

# The Compositional Structure of the Psalter

## A New Approach

### Contents

Time for a new approach	1
Examples of Ordered Compositions in terms of verselines	4
The Use of 7 and 11 as Ordering Principles to Shape the Psalter	5
The Psalter in Terms of Author-Related Psalms	7
The Compositional Structure of Book I, Psalms 1-41	8
The Compositional Structure of Book II, Psalms 42-72	14
The Compositional Structure of Book III, Psalms 73-89	17
The Compositional Structure of Book IV, Psalms 90-106	18
The Compositional Structure of Book Va, Psalms 107-119	19
The Compositional Structure of Book Vb, Psalms 120-150	22
Conclusions	25
The Formation of the Psalter as a Linear Compositional Process	25
Table 1: The Numerical Features of the Five Books	26
Table 2: The Psalter as a Whole in Terms of Verselines	27
Select General Bibliography	28

### Time for a new approach

Having completed my investigation of the numerical features of the individual psalms, the time has come for an appraisal of its meaning and implications for the compositional structure of the Psalter as a whole, its five books and their sub-groups. My conclusion is that the view of the Psalter as a conglomerate of individual psalms and groups of psalms originating from different hands and times should definitely be abandoned. Recent study of the rhetorical features of the psalms in the five books of the Psalter by Pieter van der Lugt,<sup>1</sup> and my research into their numerical features show that the book of Psalms is a literary composition of the highest order.

The redactors behind this composite work were not merely collectors, but editors who compiled the five books on the basis of existing author-related collections, which were supplemented with various 'nameless' psalms. This compiling was executed according to specific ordering principles, which have up till now not been identified. Since the traditional approach to the problem of the organic arrangement of the psalms, which was primarily based on content and subjective form-critical considerations, have by now proved their limited virtue, there is a need for a fresh approach and for new criteria to test our views on the arrangement of the psalms and the architecture of the Psalter.

To my knowledge, the German scholar F.B. Koester was the first in modern times to explicitly address the problem of the arrangement of the psalms. In his view, the present arrangement of the psalms should not be regarded as "ein Werk des Zufalls, sondern nach einer gewissen Planmässigkeit gemacht seyn werde."<sup>2</sup> Nineteenth century commentators such as E.W. Hengstenberg (1845), J.J. Stähelin (1859) and F. Hitzig (1863, 1865) paid some attention to the problem, but it was Franz Delitzsch

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<sup>1</sup> Pieter van der Lugt, *Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry, with Special Reference to the First Book of the Psalter*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2006. The second (on Psalms 42-89), *Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry II* (OTS 57), Brill, will appear in 2010. Volume 3 of this major Psalms Project is in the making.

<sup>2</sup> F.B. Koester, *Die Psalms nach ihrer strophischen Anordnung übersetzt*, 1837, p. X.

(1846) who wrote the first monograph on the subject.<sup>3</sup> During the next hundred years the majority of commentators were aware of the problem, but - with the exception of Benno Jacob (1896-98) and a few others<sup>4</sup> – they only mentioned it in a casual way, or played it down. The famous Dutch scholar B.D. Eerdmans (1947) even denied any deliberate arrangement, stating that “the Book of Psalms is a miscellaneous collection of all kinds of songs... various types of songs are heaped up in it higgledy-piggledy, like manuscripts in the corner of a Genizah.”<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps this negative attitude prompted the Dutch scholar C.Th. Niemeyer to address the problem anew in his dissertation under the direction of Th. C. Vriezen.<sup>6</sup> He argued that the psalms were consciously ordered on the basis of “authors’ names, names of God, sort of psalm, catchwords, material consonance, similar form, size, and alliteration” (p. 160). His book made little impact, not so much because it was written in Dutch but because the agenda of psalms research during the next forty years was dictated by Herman Gunkel’s *Gattungsforschung* and Sigmund Mowickel’s focus on the relation between the psalms and the cult. In search of the *Sitz im Leben* of individual psalms and their various categories, scholars grouped the psalms on the basis of *formgeschichtliche* considerations, strongly focussing on historical questions as to their provenance and their function in the cult. This means that the diachronic approach was given precedence over the synchronic study of the psalms which analyzes their structure and function as they relate to their literary context.

This situation only changed decisively after the publication of Gerald H. Wilson’s landmark dissertation, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, in 1985.<sup>7</sup> Wilson was the one who put the synchronic approach definitively on the agenda. Different from earlier investigations of the *Sitz im Leben* of the psalms, scholars came to focus more specifically on the *Sitz im Psalter* of the individual psalms and groups of psalms. This fundamental change in approach may be deemed a paradigm shift, in the words of Matthias Millard, a shift “von der Psalmsexegese zur Psalterexegese” based on the supposition that the book of Psalms is a deliberately devised literary composition with a carefully designed structure.

Wilson argued that the book of Psalms should be regarded as “a finished product, an ordered publication bearing the fingerprints of deliberate editorial arrangement throughout” - to use the words of David C. Mitchell in his appraisal and discussion of Wilson’s work.<sup>8</sup> I concur with Mitchell’s statement about the recent growing consensus among scholars “that the Psalms were redacted around a purposefully developing sequence of ideas. Instead of a jumble of unrelated lyrics, they became instead an oratorio, forming together a literary context for their mutual interpretation.”

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<sup>3</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Symbolae ad Psalmos illustrandos isagogicae*, Leipzig, 1846.

<sup>4</sup> B. Jacob, “Beiträge zu einer Einleitung in die Psalms”, *ZAW* 16-18 (1896-1898).

<sup>5</sup> B.D. Eerdmans, *The Book of Psalms (OTS 4)*, 1947, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> C. Th. Niemeyer, *Het probleem van de rangschikking der psalms*, Leiden 1950. He offers a comprehensive overview of the way older commentators treated the problem.

