The verse שָׁמַרְתִּי הָן appears for the first time in the Song of Moses (Ex. xv 2), a psalm of thanksgiving. It reappears verbatim in Ps. cxviii 14, a psalm of the same literary genre and again in Is. xii 2, a chapter recognized for its hymn-like quality, with the secondary addition of the Tetragram after יה 1). Therefore the formula seems to be a standard feature of hymn writing which has been in existence from very early times since the fossilized pair of words שָׁמַרְתִּי הָן has been preserved in this set context only.

The interpretation of this expression is known to present difficulties. Prima facie שָׁמַרְתִּי הָן means ‘my strength’, תָּמרִית ‘song’ (not my song!), the suffix of the first person found in שָׁמַרְתִּי הָן being conspicuously absent in תָּמרִית. Moreover the ideas of strength and song seem to be utterly disparate: they are neither synonymous nor even congeneric.

To a certain extent the solution of this second problem depends upon the solution of the first. Scholars emending תָּמרִית to read תָּמרִית 2) maintain the traditional rendering of שָׁמַרְתִּי הָן as ‘my strength’ and its derivation from the well-known root שָׁמַר, ‘to be strong’ On the other hand those who would retain the suffixless form תָּמרִית, deny that the שָׁמַר in שָׁמַרְתִּי הָן is suffixed personal pronoun, and consequently explain this שָׁמַר as the third radical of a supposed Hebrew root שָׁמַר, relating שָׁמַר to Arabic גָּזִין ‘warrior’, גָּזַד ‘go forth to war’ 3) or to Arabic גָּזַד ‘patience, consolation’ 4)

A higher degree of unanimity has been reached in the interpretation of the root of the noun תָּמרִית. The opinion clearly prevailing to-day

1) The tetragram may have been here a varia lectio of the less usual divine name יה. MT is probably a conflation of both readings.
2) E. g. F. M. CROSS-D. N. FREEDMAN, JNES, XIV 1955, p. 243.
is that Hebrew הָדֹאִי represents two different proto-Semitic roots, viz. proto-Semitic גֹּאֶר ‘to sing, to play upon an instrument’ and דֹּאֶר, variously explained as ‘strength’ (1) or ‘protection’ (2) both interpretations resorting to different meanings of the Arabic root דֹּאֶר. It is further claimed that proto-Semitic דֹּאֶר, ‘protect’ is attested in South-Arabian, Amorite and Hebrew personal proper names (3). The choice is then between the following interpretations. 1) My strength and my might. 2) My strength and my protection. 3) Warrior and protection. 4) Consolation and protection.

The basic assumption here is that in Hebrew זֹמַר we are to distinguish between two proto-Semitic stems, viz. זֹמַר and דֹּאֶר. For proto-Semitic זֹמַר ‘to sing, to play upon an instrument’ BAUMGARTNER (4) adduces Ugaritic זֹמַר. There is an Ugaritic word azmr, but its interpretation is entirely obscure and GORDON (5) quite correctly leaves it untranslated. Furthermore BAUMGARTNER quotes Arabic זֹמַר and BARR (6) stresses that “Arabic words cognate with ‘make music’ have the first consonant /z/ not /d/”. This evidence for proto-Semitic z in זֹמַר however overlooks SCHWALLY’S (7) argument that Arabic זֹמַר ‘to play the flute’ is a loanword from Syriac, where זֹמַר is attested in this special sense in addition to its general meaning known from Hebrew. Therefore Syriac זֹמַר (not דֹּאֶר) remains as the only indication for proto-Semitic זֹמַר. But even this should not be considered as a conclusive evidence because the Syriac verb זֹמַר might in turn have been borrowed from Hebrew or Canaanite like the Syriac noun mezmr.

It can now be convincingly shown that this is in fact the case: in an Ugaritic hymn in praise of El we read: dyšr wydmr bkrr wylb btp wmsltm (8) ‘who sings and plays upon harp and ... upon timbal and cymbals.’ This text admits a thoroughly verbal rendering into the language of the Hebrew psalms, which would read: אַשָּׁר יְשֵׁר יָוָם.

1) CROSS-FREEDMAN, loc. cit.; W. BAUMGARTNER, Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon, Leiden 1967 s.v. II דֹּאֶר.
2) GASTER, loc. cit.; WINTON THOMAS, loc. cit.; BARR, op. laud., p. 29.
4) BAUMGARTNER, op. laud., s.v. I דֹּאֶר.
6) BARR, op. laud., p. 29.
7) F. SCHWALLY, ZDMG. LII 1898, pp. 133-4.