Psalm 150— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

- Please read the General Introduction as well as the Introduction to Book I and Book V.
- For common features found in the numerical analysis charts, see the Key to the charts.

Specific feature of Psalm 150

- The strophic structure of the text reflects the universality and the comprehensiveness of the praise due to God by the use of the number of fulfilment, **11**, to structure the text in the pattern **4 + 7 = 11**. Strophe 1 (vs. 1-2) has **4** cola with **11** words, and Strophe 2 (3-6) **7** cola with **22** words. This division of the text is significantly confirmed on letter level: see Observations 3 and 8.

Strophic structure   - Strophe boundary: |

- Van der Lugt: 1-2 | 3-6 (leaving the two halleluh-yahs out of consideration: 2 strophes with 5 verselines and 11 cola, taking v. 6 as the 3rd colon of verseline 5).
- Fokkelman: similarly, but he finds 6 verselines and 12 cola, erroneously taking the concluding *hallelu-yah* as the 2nd colon of verseline 6.
- Labuschagne: as Van der Lugt.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: ninefold call to praise God; **d**: opening and concluding call to praise him.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in brown.

		Total		a		b		c		d
1	הַלְלוּ יָהּ	2	=	2	+	2				
	הַלְלוּ־אֵל בְּקָדְשׁוֹ^ 1	3		3						3
	הַלְלוּהוּ בִּרְקִיעַ עֻזּוֹ:	3				3		3		
2	הַלְלוּהוּ בִגְבוּרֹתָיו^ 2	2		2				2		
	הַלְלוּהוּ כְּרֹב גֻּדְלוֹ:	3				3		3		
Strophe 1 Total, v. 1-2		**11**	=	5	+	6	=	8	+	3
3	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתֵקַע שׁוֹפָר^ 3	3		3				3		
Middle word: 16 + 1 + 16	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּנֵבֶל וְכִנּוֹר :	3				3		3		
Middle colon: 11 = 5 + 1 + 5	Total, v. 3	6	=	3	+	3	=	6	+	0
No meaningful centre	Total, v. 1-3	17	=	8	+	9	=	14	+	3
4	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתֹף וּמָחוֹל^ 4	3		3				3		
	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּמִנִּים וְעוּגָב:	3				3		3		
	Total, v. 2-4	17	=	8	+	9	=	**17**	+	0
5	הַלְלוּהוּ בְצִלְצְלֵי־שָׁמַע^ 5	3		3				3		
	הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה:	3				3		3		
	Total, v. 1c-5	26	=	11	+	15		26	+	0
6	כֹּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְּהַלֵּל יָהּ הַלְלוּ־יָהּ:	4		4						4
Strophe 2 Total, v. 3-6		**22**	=	13	+	9	=	18	+	4
	Total, v. 1-6	**33**	=	18	+	15	=	**26**	+	7
	With the two *hallelu-yahs*, v. 1-6	37	=	22	+	15				

Observations

1. Psalm 150 concludes not only the five closely connected Hallelu-yah Psalms (146-150) but also the 31 psalms of Book Vb (120-150), and, last but not least, in its capacity of super doxology, the entire Psalter. The author invites every living creature on earth to praise YHWH with every possible instrument.

   Most intriguingly, there are **11** instances of the verb הלל: **10** imperatives (vs. 1a-5b) and **1** jussive, תהלל (v. 6a). The use of a jussive here is a deliberate scribal decision in order to let the very last verb in the Book of Psalms end with a *taw*, the last letter of the alphabet. This means that the Book of Psalms begins with an *aleph* (1:1) and has an initial *taw* in the last verb (150:6). For the use of the *aleph* and *taw* as a device for delimiting a text, see Observation 3 in my analysis of Psalm 1. Significantly, the second word of Psalm 150, אל, *begins* with an *aleph,* which may attest to the use of the Alef-taw device for inclusion in Psalm 150 itself. This is underscored by the fact that הללו־אל at the beginning and תהלל יה at the end also function as an inclusion. For particulars, see Van der Lugt's analysis of Psalm 150 in Volume III of his *Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*.

2. Neither the middle word וְכִנּוֹר, 'and lyre', nor the middle colon, v. 3b, seem to have been intended to constitute a meaningful centre. This is not surprising, given the stringent structure of the psalm on the level of cola, words, and even letters.