<sup>7</sup> G.H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter (SBL.DS 76)*, Chico 1985. See also his earlier article “Evidence of Editorial Divisions in the Hebrew Psalter”, *VT* 34 (1984), 337-352, and “The Shape of the Book of Psalms”, *Int.* 46 (1992), 129-142.

<sup>8</sup> Zie David C. Mitchell, ‘Lord, remember David: G.H. Wilson and the Message of the Psalter’, *VT* 56 (2006), 526-548.

This growing awareness that the book of Psalms is not a conglomerate of individual hymns but an *ordered* compilation, was without doubt a great step forward, albeit that the exact nature of the underlying ordering principles still remained unclear.<sup>9</sup>

What we lacked up till now was indisputable *objective* criteria to retrieve the underlying ordering principles, but in what follows I shall demonstrate that there are indeed such criteria. Pieter van der Lugt's investigations and my own research have opened up new perspectives for our understanding of the compositional architecture of the book of Psalms. Starting from the supposition that the psalms are numerical compositions, we independently counted every possible compositional building block in the psalms: words before and after the *atnach*, words spoken about, to, and by God, words in other connections, Masoretic verses, poetic verselines and cola, strophes and cantos, the occurrences of the divine names and significant epitheta. In addition, Van der Lugt also registered noteworthy verbal repetitions and on my part I counted striking key-words, which appeared to have been woven like red threads into the texture of the compositions. This enabled us to access the *arcane* compositional techniques of the psalmists and the compilers of the Psalter which were only known to insiders.<sup>10</sup>

Our investigations added a new dimension to what we already knew, namely that the biblical authors and the compilers of the Psalter were skilled writers: *soferim* in the true sense of the word, *Schriftsteller*. For in biblical antiquity 'writing' was in fact 'compiling', 'composing', an activity in which counting was indispensable. Texts of any importance were not written in an off-the-cuff manner, but carefully composed as numerical compositions.<sup>11</sup> The same holds true for compilations such as the book of Proverbs and the Psalter, as I shall demonstrate presently.

In search of the underlying ordering principles, I tried to retrieve the *modus operandi* of the editors of the Psalter, working on the supposition that the five books are a compilation made by professional priestly guilds on the basis of older collections they had on hand: three (most probably Zadokite) collections of Davidic psalms, a collection of Korahite psalms and one of Asaphite psalms. At the same time, I ventured to reconstruct the older author-related collections to see how they were supplemented and adapted to function in their new context.

In my view, one can only imagine the compilation of the five books of the Psalter as an enterprise whereby the priestly guilds have decided to consolidate the existing collections into a new comprehensive composition. This joint project could only be realized in close cooperation and by negotiating about the form and content of the envisaged larger compilation. In this way, they started from one author-related collection after the other, and, while retaining the original headings, supplemented them with no less than 29 new, or extant, non author-related psalms, in order to attain their objective: the five books of the Psalter. In addition to the author-related

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<sup>9</sup> The following names should be mentioned with respect to this awareness: Michael D. Goulder, David C. Mitchell, D.M. Howard, J. Clinton McCann, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, Erich Zenger, Klaus Seybold, Matthias Millard, Christoph Rösel, G. Barbiero, Susan Gillingham and Pieter van der Lugt. The papers read at the Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense LVII (2008) will be published in 2010 under the title *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* in the Series *BETL*, Uitgeverij Peters, Leuven.

<sup>10</sup> I deliberately refrain from using the term *esoteric* because it suggests that there is something mysterious about the biblical texts, which is certainly not the case. We are faced with concrete compositional techniques.

<sup>11</sup> See also my article "Significant Compositional Techniques in the Psalms" in: *VT* 59/4 (2009), pp. 583-605.

collections, they also had on hand a collection of psalms about YHWH's kingship and an older collection of Psalms of Ascents.

## Examples of Ordered Compositions in Terms of Verselines

The collection of proverbs compiled by 'the men of King Hezekiah' can serve as a simple example illustrating the modus operandi of compilers. In Prov. 25:1 we read:

בְּאֵלֶּה מִשְׁלֵי שְׁלֹמֹה אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱתִיקוּ אַנְשֵׁי הַזְּקֵנִים מִלְּדָוִד יְהוּדָה:

"These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of King Hezekiah... compiled."

These proverbs were obviously arranged in an ordered way and compiled so that they form a little pentateuch, which was carefully embedded in the book of Proverbs.<sup>12</sup>

1.	Chapter 25	<b>27</b> verselines
2.	Chapter 26	28 verselines
3.	<b>Chapter 27</b>	<b>27</b> verselines
4.	Chapter 28	28 verselines
5.	Chapter 29	<b>27</b> verselines

It appears that the pentateuch pattern was consciously structured according to an alternating pattern: a.b.a'.b'.a', strictly determined by the number of verselines.

According to Pieter van der Lugt, *Rhetorical Criticism & the Poetry of the Book of Job* (OTS 23), 1995, p. 518, such a pentateuch model with an alternating pattern is also to be found in Job 3-12:

Job 3-4	44 verselines
Job 5-6	56 verselines
Job 7-8	44 verselines
Job 9-10	56 verselines
Job 11-12	44 verselines.

