

# Studies in Early Israelite Poetry I: An Unrecognized Case of Three-Line Staircase Parallelism in the Song of the Sea

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While it is generally accepted that climactic parallelism is a prime feature of Early Israelite Poetry,<sup>1</sup> the distinction between three-line staircase parallelism and two-line climactic parallelism in these early poems has not for the most part been maintained.<sup>2</sup> In fact, one important difference between the two is the existence of numerous examples of the former in Ugaritic literature, where there are few if any clear-cut cases of the latter.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this study is to show that a widely accepted case of two-line climactic parallelism in the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15:1b–18)<sup>4</sup> may have originally been an instance of three-line staircase parallelism unrecognized by the Masoretes.

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1 See F. M. Cross Jr., *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Baltimore, 1950), 23–24; W. F. Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy* (Edinburgh, 1950), 4–8; idem, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (New York, 1969), 10–28.

2 No distinction whatsoever is made in the articles referred to in the previous note. In fact, Albright in his latest work cited only the first two lines of Exod. 15:11 (a clear case of three-line staircase parallelism) and then proceeded to label them "repetitive parallelism." See Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 11–13. Most recently, this distinction has been upheld to a certain extent by S. Loewenstamm, Y. Avishur, and E. Greenstein. Only the last, however, correctly analyzes three-line staircase parallelism as a separate form, completely independent of two-line climactic parallelism. See S. Loewenstamm, "The Expanded Colon in Ugaritic and Biblical Verse," *JSS* 14 (1969), 176–96; Y. Avishur, "Addenda to the Expanded Colon in Ugaritic and Biblical Verse," *UF* 4 (1972), 1–10; E. Greenstein, "Two Variations of Grammatical Parallelism in Canaanite Poetry and Their Psycholinguistic Background," *JANES* 6 (1974), 96–105.

3 Greenstein, *Grammatical Parallelism*, 96, n. 48.

4 Here it should be noted that Exod. 15:21b is simply the incipit of the entire Song of the Sea (Exod. 15:1b–18). The older view which still survives today (e.g. M. Noth, *Exodus* [Philadelphia, 1962], 121–26), according to which Exod. 15:21b is the original song and Exod. 15:1b–18 represents a later expansion, must be abandoned in light of both our knowledge of Ugaritic and Early Israelite Poetry and the extensive use of the incipit in Akkadian texts. In the latter, the standard method of referring to an entire composition

## EXOD. 15:6–7a

Your right hand, O Lord, mighty in strength,	y m y n k Y H W H n ' d r y b k ḥ
Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy,	y m y n k Y H W H t r ' ṣ ' w y b
And with your great majesty,	w b r b g ' w n k t h r s q m y k
you destroyed your attackers.	

While the suggestion to interpret verses 6–7a as three-line staircase parallelism was already made by M. Dahood in 1972,<sup>5</sup> neither has this proposal been adopted or even mentioned in the most recent works on the Song of the Sea,<sup>6</sup> nor have its implications been realized. Dahood, basing himself on the Hebrew-Ugaritic parallel pair 'ôyēb // qām (= Ugaritic *ib // qm*) 'enemy // attacker',<sup>7</sup> claimed that "this parallelism suggests new stichometry and translation of Exod. 15:6–7a."<sup>8</sup> He then proceeded, however, to offer a new translation of 6–7a which can in no way be accepted, as will be seen below.<sup>9</sup> The understanding of 6–7a as three-line staircase parallelism solves two philological problems in verses 6–8. The first problem concerns the interpretation of the epithet *ne'dārî bakkō'āḥ* 'mighty in strength'.<sup>10</sup> Virtually all modern

was by quoting its incipit or first line. For this practice, see E. Leichty, "The Colophon," *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim* (Chicago, 1964), 148, n. 4; H. Hunger, *Babylonische und Assyrische Kolophone* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1968), 2 and passim; D. J. Wiseman, "Books in the Ancient World," *The Cambridge History of the Bible I* (Cambridge, 1970), 33. For many textual references, see *CAD I/J*, 249. Finally, note the justified criticism of the older view in F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, 1973), 123–24. See also S. Loewenstamm, *The Tradition of the Exodus in Its Development* (Jerusalem, 1965), 112 [in Hebrew]. Contrast the much weaker "even-handed" position in B. S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Philadelphia, 1974), 246–47. It is quite possible that some of the fragments of compositions belonging to Early Israelite Poetry may not in fact be mere fragments of lost compositions, but rather incipits (e.g. Num. 21:17–18; Josh. 10:12–13; 1 Sam. 18:7 = 1 Sam. 21:12 = 1 Sam. 29:5; 1 Kgs. 8:12–13).

