Chapter I

Methodology

1 Methodology

This is a shortened account of the methodology which I presented in the first volume of this series about the canto structures of the psalms. Similarly to the investigations in CAS I regarding Psalms 1–41, the search for the poetic framework of the psalms I investigate in this volume (Psalms 42–89) will move along five mutually complementary lines of approach:

1. the description of the logical division of the subject matter;
2. the registering of transition markers;
3. the recording of verbal repetitions;
4. the description of quantitative structural aspects;
5. a survey of various divisions.

Together, these lines of approach constitute the method for this rhetorical inquiry. This methodology enables us to systematically describe the rhetorical aspect of the overall design of classical Hebrew poetry in terms of cantos, canticles (as the case may be) and strophes.

The sequence in which the different steps of the analysis are presented is more or less arbitrary and generally does not—and in view of the economy of presentation cannot—mirror the steps of the hermeneutic circle. For this aspect, see the ‘comments and summary’ (§ 0.7).

It may tentatively be stated that, with the application of these five complementary lines of approach, the most important rhetorical phenomena constituting the poetic structure of the psalms can be seen.

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1See my Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry (OTS 53), Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006 (further CAS I), Ch. II, 2, pp. 75–92.
2For such systematic descriptions, see CAS I, Ch. V, and further Chs. IV–V below.
3Here and in the following sections the figure zero, in e.g. § 0.7, is to be replaced by the number of the section a psalm is discussed in Chs. II–III; that is to say, 2.7 means subsection seven in the analysis of Psalm 44 (Ch. II, 2).
1.1 The logical division of the subject matter

In the first stage of my inquiry, I present a description of the material content of the poem in question: § 0.2. This description in terms of semantics corresponds to the rhetorical framework of the poem as it was established on the basis of the investigation as a whole.

Because each piece of poetry formally and thematically comprises several levels, this stratification has to be made explicit in the description of the content too. I use Roman numerals to indicate the main sections of the poem, the cantos (mostly called ‘stanzas’). The strophes, the poetic units mostly consisting of only two or three verselines, are marked by means of the Masoretic verses (or verse) that correspond(s) to the strophe in question. If the cantos divide into canticles that encompass the strophes, the canticles are indicated by the Roman numeral of the canto, followed by an Arabic numeral (e.g., II.1 and II.2; see Ps. 69,14–19 and 20–29).

The confusion among exegetes concerning the subdivisions of Hebrew poetic texts—note § 0.6 (‘various divisions’)—does not stem from a certain vagueness of the poets as regards the rhetorical structure of their compositions in terms of cantos and strophes, but is due to lack on our part of first-hand knowledge of their techniques. I dare to state that in the past too little attention has been paid to the formal devices which determine the structure of a classical Hebrew poem on the level of the cantos and the strophes. An inquiry into these formal aspects may help us to draw conclusions on a more objective and verifiable basis. The analysis of the transition markers, the verbal repetitions and the quantitative structural aspects can lay the appropriate foundations.⁴

1.2 Transition markers

On the level of the strophes, I make use of formal markers that demarcate the beginning or the end of these units. There are a special group of words and grammatical forms that mark turning points within a Hebrew poem; cf. the Greek word strophè, which means ‘turn’ (§ 0.3).⁵ This is


⁵Dabei darf es uns nun auch nicht irre machen, wenn einzelne Strophen sich durch Einheit des Inhalts nicht so scharf absondern, als andere. Pflegen ja doch alle Dichter, schon der gefälligen Abwechslung zu Liebe, nicht immer die Sinn-Pause mit dem Schlusse