In accordance with what we have discovered in our analyses of the psalms, the verseline was by far the most important building block, as illustrated, e.g., by a magnificent specimen of a large-scale composition structured by its number of verselines, **Psalm 119** with **176** verselines, arranged in **22** canticles of **8** verselines. This alphabetic acrostic is made up of **7** cantica in a menorah pattern, with the 32-verseline Canticum IV (vs. 73-104) at the centre flanked by **3** arms of 24 (3 x 8) verselines each:

Canticum I	119:1-24	9 {	3 canticles	24 verselines	(Aleph to Gimel)	} 72
Canticum II	119:25-48		3 canticles	24 verselines	(Dalet to Waw)	
Canticum III	119:49-72		3 canticles	24 verselines	(Zajin to Teth)	
<b>Canticum IV</b>	<b>119:73-104</b>		<b>4 canticles</b>	<b>32 verselines</b>	(Yod, Kaph, Lamed, Mem)	
Canticum V	119:105-128	9 {	3 canticles	24 verselines	(Nun to `ayin)	} 72
Canticum VI	119:129-152		3 canticles	24 verselines	(Peh to Qoph)	
Canticum VII	119:153-176		3 canticles	24 verselines	(Resh to Taw)	

In his study on the book of Job (pp. 517-536), Van der Lugt also discovered an important technique used by the biblical writers to round off and 'finalize' their

<sup>12</sup> This collection was integrated into the book of Proverbs by means a well-established literary technique: the use of **7** instances of a key-word, in this case, עָרוּם, 'shrewd', of which the **7th** instance is to be found in this collection as the climax, in 27:12 (12:16.23; 13:16; 14:8.15; 22:3; **27:12**). On the level of poetic verselines, verse 12 constitutes the mathematical centre of Proverbs 25-29: 137 = **68** + 1 + **68** (**68** = 4 x **17**).

compositions: by ‘sealing’ them with a specific number of verselines. Psalm 119 may be regarded as a specimen of such a ‘sealed’ composition, which also holds true for the other alphabetic acrostics.

Van der Lugt has convincingly shown that the author of the book of Job ‘finalized’ the three speech cycles by ‘sealing’ each of them with exactly **270** verselines.<sup>13</sup>

Job 4-14	First Speech Cycle:	<b>11</b> speeches	<b>270</b> verselines
Job 15-26	Second Speech Cycle:	<b>11</b> speeches	<b>270</b> verselines
Job 27-31 & 38-41	Third Speech Cycle:	<b>8</b> speeches	<b>270</b> verselines. <sup>14</sup>

He rightly concluded that we can use this compositional technique as a criterion to check the correctness of our delimitation of literary units: “The equal number of poetical lines in cycles I, II and III is a strong argument in favour of the *demarcation* of these units proposed in this study on the structure of the book of Job.” (p. 536)

Since we consistently counted the number of verselines in the psalms, we could find out how, and to what extent, the compilers of the psalms used this particular compositional technique to shape and finalize or ‘canonize’ the five books and their sub-groups. Our investigations confirmed the supposition that the compilers used well-established numerical ordering principles to shape the five books and employed a specific number of verselines to finalize them.

## The Use of 7 and 11 as Ordering Principles to Shape the Psalter

Having studied the psalms from the perspective of their numerical features Van der Lugt and I found that the compilers/editors of the psalms used the numbers **7** (the number of fullness) and **11** (the number of fulfilment and completion) as ordering principles to shape the sub-groups within the five books and the books themselves. This enabled us to trace and define *eight* sub-groups of **7** and *six* sub-groups of **11** psalms. Considering them reliable building blocks, we could lay bare the compositional architecture of the Psalter in all its profound simplicity.

Moreover, we discovered that the compilers/editors *finalized* and *sealed* the sub-groups and books with minute care by means of a specific number of verselines which are determined by the divine name numbers **17** and **26** and their multiples in much the same way as the **270** verselines seal the speech cycles in the book of Job. In sum, we have adduced sufficient evidence to prove beyond reasonable doubt that the order and arrangement of the psalms are the result of purposeful editorial and compositional activities, which are to a great extent based on *numerical thinking*. Since all biblical scholars are aware of the innumerable occurrences of the number **7** in the Bible, I shall briefly discuss the use of the lesser-known number **11**.

In the table below the reader will find examples from outside the Book of Psalms illustrating that not only **7** but also **11** was a well-established scribal tool for ordering purposes.

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that the Babylonian Theodicy consists of **27** strophes of **11** verselines each, and the question is whether this is simply a matter of coincidence, which I think it is not. See B. Landsberger, “Die babylonische Theodizee”, *ZA*, NF Band 9 (1936), 32-76.

<sup>14</sup> Pieter van der Lugt, *Rhetorical Criticism & the Poetry of the Book of Job* (OTS 23), E.J. Brill, 1995, 517-536. See also his article “Speech-Cycles in the Book of Job: A Response to James E. Patrick”, *VT* 56 (2006), 554-557, and *Cantos and Strophes in Biblical Hebrew Poetry, with Special Reference to the First Book of the Psalter*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2006.

## Examples of the Use of 11 as Ordering Principle Outside the Psalter

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>7+4</b>	Genesis 1-2	Genesis 3-4	Genesis 6-11	Monologues	Deut. 1-4	Dtr History
1	Gen. 1:3	Gen. 3:9	Gen. 6:3	Gen. 1:26	1:1-5	Genesis
2	Gen. 1:6	Gen. 3:11	Gen. 6:7	Gen. 2:18	1:6-18	Exodus
3	Gen. 1:9	Gen. 3:13	Gen. 6:13	Gen. 3:22	1:19-2:1	Leviticus
4	Gen. 1:11	Gen. 3:14	Gen. 7:1	Gen. 6:3	2:2-15	Numbers
5	Gen. 1:14	Gen. 3:16	Gen. 8:15	Gen. 6:7	2:16-25	Deuteronomy
6	Gen. 1:20	Gen. 3:17	Gen. 8:21	Gen. 8:21-22	2:26-37	Joshua
7	Gen. 1:24	Gen. 3:22	Gen. 9:1	Gen. 11:6-7	3:1-10	Judges
8	Gen. 1:26	Gen. 4:6	Gen. 9:8	Gen. 18:17-19	3:11-17	1 Samuel
9	Gen. 1:28	Gen. 4:9	Gen. 9:12	Exod. 3:17	3:18-22	2 Samuel
10	Gen. 1:29	Gen. 4:10	Gen. 9:17	Exod. 13:17	3:23-29	1 Kings
11	Gen. 2:18	Gen. 4:15	Gen. 11:6	Deut. 32:20-27	4:44-49	2 Kings