<sup>5</sup> M. Dahood, "Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs." *Ras Shamra Parallels I* (Rome, 1972), 98. Note also that S. Gevirtz listed Exod. 15:6–7 in his list of biblical occurrences of the word pair 'wyb // (mt)qm(m) 'foe // attacker', but without any comment. See S. Gevirtz, "The Ugaritic Parallel to Jeremiah 8:23," *JNES* 20 (1961), 44. Finally, note that R. Tournay had already suggested this division in 1958, but without any reference to three-line staircase parallelism or even the parallelism of 'wyb // (mt)qm(m). It appears that Tournay put 7a together with verse 6 in order to enable him to place 7b immediately preceding verse 10. See R. Tournay, "Recherches sur la chronologie des Psaumes," *RB* 65 (1958), 335, 337.

<sup>6</sup> Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 128; Childs, *Exodus*, 241.

<sup>7</sup> For a convenient listing of the relevant Hebrew and Ugaritic passages, as well as the major bibliography for this parallel pair, see Dahood, *Ugaritic-Hebrew Parallel Pairs*, 98.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Dahood translated Exod. 15:6–7a as follows:

With your right hand, Yahweh, dreaded for your power,  
With your right hand, Yahweh, you shattered your foes,  
And by your great majesty, you felled your attackers.

<sup>10</sup> Here it should be noted that the root 'dr in Early Israelite Poetry always refers to physical strength (Exod. 15:6, 10, 11; Jud. 5:13, 25) and seems to replace the elsewhere exceedingly common root ḥzq 'to be strong' which is virtually unattested in these texts (the only apparent exception, Ps. 18:2, is however suspect since this entire verse is missing in the parallel text 2 Sam. 22:2 and the later similar text Ps. 144:2).

commentators have assumed that this title refers to God's right hand mentioned at the beginning of verse 6.<sup>11</sup> The difficulty is to explain how this epithet, in apparent masculine form with the addition of the *hireq compaginis*,<sup>12</sup> can be understood to refer to the feminine *y<sup>e</sup>mîn<sup>e</sup>kā* 'your right hand'.<sup>13</sup> The most widely accepted solution<sup>14</sup> is that of W. L. Moran<sup>15</sup> who revocalizes the consonantal text as *ne'dôrî* and explains this form as an infinitive absolute. Moran claims that "the basis for such a revocalization is to be found in similar infinitives also with a similar *i* ending in both the Jerusalem and the Byblos Amarna letters."<sup>16</sup> Moran's understanding of the relevant forms in the Amarna letters, however, has been questioned by J. Obermann,<sup>17</sup> and notwithstanding Moran's reply,<sup>18</sup> D. Marcus now contends "it appears that Obermann is right in treating these Amarna infinitives as occurring only in conditional or temporal sentences with the preposition omitted."<sup>19</sup> Thus, the most widely accepted solution to this problem may itself be based on a misunderstanding. On the other hand, as may be seen from the above translation, understanding 6–7a as three-line staircase parallelism forces us to interpret the epithet *ne'dârî bakkô<sup>a</sup>h* as referring not to God's right hand, but to God himself. For as

'*dr* is also the regular term for 'to be strong' in Phoenician and Ugaritic, where the root *h<sub>2</sub>q* is likewise unattested. See C. F. Jean and J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'ouest* (Leiden, 1965), 5–6, and C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome, 1965), Glossary #92. The usage of the root '*dr* with *kô<sup>a</sup>h* 'strength' in Exod. 15:6 is in no way different from its usage with '*z* 'strength' in KAI 26:III:2–4: *wbrk b' l' kr[n] tryš 'yt 'ztwd hym wšlm w'z 'dr l' kl mlk . . .* "May Ba'al-krntryš bless Azitawadda with life, security, and mighty strength over every king . . ."