3. The only caesura in the text is that between vs. 2||3. In my opinion, there is no break between 4||5, as suggested by Christensen. The psalm clearly divides into two close-knit strophes: vs. 1-2 and vs. 3-6, determined by content and logotechnical devices.

   Strophe 1 Praise God in all his dwellings!   **4** cola **11** words, **52** letters
   Strophe 2 Praise him with all possible instruments! **7** cola **22** words,**104** letters.

   The number of fulfilment, **11**, defines the bipartite framework in two ways: on the level of cola, by means of the **4 + 7 = 11** pattern, and on word level, by **11** words in Strophe 1 and **22** (2 x **11**) in Strophe 2. Compare the use of this pattern in Psalm 146 (Observation 4) and Psalm 147 (Observation 3).

   The strophic structure is corroborated on the level of letters: Strophe 1 has **52** (2 x **26**) letters and Strophe 2 **104** (4 x **26**) – see Observation 8.

4. In the **7** cola of Strophe 2 we find **10** explicitly mentioned <u>musical instruments</u>:

   1. praise him with the <u>shofar</u>[1]
   2. praise him with <u>harp</u>[2] and <u>lyre</u>[3]
   3. praise him with <u>timbrel</u>[4] and <u>dance</u>[5]
   4. praise him with <u>stringed instruments</u>[6] and <u>pipes</u>[7]
   5. praise him with <u>sounding cymbals</u>[8]
   6. praise him with <u>triumphant cymbals</u>[9]
   7. let <u>everything with breath</u>[10] praise YH.

   In my opinion, the dance was considered an *instrument* producing music, since in biblical antiquity, as in many cultures, dancing was the *bodily* expression of music. It was performed to the accompaniment of musical instruments, especially the timbrel, to convey feelings of pleasure and joy. The use of the body as a musical instrument involved stamping of the feet, clapping of the hands, rhythmic twisting and writhing, and letting bangles and anklets sound.

   The word מָחוֹל, 'dance', most certainly did not have the (erotic) connotation some people sense in the English word 'dance'. Therefore, we should not allow puritan aversion against modern forms of dancing make us frown upon dancing in biblical times.

Neither is there any reason for trying to find some musical instrument behind the word מָחוֹל. It was only in medieval Hebrew that the feminine form מְחֹלָה (and in modern Hebrew also מָחוֹל) achieved the derived meaning of 'timbrel' or 'tambourine' – see *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 569.

What is true of the dance as an instrument producing music also applies to the 10th instrument: 'everything that breathes' (v. 6), the many-voiced vehicle for expressing praise of all living beings.

5. Unlike Van der Lugt, who takes v. 6 as the third colon of verseline 5, Fokkelman considers it a separate bicolic verseline, taking the stereotyped editorial conclusion הַלְלוּ־יָהּ as its second colon. In terms of form (the deviating verbal form תְּהַלֵּל) and content ('everything that has breath'), v. 6 may indeed be regarded as a little coda concluding the doxology as a grand finale. However, as Van der Lugt has argued, it does not stand apart, but remains part of the second strophe.

6. The first and last cola (v. 1a and v. 6) stand out (Column d), because they deviate from the stereotyped phrasing of vs. 1b-5 (Column c). They clearly serve as a device for inclusion. The inclusion are made up of altogether **7** words, while the inner body of the psalm (vs. 1b-5, Column c) has **26** words.

7. Despite the stringent use of the number **11** to structure the text logotechnically, the author still managed to weave the two divine name numbers into its fabric:

vs. 1-3	**17** words in total
vs. 2-4	**17** words in total
vs. 1c-5	**26** words in total
vs. 1b-6a	**156** (6 x **26**) letters in total.

8. Instead of the name יהוה, which is significantly absent, we find the word אֵל, 'God' (v. 1a) - compare Ps. 146:5a and Ps. 149:6a - and surprisingly, the short form יָהּ in v. 6, in addition to the two instances in the two *hallelu-yahs*. It is likely that its use served to achieve exactly **156** (6 x **26**) letters in the 33 words of the psalm in order to render the concluding doxology a perfect numerical composition, even on the level of letters.

© 2013
Dr. C.J. Labuschagne   Senior Lecturer in Semitic Languages (retired),
Brinkhorst 44   University of Pretoria, South Africa
9751 AT Haren (Gron)   and
The Netherlands   Professor of Old Testament (retired),
labuschagne.cj@gmail.com   University of Groningen, The Netherlands