	7	8	9	10	11
<b>7+4</b>	Gen. Toledoth	Gen. 5:1-32	Gen. 11:10-27	Ruth 4:12-22	Matthew 1:3-6 <sup>15</sup>
1	2:4 H & Earth	Adam	Shem	Tamar	Judah
2	5:1 Adam	Seth	Arpaxad	Perez	Perez by Tamar
3	6:9 Noah	Enosh	Shelah	Hezron	Hezron
4	10:1 N's Sons	Kenan	Eber	Ram	Ram
5	11:10 Shem	Mahalalel	Peleg	Amminadab	Amminadab
6	11:27 Terah	Jared	Reu	Nahshon	Nahshon
7	25:12 Ishmael	Enoch	Serug	Salmon	Salmon
8	25:19 Isaac	Methuselah	Nahor	Boaz	Boaz
9	36:1 Esau	Lamech	Terah	Obed	Obed by Ruth
10	36:9 Edom	Noah	Abram, Haran	Jesse	Jesse
11	37:2 Jacob	Shem	Lot	David	David

The number **11** appears mostly in the pattern  $11 = 7 + 4$ , because it derives its symbolical significance from the fact that it is a combination of **7** (the number of fullness) and **4** (the four quarters of the world).<sup>16</sup>

Being *odd* numbers, **7** and **11** have the advantage of having a *pivot* and the ability to make the *middle* of a series or string a strong focus of attention. This enabled a composer to give pride of place to a key-idea or key-text at the arithmetic centre of his composition or in the middle of a series of **7** or **11**.

The insight that the psalms are numerical compositions necessarily led to a new approach to the compositional structure of the book of Psalms. In a paper read at the CBL conference in August 2008 in Louvain, I presented my view on the architecture of the book of Psalms, arguing that its component parts were shaped by numerical considerations and 'sealed' in terms of verselines by means of the divine name numbers **17** and **26**.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Worth noting is that the ancestry of Jesus in Luke 3:23-38 comprises exactly **77** names, which are arranged in **11** groups of **7** names, with important names/figures at the seams: **Jesus, Joseph II, Mattathias, Shealtiel, Joshua, Joseph III, David, Abraham, Shelah, Enoch, Adam.**

<sup>16</sup> For the close relationship between **7** and **11** and their use for structuring purposes, see my book *Numerical Secrets of the Bible*, pp. 26-74.

<sup>17</sup> Casper J. Labuschagne, "Significant Sub-Groups in the Book of Psalms", in: *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* (BETL), Leuven, 2010.

Let us now, in light of these insights, ferret out the compositional structure of the five books of the Psalter and try to fathom the way in which the compilers arrived at the final form of the book. I shall also attempt to reconstruct the underlying older author-related collections in order to see how they came to function in a new literary context.

In the final form of the Psalter the author-related psalms and the ‘nameless’ ones appear in the new context in a *fragmented* form, as a kind of mosaic. In order to reconstruct the older author-related collections of concatenating psalms, the mosaicked psalms should be *defragmented* – in much the same way as we defragment the files on the hard disc of our computers.

To this end, it will be helpful to have a clear view of the book of Psalms in terms of the author-related psalms. Here is an overview:

## The Psalter in Terms of Author-Related Psalms

Arranged in sub-groups (to be discussed later in more detail)

David Nameless Korah Asaph Solomon Ethan Moses YHWH’s Kingship Songs of Ascents

### Book I

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8  
 9-10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18  
 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31  
 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41

### Book II

42-43 44 45 46 47 48 49 + 50  
 51 52 53 54 55 56 57  
 58 59 60 61 62 63 64  
 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72

### Book III

73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83  
 84 85 86 87 88 89

### Book IV

90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100  
 101 102 103 104 105 106

### Book V

107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119  
 120 121 122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134  
 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145  
 146 147 148 149 150

In **Book I** there are **3** nameless, non author-related psalms (**1**, **2**, and **33**) among the Davidic psalms. The precise number of Davidic psalms is not certain because two are clearly composed of two originally distinct psalms: **Psalms 7**, which consists of 7:2-9a and 7:9b-18, and **Psalms 40**, which is a combination of 40:2-13 and 40:14-18

(almost identical with 70).<sup>18</sup> This means that **7** and **40** can either be counted as one or as two, as I shall demonstrate below. **Psalm 9+10**, however, is a different case. In the Masoretic tradition it has in the course of time been regarded as two distinct psalms, but in the LXX it appears as a single composition. Being an alphabetic acrostic, it is without any doubt a compositional unity, which is strongly underpinned by its numerical structure, as I have argued in my [logotechnical analysis](#).

In **Book II** only **7** of the altogether **12** Korahite psalms are to be found, followed by a solitary Asaphite psalm (**50**). Among the **18** Davidic psalms we find **3** nameless psalms (**66**, **67**, and **71**) and the solitary Solomonic **Psalm 72**.

**Book III** contains the remaining **11** Asaphite psalms (**73-83**), a solitary Davidic psalm (**86**) surrounded by the remaining **4** Korahite psalms (**84**, **85**, and **87**, **88**) and **89**.

**Books IV** and **V** contain the remaining **17** Davidic psalms in a very fragmented form scattered over the two books.

## The Compositional Structure of Book I (Psalms 1-41)

The main component of Book I was an older collection of psalms ascribed to David and clearly labeled as such (3-41\*). Since **Psalms 1**, **2**, and **33** are not author-related, they did not belong to the older Davidic collection and should be considered new compositions used to shape the new book. This also holds true for **Psalm 9+10** and **Psalm 18**. They stand out in their present context because of their exceptional length (39 and 52 verses respectively), and did not, in my opinion, form part of the older collection. Moreover, **Psalm 18** is an adaptation of 2 Samuel 22, which the compilers used to underline the royal character of their new compilation and to provide support for the three other royal psalms, **2**, **20**, and **21**.