11 See most recently Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 128; Childs, *Exodus*, 243.

12 GK § 90L.

13 Note that in Cross' first study of this poem, he rightly understood *ne'dârî bakkô<sup>a</sup>h* as referring to God, translating as follows:

Thy right hand, Yahweh  
Who art fearful in power.

See Cross, *Studies in Ancient Yabwistic Poetry*, 95, 112. In all his subsequent studies however, beginning with his joint article with D. N. Freedman in 1955, *ne'dârî bakkô<sup>a</sup>h* was incorrectly understood to refer to *y<sup>e</sup>mîn<sup>e</sup>kā*. See F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, "The Song of Miriam," *JNES* 14 (1955), 245, n. 14. For the correct understanding of this phrase as referring to God in the commentary *Sbirta*, "the earliest extant and complete commentary on the Song at the Sea," as well as in the medieval commentaries of Rashbam and Ibn Ezra, see J. Goldin, *The Song at the Sea* (New Haven, 1971), 146–47.

14 For the older view to read *n'drb* (feminine) for *n'dry*, which has now generally been replaced by the suggestion of Moran (see next two notes), see GK § 90L.

15 W. L. Moran, "The Hebrew Language in its Northwest Semitic Background," *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York, 1965), 67.

16 Moran, *The Hebrew Language*, 67. For the textual evidence for this statement, see idem, "The Use of the Canaanite Infinitive Absolute as a Finite Verb in the Amarna Letters from Byblos," *JCS* 4 (1950), 169–72. Here it should be noted that Moran's additional proposal concerning Gen. 49:11 to "revocalize the apparent participle [*'sry* 'he tethers'] as an infinitive absolute (*'āsôrî*)" is absolutely unnecessary and must be rejected. Contrast Moran, *Hebrew Language*, 67; Cross and Freedman, *Song of Miriam*, 245, n. 14 (as opposed to Cross, *Studies in Ancient Yabwistic Poetry*, 158, n. 35).

17 J. Obermann, "Does Amarna Bear on Karatepe ?," *JCS* 5 (1951), 58–61.

18 W. L. Moran, "Does Amarna Bear on Karatepe ?—An Answer," *JCS* 6 (1952), 76–80.

19 D. Marcus, "Studies in Ugaritic Grammar I," *JANES* 1/2 (1969), 59, n. 19.

recently contended by E. Greenstein, one of the main features of three-line staircase parallelism is that “the last word(s) of the first line is(are) either the grammatical subject NP of the first two lines or a vocative.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, *ne’dārî bakkō<sup>ā</sup>ḥ* refers to God in verse 6<sup>21</sup> as *ne’dār baqqōdeš* ‘mightiest among the holy ones’<sup>22</sup> refers to God in verse 11. The second problem involves the resulting parallelism of 7b//8a. By understanding 6–7a as suggested above, we must then posit the respective parallelism of 7b//8a and 8b//8c. While the latter is quite evident,<sup>23</sup> the former is less so. However, only by assuming such parallelism can we understand the juxtaposition of *ḥārôn* ‘anger’ and its synonym *’ap* ‘fury’ as a case of the breaking up of the composite phrase<sup>24</sup> *ḥārôn ’ap* ‘furious anger’. For of the forty-one occurrences of the substantive *ḥārôn* in the MT, the idiom *ḥārôn ’ap* occurs no less than thirty-three times.<sup>25</sup> Of the remaining eight occurrences, several of which are suspect,<sup>26</sup> there is at least one case, Ps. 2:5, where the composite phrase *ḥārôn ’ap* is broken up into a parallel pair as suggested

20 Greenstein, *Grammatical Parallelism*, 97. An excellent parallel to our construction is CTA 17:6:26–28:

ī r š ḥ y m l a q h t ḡ z r	Ask for life, O Aqht the valiant,
ī r š ḥ y m w a t n k	Ask for life and I'll give it to you,
b l m t w a š l ḥ k	No-death and I'll bestow it on you.

