FORM AND STRUCTURE IN ANCIENT HEBREW POETRY (CONTINUED)

BY

HANS KOSMALA
Jerusalem, Isr.

The following article is a continuation of the study on form and structure in Biblical Hebrew poetry published in this journal XIV, 4, 1964, pp. 423-445. It is not exactly its “second” part, much less its conclusion, as we can again deal only with further selections from the vast material. The majority is taken from Isaiah. The examples are of special interest as they show that there is some hope in the new approach not only to come nearer to or even to establish the original text of a poetic piece but also to gain an insight into the ways in which additions have been made and of what type they are.

On the whole the poems are well preserved within the MT, far better than the text critics of our time have surmised. Omissions are rare, but accretions of various kinds abound. The custom that words or even whole phrases have been “added to the word or taken from it” in the course of transmission, oral or literary, was well known in the Orient already in ancient times. Deut. iv 2 is a comparatively late example of a warning against such a procedure. We learn from it that making additions or omissions was an offence especially in codes of laws. But even in codes further laws were sometimes incorporated and “bylaws”, explanations, comments, Ausführungsbestimmungen, etc. were added. In fact this was the common fate of all law codes, including the Law of Moses (in spite of the warning in Deut. iv 2).

There was, of course, greater freedom in the other branches of oral and literary tradition. As soon as collections of histories and prophetic oracles began to play their part in the instruction of the people explanations and illuminations were often felt necessary and they were inserted into the text or added to it (see p. 159, note 3). ALBRIGHT has once casually, but pertinently, remarked 1) that the

1) From the Stone Age to Christianity. The English edition not being available, we quote from the German edition Von der Steinzeit zum Christentum, Sammlung Dalp, 1949, p. 69.
“oriental scribes and redactors” were more inclined to add to the text than to omit something of it.

Additions in poetical texts can often be easily recognized as such. They are usually in prose, though not always, they separate words or clauses which obviously belong together, and thus disturb the poetic form and the logical structure of the poem. The main concern of the commentator is instruction, not poetic beauty 1).

Sometimes our findings are supported by the reading of the LXX or rather of its Hebrew Vorlage 2), or, in the case of the Book Isaiah, by the Isaiah manuscript A found in Qumran, both of which are considerably older than the MT. Sometimes, however, comments have been added at such an early time that they appear already in the LXX and the Isaiah manuscript; then we have to fall back on the internal evidence as our only guide.

For the new method applied here to the study of Hebrew poetry we must refer the reader to the introductory notes in the first article 3). The question whether certain particles are to be counted as units or not, is sometimes still difficult to decide 4), but the reader will find further help in the notes on the pieces examined in the present article. We must consider each case on its own merit, as there are no hard and fast rules. The inquiry into what the author wants to express and to stress is always important and decides the issue.

To the selections from Isaiah we add a few specimens from the Ugaritic poetry 5) which is roughly 750 years older than the poetry of the Second Isaiah and it has come down to us on the “original” clay-tablets. Ugaritic poetry does not by a long way reach the highly developed artistic form which the Second Isaiah employs. Still, we notice that already Ugaritic poetry observes definite laws in the structure of its lines.

It may be surprising, however, that many of the Hebrew Psalms follow similar rules. We append a few examples in order to show the direction in which further study of the formal structure of our Psalms could be undertaken.

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1) Albright, l.c., p. 56.  
2) VT, XIV, 1964, p. 441.  
3) VT, l.c., pp. 423-426.  
4) VT, l.c., p. 426.  
5) VT, l.c., pp. 427 and 445