
XIV	62	57	119	66	65	131	65	62	127
XV	65	60	125	70	66	136	69	65	134
XVI	61	54	115	69	58	127	62	58	120
XVII	59	60	119	64	65	129	62	64	126
XVIII	57	53	110	62	59	121	61	58	119
XIX	65	54	119	68	62	130	66	61	127
XX	68	63	131	71	71	142	70	70	140
XXI	68	53	121	76	58	134	73	57	130
XXII	72	59	131	80	68	148	73	67	140
Subtotals	710	621	1331	769	689	1458	742	678	1420
TOTALS	1417	1222	2639	1531	1371	2902	1479	1336	2815
Averages									
Bicolon			15.00			16.25			16.00
Colon			7.50			8.25			8.00
Stanza			120.00			132.00			128.00

TABLE B

SYLLABLE COUNT
BY STANZAS

LOW COUNT	HIGH COUNT	PROPOSED COUNT
106	116	112
107	121 (2 stanzas)	115
110	122	119
111	125	120 (2 stanzas)
114	127 (2 stanzas)	122
115	129	125 (2 stanzas)
116		126
118	130 (4 stanzas)*	
	131 (2 stanzas)*	127 (3 stanzas)
119 (3 stanzas)*		128 *
121 (2 stanzas)*	134	
	136 (3 stanzas)	129
122 (3 stanzas)	142	130 (3 stanzas)
125	147	134
131 (2 stanzas)	148	140 (2 stanzas)
133	153	143
138		146

* = Median Range

TABLE C

LINE LENGTHS BY SYLLABLES

Syllables	Stanzas 1-11			Stanzas 12-22			Total		
	Low	High	Prop.	Low	High	Prop.	Low	High	Prop.
11	5	0	0	1	0	0	6	0	0
12	9	3	4	4	1	1	13	4	5
13	9	7	11	9	1	4	18	8	15
14	18	9	9	19	7	7	37	16	16
15	17	15	18	16	16	21	33	31	39
16	10	13	17	22	18	17	32	31	34
17	12	18	9	13	21	22	25	39	31
18	2	5	11	1	13	11	3	18	22
19	3	9	3	2	6	2	5	15	5
20	0	4	3	1	3	2	1	7	5
21	2	2	0	0	2	1	2	4	1
22	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
23	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	2
24	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

TABLE D

COLA LENGTH BY SYLLABLES

Syllables	Stanzas 1-11			Stanzas 12-22			Total		
	Low	High	Prop.	Low	High	Prop.	Low	High	Prop.
4	6	4	5	2	1	1	8	5	6
5	15	9	9	4	4	4	19	13	13
6	32	13	24	35	13	19	67	26	43
7	46	33	32	46	33	36	92	66	68
8	37	51	48	48	50	51	85	101	99
9	18	26	26	27	42	40	45	68	66
10	13	19	19	9	20	16	22	39	35
11	6	14	8	4	10	7	10	24	15
12	0	4	2	1	2	1	1	6	3
13	2	1	1	0	1	1	2	2	2
14	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
15	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1

COLA SYLLABLES BY A AND B COLA

Syllables	Low		High		Proposed	
	A	B	A	B	A	B
4	1	7	1	4	1	5
5	4	15	2	11	2	11
6	24	43	13	13	20	23
7	37	55	23	43	28	40
8	51	34	53	48	50	49
9	30	15	32	36	32	34
10	16	6	23	16	25	10
11	9	1	20	4	12	3
12	1	0	5	1	2	1
13	2	0	2	0	2	0
14	1	0	1	0	1	0
15	0	0	1	0	1	0

TABLE E

BI-COLA BY ACCENTS

<i>Massoretic Text</i>			
Accents A+B	Stanzas 1-11	Stanzas 12-22	TOTALS
2+2	13	6	19
2+3	11	15	26
2+4	1	2	3
3+2	32	32	64
3+3	14	22	36
3+4	0	1	1
4+2	8	6	14
4+3	7	3	10
4+4	1	0	1
5+3	1	0	1
5+4	0	1	1

<i>With Metheg</i>			
Accents A+B	Stanzas 1-11	Stanzas 12-22	TOTALS
2+2	9	5	14
2+3	7	9	16
2+4	0	3	3
3+2	29	29	58
3+3	15	28	43
3+4	2	3	5
4+2	11	5	16
4+3	10	5	15
4+4	1	0	1
5+3	3	0	3
5+4	0	1	1
6+2	1	0	1

<i>Proposed Count</i>			
Accents A+B	Stanzas 1-11	Stanzas 12-22	TOTALS
2+2	2	2	4
2+3	7	6	13
2+4	1	2	3
3+2	33	29	62
3+3	22	32	54
3+4	2	4	6
4+2	8	6	14
4+3	7	6	13
4+4	1	0	1
5+2	1	0	1
5+3	2	0	2
5+4	0	1	1
6+2	1	0	1
6+3	1	0	1