On the basis of the supposition that **Psalms 1**, **2**, **9+10**, **18**, and **33** did not belong to the original collection, we can reconstruct the one-time Davidic collection as follows:

### The One-time First Davidic Collection (without 1, 2, 9+10, 18, and 33)

<b>3</b> <b>4</b> <b>5</b> <b>6</b> <b>7<sup>2-9a</sup></b> <b>7<sup>9b-18</sup></b> <b>8</b>	7 psalms	69 verselines
<b>11</b> <b>12</b> <b>13</b> <b>14</b> <b>15</b> <b>16</b> <b>17</b>	7 psalms	64
<b>19</b> <b>20</b> <b>21</b> <b>22</b> <b>23</b> <b>24</b> <b>25</b> <b>26</b> <b>27</b> <b>28</b> <b>29</b>	11 psalms	170 (10x17)
<b>30</b> <b>31</b> <b>32</b> <b>34</b> <b>35</b> <b>36</b> <b>37</b> <b>38</b> <b>39</b> <b>40</b> <b>41</b>	11 psalms	241
<b>36</b> Davidic psalms (including the doxology!) finalized with		<b>544 (32x17) verselines.</b>

The ordering of the 36 psalms is based on my analysis of Book I in its present form, which I shall discuss in detail below. The only additional supposition is that **Psalm 7** figured as two distinct psalms in the first sub-group of **7** in the older Davidic collection. The one-time collection consisted of two sub-groups of **7** and two sub-groups of **11** psalms and was neatly finalized with altogether **32 x 17** verselines.

Moreover, the first sub-group of **11** (**Psalms 19-29**, with Psalm 36 at the centre) was finalized with **10 x 17** verselines. The second sub-group of **11** (**Psalms 30-41**, with Psalm 36 at the centre) was rounded off by means of a doxology (41:14), the inclusion of which brings the total number of verselines to **32 x 17**. This warrants the conclusion that the doxology was not added at a later stage during the formation process of the Psalter, but was integral to the older collection. As I shall demonstrate further on, this also holds true for the other doxologies.

<sup>18</sup> See my analyses of [Psalm 7](#) and [Psalm 40](#).

Starting from the one-time Davidic collection, let us now examine the compositional structure of Book I of the Psalter and find out how it attained its present form.

The following overview speaks for itself, but I shall discuss it in detail presently.

1   2 3 4 5 6 7 8	8 (1+7) psalms,	87
9+10   11 12 13 14 15 16 17   18	9 (1+7+1) psalms,	156 (6x26)
19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29	11 psalms,	170 (10x17)
30 31	2 psalms with a bridge function	41
32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 <sup>2-13</sup> 40 <sup>14-18</sup> 41	11 psalms,	222 / 221 (13x17).
<i>Excluding</i> the doxology, 675 verselines, but <i>including</i> it,		676 (26x26).
YHWH occurs 272x (16x17); Elohim only 45x.		

In connection with **Psalm 7** and **Psalm 40**, the only difference between the older collection and Book I is that **Psalm 7** is here regarded as a single composition while **Psalm 40** appears as two distinct psalms. This supposition lies at the base of the first sub-group of 7 (**Psalms 2-8**) and the last sub-group of 11 (**Psalms 32-41**).

With the one-time Davidic collection at their disposal, the compilers decided to use it as the main component of the new book they had in mind, which should have a comparable structure but a more pronounced character: David as the monarch elected by God as his earthly representative (Psalm 2) and the ideal king who lives according to the precepts of the law (Psalm 1). To this end, they composed **Psalm 1** (or ordered it to be composed) as the introduction to Book I to set the tone for the entire book.

## Psalm 1, the Corner Psalm of, and the Introduction to, Book I

Structurally **Psalm 1** functions as a corner psalm, with **Psalm 41** as its opposite. In my view, it was consciously composed in view of Psalm 41 and to form an inclusion with it, because it is not a matter of chance that it begins in exactly the same way as Psalm 41 with the key-word אֲשֶׁר־י, 'happy'. In fact, this underscores and reinforces their inclusion function. Therefore, I consider it out of the question that Psalm 1 has only at a later stage been positioned in Book I, as many commentators still believe. On the contrary, it was from the very beginning part and parcel of Book I.

In his article "The Shape of Book I of the Psalter and the Shape of Human Happiness", J. Clinton McCann has argued convincingly on the basis of the use of this key-word that Book I constitutes a well-planned compositional unity.<sup>19</sup>

Crucial to our understanding of Book I is that we have to keep in mind that it constitutes a *Davidic* Psalter in which David is the principal personage. This means that *all* psalms in the corpus are to be understood as having him in mind. Therefore, when **Psalm 1** speaks about the person whose "delight is in the law of YHWH, his meditation day and night" (v. 2), this person is of course in the first place everybody who lives according to the precepts of the law, but by implication this person is the Davidic king, represented by David.

<sup>19</sup> "The Shape of Book I of the Psalter and the Shape of Human Happiness", in: Peter W. Flint & Patrick D. Miller (eds), *The Book of Psalms*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2005, pp. 340-348. This key-word occurs exactly 26x in the Psalter: 13x in Psalms 1-89 and 13x in 90-150. See Observation 3 in my analysis of [Psalm 1](#).

He is implicitly presented here as a king “whose delight is in the law of YHWH,” who sets an example to all. He is the ideal ruler who conforms to the injunction given to the king in Deut. 17:18-19

“...he is to have it (a copy of the law) by him and read from it all his life, so that he may learn to fear YHWH his God and keep all the words of this law and observe these statutes.”

King David is presented as the leader who follows in the footsteps of the great leader Joshua who is instructed by YHWH in Joshua 1:7-8

“Only be very strong and resolute. Observe diligently all the law, which my servant Moses has given you.... This book of the law must never be off your lips; you must keep it in mind day and night so that you may diligently observe everything that is written in it.”