As in Exod. 15:6–7a, the last words of the first line (*lAqht ḡzr*, YHWH *ne’dārî bakkō<sup>ā</sup>ḥ*) represent a vocative consisting of first the name of the addressee (*Aqht*, YHWH) and then an epithet referring to the addressee (*ḡzr*, *ne’dārî bakkō<sup>ā</sup>ḥ*). The only major difference is that the addressee in Exod. 15:6–7a, YHWH, is also one of the first two words in the first line, and must therefore be repeated initially in the second line (see Greenstein, *Grammatical Parallelism*, 97), while in CTA 17:6:26–28, this is not the case.

21 Note that this conclusion was already reached by Loewenstamm in 1969 on the basis of somewhat similar reasoning. However, Loewenstamm did not recognize that Exod. 15:6–7a is an example of three-line staircase parallelism. See Loewenstamm, *Expanded Colon*, 187, 192.

22 See most recently Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 129, n. 61. Contrast Loewenstamm, *Expanded Colon*, 187, who translates “glorious in holiness.” Since the root *’dr* in Early Israelite Poetry always refers to ‘physical strength’ (see above, n. 10), it is difficult to see how *qdš* ‘holiness’ could be related to it in this phrase. Understanding *qdš* as a collective meaning ‘holy ones’ solves the problem and provides a parallel to *bā’ēlîm* ‘among the holy ones’ in the first line. For other cases of *nōrā’* ‘awe-inspiring’ together with words denoting physical strength, see e.g., Ps. 66:3; 145:6 (note also e.g., Ps. 78:4).

23 The general meaning of the parallelism in Exod. 15:8bc is quite clear whatever the exact meanings of the substantive *nēd* and the verb *qāpā’*. On the latter, there is a longstanding controversy between Cross and Childs. See most recently and for previous bibliography Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 128–29, n. 59; Childs, *Exodus*, 243. It is difficult to assume that Exod. 15:8bc is not the source (or one of the sources) of Exod. 14:22, 29 (see also n. 29 below).

24 For the breaking up of composite phrases in the Bible and Ugaritic, see E. Z. Melamed, “Break-up of Stereotype Phrases as an Artistic Device in Biblical Poetry,” *Studies in the Bible* (Jerusalem, 1961), 115–53 (Biblical examples only); M. Dahood, “The Breakup of Stereotyped Phrases: Some New Examples,” *JANES* 5 (1973), 83–89 with additional bibliography on page 83, n. 1 (Biblical and Ugaritic examples).

25 Exod. 32:12; Num. 25:4; 32:14; Deut. 13:18; Josh. 7:26; 1 Sam. 28:18; 2 Kings 23:26; Isa. 13:9, 13; Jer. 4:8, 26; 12:13; 25:37, 38; 30:24; 49:37; 51:45; Hos. 11:9; Jonah 3:9; Nahum 1:6; Zeph. 2:2; 3:8; Ps. 69:25; 78:49; 85:4; Job 20:23; Lam. 1:12; 4:11; Ezra 10:14; 2 Chron. 28:11, 13; 29:10; 30:8.

26 The eight occurrences are Exod. 15:7; Jer. 25:38; Ezek. 7:12, 14; Ps. 2:5; 58:10; 88:17; Neh. 13:18. For Exod. 15:7 and Ps. 2:5, see above. In Jer. 25:38, *ḥrwn ḥywnb* must surely be an error for *ḥrb ḥywnb* ‘the oppressive sword’ (see Jer. 46:16; 50:16). In Ezek. 7:12, 14, *ḥārôn/ḥārônî* appears in an awkward phrase which is missing in the Septuagint, and which occurs with *ḥ<sup>ā</sup>zôn* ‘vision’ instead of *ḥārôn* (together with some other changes) in Ezek. 7:13. The latter is also omitted from the Septuagint (see BHS 9, 10). Ps. 58:10 is

above.<sup>27</sup> The term *rû<sup>ah</sup>* 'appekā 'the wind of your fury' in 8a must then be understood as a *double entendre*. It must be seen as both a manifestation of God's fury and as a physical weapon.<sup>28</sup> Thus, in verses 6–8, God's miraculous strength is responsible for two distinct but nevertheless interrelated events—the destruction of Israel's enemies and the parting of the sea which is a prelude to the redemption.<sup>29</sup> In 6–7a, only the former is mentioned; in 7b–8a, which is transitional, both are mentioned; while only the latter is referred to in 8bc.

