THE JUXTAPOSITION OF SYNONYMOUS AND CHIastic PARALLELISM IN TRICOLA
IN OLD TESTAMENT HEBREW PSALM POETRY

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In several of his writings, W. F. Albright called attention to the use of tricola in Ugaritic and in the Old Testament ¹), and stated that it “is much commoner both in Ugaritic and in the Bible than hitherto recognized” ²). S. Mowinckel devoted a monograph to the examination of tricola in the Psalms, and concluded that while such certainly exist they are not nearly so numerous as Albright and others have thought ³). Generally speaking, scholars do not seem to have considered it sufficiently important or fruitful to examine this phenomenon at length in Old Testament poetry ⁴). The present writer has discovered several different structures in tricola in various Old Testament poetic passages. One of these is the linking together of the first two cola ⁵) of a tricolon in synonymous parallelism and of the last two cola in chiastic parallelism (or vice versa), so that the middle


⁴) E.g., L. Alonso Schökel, “Poésie Hébraïque”, DBS 8 (1972), cols. 47-90, in an otherwise very comprehensive treatment of Old Testament poetry, devotes only approximately half a column, 71, to little more than a bare introduction to tricola.

⁵) Scholars have not been consistent in their use of such terms as “stich”, “hemistich”, “line”, “half-line”, etc., in dealing with Old Testament poetry, and it seems least ambiguous to employ “colon” and the like, in spite of the fact that Mowinckel, pp. 6-7, insists that “stich” is preferable to “bicolon” and “distich” to “colon” in describing Hebrew poetry. Cf. Albright’s struggle with this problem reflected in “The Furniture of El in Canaanite Mythology”, p. 43, n. 40; and in “The Old Testament and Canaanite Language and Literature”, p. 20.
colon is simultaneously a vital element of both. A reading of the Psalms in Hebrew reveals several examples of this technique. This article does not attempt to offer an exhaustive list of relevant passages, but to cite sufficient examples to support the thesis that this technique must be taken seriously in approaching Old Testament poetry, and to suggest certain didactic and theological reasons for its use.

Before examining illustrative passages in the Psalms, a few remarks concerning Mowinckel's study are in order. He is correct in insisting that the main rule for determining whether a poetic piece is tricolon is "that all the three cola (membra) show more or less exact parallelism between each other" (p. 17). And yet, this should be understood in conjunction with Mowinckel's perception of a wide range of possibilities in his own analyses of the interrelationships of cola in tricola in the Psalms (pp. 17-21), and with the fact that precise identity of terms in parallel cola is rare in Hebrew poetry. Mowinckel is also correct in emphasizing that the reading of the MT, the Massoretic divisions indicated by athnach and other accents, the division of verse lines in BHK⁸ and the like may be in error or misleading (pp. 22 ff.). However, scholars may disagree as to the specific passages in which these errors have occurred, and it is at this point that many will find it necessary to differ with Mowinckel.

Mowinckel goes too far in insisting that whole psalms or distinct sections of psalms must be regular in scansion throughout both in "thought rhyme" and in meter. Almost invariably he refuses to allow a tricolon to stand in a poem that he scans otherwise as bicolon. His monograph is filled with what justifiably may be termed a rewriting of the Hebrew text of passages which do not fit his scheme. He removes cola, adds cola to form parallels for existing cola, rearranges and emends the text, and the like, all in an effort to restore the original regular poetic pattern as he envisions it, and all resulting in the removal of "apparent" tricola in the midst of otherwise bicolon poetry. Surely, sometimes marginal glosses were wrongly incorporated

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6) J. Muilenburg, "A Study in Hebrew Rhetoric: Repetition and Style", JVT 1 (1953), p. 98; and T. H. Robinson, "Hebrew Poetic Form: The English Tradition", JVT 1 (1953), p. 130, have emphasized that in reality even synonymous parallelism is only rarely strictly synonymous.

7) Mowinckel, p. 22. One of Mowinckel's major contentions is that the basic unit of Hebrew poetry is the bicolon, which has four beats to each colon (4:4), not three (3:3), and that the fundamental stanza or strophe is a 2 and 2 bicolon or the distich, pp. 6-7, 10, 97. With regard to meter, he writes: "the metrical structures as a rule are much more regular than often supposed", p. 67. On the problem of regularity in Hebrew poetry, cp. Alonso Schökel, cols. 63-64.