King David is presented as the man who had done what he instructed his successor Solomon to do, according to 1 Kings 2:2-4 (compare 1 Chronicles 28:8-10):

“...Be strong and show yourself a man. Fulfil your duty to YHWH your God conform to his ways, observe his statutes and his commandments, his judgements and his solemn precepts, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in whatever you do and whichever way you turn, and that YHWH may fulfil his promise that he made about me.”

In this respect, David is the archetype of the ideal Israelite king, the famous predecessor of both Hezekiah and Josiah, each of whom “followed in the footsteps of his father David” (compare 2 Kings 18:3 and 2 Kings 22:3).

If we read the psalms of Book I and the other Books from this perspective, the leading themes in the utterances on Davidic kingship emerge: king David’s election and his universal rule and that of his dynasty (Psalms 2, 72, 89, 110 and 132). The same holds true for the theme of his firm belief - under the most adverse circumstances - in YHWH’s protection and deliverance from enemies, which we find throughout the Davidic psalms. In Book I, this theme is to be found particularly in the sub-groups Psalms 2-8 and Psalms 9-18, to begin with in Psalm 3, the first psalm attributed to David.

Another leading theme already present in Book I is the Torah (Psalms 1 and 19!) and YHWH’s earthly abode (Psalm 24!), his universal presence and universal rule, to be found particularly in Psalms 19-29 – see below. The latter theme reaches a climax in Book II, in the psalms praising YHWH’s incomparability (beginning in Psalms 35 and 40 in Book I, followed by Psalms 71 and 77 in Book II, Psalms 86 and 89 in Book III, and Psalm 113 in Book V) and in his judgement over the non-gods in Psalm 82 and especially in the psalms celebrating YHWH’s kingship (Psalms 93-99).

The combination of the Davidic Kingship and the Torah, already manifestly present in Book I, will become the dominant leading themes throughout the Psalter up to Psalm 119, one of the high points in the compositional process of the Psalter.

## **Psalm 2, the Overture to the Davidic Psalms**

The next step in the formation of Book I was the composition of **Psalm 2** as the introduction to the Davidic psalms. Its leading theme is the designation of the Davidic king by God as the earthly representative of his universal rule. In much the same way as Psalm 1 was composed as the corner psalm of Book I and geared to its opposite Psalm 41, **Psalm 2** was designed as the corner psalm of **Psalms 2-8**, with Psalm 8 as its counterpart in the first sub-group of 7 psalms. Psalm 2 with its leading theme of the universal rule of the Davidic king is clearly geared to **Psalm 8**, of which the leading theme is the universal rule of mankind and, by implication, that of the Davidic king. Taken at face value, **Psalm 8** is of course about a human being, who is called by God to rule on earth, despite the fact that he is a frail mortal:

“What is a frail mortal, that you should be mindful of him, a human being, that you should take notice of him?

Yet you have made him little less than a god, *crowning* his head with glory and honour.

You *make him master* over all that you have made, putting everything under his feet...”

By implication, however, the psalm is about the *crowning* of the Davidic king to rule the world. Despite his glorious call, he remains a frail mortal.

This view on the election of the king is perfectly in accordance with the view on the election of Israel in Deut. 7:6-7:

“You are a people holy to YHWH your God, and he has chosen you out of all peoples to be his special possession.

It was not because you were more numerous than any other nation that YHWH cared for you and chose you, for you were the smallest of all nations...”

Together with Psalm 2, Psalm 8 sets the Davidic psalms in a *universal* perspective, since it is concerned with Yahweh’s majesty and might and with a human being (*’enosh*) as his earthly representative (by implication the Davidic king!). Therefore, Psalms 2 and 8 are to be regarded as two *royal psalms* functioning as the corner psalms of the sub-group 2-8. There is a close connection between the two psalms in that Psalm 2 is about the *election* of the Davidic king (the ‘anointed’) by YHWH, the King of the world, and Psalm 8 on its part deals implicitly with his *crowning* and his *commission* to rule the world. The psalms in between, 3-7, all deal with the speaker’s firm belief in the unfailing deliverance, protection and blessing by YHWH. In this respect they prelude the next sub-group, Psalms 9-18. In fact, there is a close relationship between this sub-group (2-8) and the one that follows, Psalms 9-18.

At the mathematical centre of Psalms 2-8, **Psalm 5** is positioned, in which the king says (v. 8b, which is the middle colon of the psalm!):

“I will enter thy house, I will worship toward thy holy temple”.

This observation is of great importance in that the king’s entry into the temple clearly anticipates YHWH’s entrance into his holy abode as the King of Glory in **Psalm 24** (which constitutes the mathematical centre of Psalms 19-29! – See below).

### **Psalms 9+10 and 18, the Outer Corner Psalms of 11-17**

Having identified Psalms 2-8 as a coherent sub-group, **Psalm 9+10** must be the corner psalm of the next sub-group. In order to delimit this group, we have to locate its counterpart. In light of the demarcating function of the two royal psalms, 2 and 8, the royal **Psalm 18** is the most obvious candidate. The demarcating role of Psalm 9+10 and Psalm 18 is reinforced by the key-word Elyon occurring only in 9:3 and 18:14, where it functions as an inclusion.

As I have argued above, 9+10 and 18 did not belong to the one-time Davidic collection, therefore it stands to reason to conclude that they were inserted here to function as the corner psalms of a sub-group of *nine* psalms (1+7+1), encompassing and demarcating the original sub-group of seven, Psalms 11-17. In terms of content, these seven psalms are all about the firm trust of the psalmist (king David!) in YHWH’s deliverance from dangerous situations. In this respect, the two outer corner psalms dovetail perfectly with 11-17, **Psalm 9+10** being a passionate *prayer for deliverance*, while **Psalm 18** is a *song of thanksgiving for deliverance*. The fact that **Psalms 9-18** are made up of exactly **156** (6 x 26) verselines shows that this sub-group was rounded off and finalized as a finished compositional entity<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Independently, Van der Lugt and I counted the same number of verselines.