Thus, if the contention in this paper is correct, there are at least two cases of three-line staircase parallelism in the Song of the Sea (verses 6–7a, 11) and at most one case of two-line climactic parallelism.<sup>30</sup> While there is presently no consensus among scholars concerning the poetic structure of this poem,<sup>31</sup> it is hoped that this study will help contribute towards limiting the number of realistic possibilities.<sup>32</sup>

one of the most corrupt verses in the Hebrew Bible and surely the term *h<sup>a</sup>rôn* cannot be original there (see e.g. M. Dahood, *Psalms II* [New York, 1968], 62: "The Hebrew of this verse is unintelligible to me").

27 Note the somewhat similar case in Hab. 3:8. See the reconstruction of Albright, *The Psalm of Habakkuk*, 11, 12, 15, and most recently Greenstein, *Grammatical Parallelism*, 105, n. 80 with previous bibliography.

28 See on this point Noth, *Exodus*, 124. For *rû<sup>ah</sup>* 'wind' as a physical weapon, see especially Exod. 15:10. Note also Exod. 14:21; Isa. 27:8; Jer. 18:17; Hos. 13:15; Ps. 48:8. For many extra-biblical parallels including Marduk's use of the wind as his weapon in Enūma Eliš IV, see Loewenstamm, *The Tradition of the Exodus*, 111 [in Hebrew], Note finally N. H. Tur-Sinai's brilliant emendation in Job 26:13 for which see Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job* (Jerusalem, 1967), 383–84, and most recently H. R. Cohen, *Biblical Hapax Legomena in the Light of Akkadian and Ugaritic* (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation: Columbia University, 1975), 118–20. For *rû<sup>ah</sup>* 'wind' as a manifestation of God's anger, see especially Isa. 30:27–28; Eccl. 7:9. The same *double entendre* suggested here is present in both 2 Sam. 22:16 (= Ps. 18:16) and Job 4:9.

29 Cross' contention that "there is no suggestion in the poem of a splitting of the sea or of an east wind blowing the waters back so that the Israelites can cross on a dry sea bottom or of the waters returning to overwhelm the Egyptians mired in the mud" is very difficult to accept in the light of Exod. 15:6–10, which at least alludes to these events; see most recently Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 131–32. Against Cross' view, see especially Loewenstamm, *The Tradition of the Exodus*, 117–18 [in Hebrew]. Note also the recent view of Childs who claims that "Ex. 15 reflects a poetic tradition of the event at the sea, which, although as old as that in the J account, has been transmitted within the larger framework of the exodus and conquest traditions;" see Childs, *Exodus*, 245.

30 Note that the one remaining case of two-line climactic parallelism in the Song of the Sea, verse 16cd, may possibly have been originally the first two lines of a third case of three-line staircase parallelism in this poem, namely verses 16cd–17a. While this case is by no means as clear as the one presented in the body of this study, it remains an interesting possibility which requires further research. The two major issues which should be investigated are:

(1) *The position of verse 17a*. Does 17a belong with 17bc as in the Masoretic Text or would it be better understood as the last line of 16cd–17a (the very clear parallelism of 17b // 17c should be taken into consideration here)?

(2) *The usage of the verb 'ābār 'to pass by/over'*. Must there be some specific indication of what is being crossed and/or the ultimate destination or goal when the verb 'ābār 'to pass by/over' is used in contexts such as the present one?

31 See the chart compiled by G. W. Coats, "The Song of the Sea," *CBQ* 31 (1969), 2 n. 9. Add the most recent attempt by F. M. Cross. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 126.

32 Contrast the nihilistic approach of S. Mowinckel concerning three line staircase parallelism generally and in the Song of the Sea specifically; see S. Mowinckel, *Real and Apparent Tricola in Hebrew Psalm Poetry* (Oslo, 1957), especially 96–97.