It is worth noting that **Psalms 1-18**, which constitute the first concatenated larger group, significantly comprise **17** psalms. This may simply be a matter of chance, but in my opinion it could be intentional, seeing that there are two other groups of **17**, namely in Book III and Book IV.

## **Psalms 19-29, the First Sub-Group of Eleven**

Since Psalms 9-18 have been identified as a distinct sub-group, it follows that there is a strong caesura after Psalm 18 and that **Psalm 19** must be the corner psalm of the next sub-group, which appears to be **Psalms 19-29**. The fact that this group consists of **11** psalms made up of exactly **170** verselines strongly suggests that it was consciously designed.

Since this supposition can be substantiated on solid grounds, P. Auffret's hypothesis that **15-24** constitute a compositional entity becomes highly questionable, if not totally mistaken, despite the fact that it was accepted as a certainty by almost all scholars.<sup>21</sup> Auffret's proposal is based on the assumption that **15** and **24** are corner psalms: Psalm 15 being a liturgy specifying the conditions for admission to the temple, and Psalm 24 as the liturgy for YHWH's entrance into his holy abode. However, this hypothesis is falsified by the new evidence, which has shown that Psalm 15 belongs to the preceding sub-group (**9-18**), and will show presently that Psalm 24 is part and parcel of the following sub-group (**19-29**), where it is positioned at the mathematical centre of the eleven psalms. In other words, Psalms 15-24 are overlapped by two manifestly stronger sub-groups: **9-18** and **19-29**.

Psalms **19** and **29**, which exhibit several common traits, demarcate the **11** psalms (19-29) as their corner psalms. Both psalms have as their leading theme the *universal presence* of YHWH. **Psalm 19** is particularly concerned with the Torah and clearly refers back to **Psalm 1**, the corner psalm of Book I. **Psalm 29**, in its turn, is very reminiscent of **Psalm 8**, the concluding corner psalm of Psalms 2-8. Moreover, it is important to note that **Psalm 24** explicitly deals with YHWH's *universal kingship*, and that it is positioned at the centre of this sub-group to constitute their central peak. In this respect, it corresponds to **Psalm 19** and **Psalm 29** at the beginning and end of the group, which is important evidence for the compositional unity of this sub-group.

Viewing Psalms 19-29 in a wider context, I discovered a remarkable parallelism between this sub-group and the first sub-group of seven, Psalms 2-8. While both corner psalms in 2-8 deal with the *universal rule of the Davidic king*, the corner psalms of 19-29 deal with the *universal rule of YHWH*. The striking correspondence also relates to the central psalms of both sub-groups: Psalm 5 and Psalm 24.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. P. Auffret, *La Sagesse a bati sa maison. Etudes de structures littéraires dans l'Ancien Testament et spécialement dans les Psaumes*, (OBO 49), Fribourg/Göttingen, 1982 ; E. Zenger, "Was wird anders bei kanonischer Psalmsauslegung", in: F.V. Reiterer (Hg.), *Ein Gott, eine Offenbarung* (FS N. Füglistner), Würzburg 1991, pp. 397-413; F.L. Hossfeld – E. Zenger, "Wer darf hinaufziehen zum Berg JHWHs?" Zur Redaktionsgeschichte und Theologie der Psalmsgruppe 15-24", in: G. Braulik (et. al. eds.), *Biblische Theologie und gesellschaftlicher Wandel*, (FS Norbert Lohfink), Herder: Freiburg – Basel – Wien, 1993, pp. 166-182; M. Millard, *Die Komposition des Psalters: Ein formgeschichtlicher Ansatz* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 9), Tübingen, 1994, pp. 24-27; P.D. Miller, "Kingship, Torah Obedience, and Prayer: The Theology of Psalms 15-24", in: *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology. Collected Essays* (JSOTS 267), Sheffield 2000, pp. 279-297, and G. Barbiero (cited in note 2), pp. 189-324. Lately defended by William P. Brown in his paper read in Louvain in 2008, "Here Comes the Sun!" The Metaphorical Theology of Psalms 15-24', in: *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* (BETL), Leuven, 2010.

In the middle colon of Psalm 5 (5:8) reference is made to *the king's entering the temple*, while Psalm 24 as a whole is about *YHWH's triumphant entrance* into his holy abode.

**Psalm 2**

(David's universal rule) (David's **entrance** in the temple)

**Psalm 5:8**

**Psalm 8**

(David's universal rule)

**Psalm 19**

(YHWH's universal rule) (YHWH's **entrance** in his city)

**Psalm 24**

**Psalm 29**

(YHWH's universal rule).

This parallelism may be considered additional evidence attesting to the compositional unity, not only of Psalms 2-8, but also that of Psalms 19-29.

In search of the next coherent group of psalms, which Van der Lugt and I found to be Psalms 32-41, we are faced with the status of **Psalms 30** and **31**. Neither of them seem to belong structurally to a sub-group, because Psalm 29 as a corner psalm marks the end of 19-29, and Psalm 32 marks, as we shall see, the beginning of the last sub-group of eleven in Book I. **Psalm 30**, 'A Song at the dedication of the temple', a psalm of thanksgiving for recovery after an illness, does not qualify for corner psalm, nor does it have a clear counterpart. **Psalm 31**, on the other hand, a personal lament, clearly anticipates the theme of Psalm 32: the happiness and joy of a person whose transgressions are forgiven. Therefore, it may be regarded as the prelude to Psalms 32-41. Whatever the case may be, in their present context they function as transitional psalms in much the same way as does Psalm 50 in Book II.

### **Psalms 32-41, the Second Sub-Group of Eleven**

**Psalm 32** can immediately be recognized as a corner psalm, with **Psalm 41** as its counterpart, which delimits the sub-group 32-41. Like Psalm 1, both psalms have the key-word אֲשֶׁר־י, 'happy', as their initial word (32:1 and 41:2), which occurs no less than 6 times in the sub-group (32:1; 32:2; 33:12; 34:9; 40:5 and 41:2).<sup>22</sup>

In their present form **Psalms 32-41** constitute a distinct Group of *Ten* Psalms, or - if we split Psalm 40 into two separate psalms – a Second Sub-group of *Eleven* Psalms. And this is probably what the compilers intended. Having relegated Psalms 30 and 31 to the role of transition psalms and recognizing Psalm 32 as the corner psalm of 32-41, the compilers inserted the nameless **Psalm 33** and counted Psalm 40 as two distinct psalms. In this way they achieved a sub-group of eleven, with the magnificent alphabetic acrostic Psalm 37 (42 verselines) at the mathematical centre.<sup>23</sup>

To crown it all, this sub-group has **221** (13 x 17) verselines, by which it was finalized and sealed.<sup>24</sup>

**Conclusion:** Book I is a well-planned and perfectly structured literary composition, which the compilers have finalized and canonized as a whole and sealed with the spectacular number of verselines: **676** (26 x 26), i.e., including the doxology already attached to Psalm 41 in the one-time Davidic collection. And, as if that was not enough, they made sure that the divine name occurs exactly **272** times (16 x 17).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Compare note 19 above.

<sup>23</sup> M. Millard, *Die Komposition des Psalters* (FAT 9), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994, pp. 138-140, also considers Psalms 32-41 a coherent cycle (contra Barbiero, p. 543 n. 1).

<sup>24</sup> Independently, Van der Lugt and I counted the same number of verselines (excluding the doxology).

<sup>25</sup> Franz Delitzsch was the first to draw attention to this significant feature. See note 3 above.

The results of my logotechnical quantitative structural analysis strongly suggest that Book I is a self-contained numerical composition, which stands on its own as a definitively finalized book. Being the Primary Davidic Psalter, there is every reason to regard it as the Mother Book, to which the other books were appended successively.

## The Compositional Structure of Book II (Psalms 42-72)

### The So-called Elohistic Psalter (42-83)

The hypothesis that **Psalms 42-83** constitute a distinct compositional entity is still accepted by many scholars as a fact.<sup>26</sup> Up till now, it was difficult to disprove this supposition, due to the lack of a clear perception of the compositional structure of Books II and III (Psalms 42-89). In my opinion, however, the time has come to falsify this hypothesis in light of a better understanding of the architecture of Psalms 42-89, because it is highly questionable whether such a compositional entity ever existed.

The supposition is based on the relatively great preference for the use of the divine designation Elohim in these psalms, and on the arrangement in which they now stand in their present context, comprising Book II (which is a mosaic of disparate psalms) and part of Book III (eleven Asaphite psalms). These considerations are too meagre to warrant the existence of this 'collection' as representing an earlier stage in the coming into being of the Psalter. Moreover, the presumed 'avoidance' of the divine name in the so-called Elohistic Psalms turns out to be much less rigorous than expected, with no less than **45** occurrences (**32x** in Book II and **13x** in Book IIIa, up to Psalm 83).<sup>27</sup>

The manner in which the divine name is used in these psalms should be attributed to the authors of the older collections: the Korahites (42-49), Asaphites (50 73-83), the authors responsible for the Davidic psalms (51-65, and 68-70), and the nameless psalms (66, 67, and 71), and not to the presumed author of a collection that never existed in its present form. It is only by reconstructing the one-time Korahite, Asaphite and Davidic collections, and then trying to retrieve the reasons behind *their* use of the divine name, that we can say anything that makes sense about the frequency in which the divine name occurs in these psalms. This means that the use of the divine name should be studied anew in light of the new insights into the compositional structure of Books II and III. This is, however, not the aim of the present investigation, which only intends to reconstruct the older Davidic, Korahite, and Asaphite collections, to come to a better understanding of the architecture of the Psalter.

Let me start with the reconstruction of the main component of Book II, the Davidic psalms. By defragmenting the psalms in Book II, we can remove the 7 Korahite Psalms (42-49), the lone Asaphite psalm (50) and the three non-author-related psalms (66, 67, and 71).

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<sup>26</sup> In 2005 once again defended by Claudia Süßenbach, *Der elohistische Psalter. Untersuchungen zu Komposition und Theologie von Ps 42-83*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005, and more recently by Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, "Der elohistische Psalter Ps 42-83. Entstehung und Programm", paper read in Louvain in 2008, in: *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* (BETL), Leuven, 2010. Like Süßenbach, Hossfeld considers it an older collection representing what he calls a 'Zwischenstadium in der Entstehung der Psalter'.

<sup>27</sup> See Table V in the Introduction to [Book II](#), and Table IX in that of [Book III](#). It is interesting to note that the divine name occurs **31x** in the rest of Book III (Psalms 84-89), and altogether **76x** (45 + 31) in Psalms 42-89!

Taking the editorial comment in 72:20, “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended”, as part and parcel of Psalm 72, necessarily implies that this psalm belonged to the older Davidic collection. In my opinion, it should certainly not be attributed to the compilers of Book II, but to the compiler of the one-time Davidic collection.

This is how the one-time Davidic Collection can be reconstructed:

### The One-Time Second Davidic Collection (51-65 + 68-70)

<b>51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65</b>	15 psalms	<b>208 (8x26)</b>
<b>68 69 70</b>	3 psalms	82
<b>72</b>	1 psalm of Solomon to round off ( <i>including</i> the doxology!)	22
In total <b>19</b> psalms, with Elohim <b>102x</b> (6x17) en JHWH 24x		<b>312 (12x26)</b> .

The **15** psalms in the first sub-group, sealed with 8 x **26** verselines, are arranged in the pattern **7 + 1 + 7** (to be found also in Psalm 92 and in the **15** Songs of Ascents), with **Psalm 58** at the centre. Together with the 3 Davidic and 1 Solomonic psalm, these **19** psalms constitute a consciously finalized collection, which was sealed with 12x**26** verselines and 6x**17** occurrences of the divine designation **Elohim**. The label “Elohistic Psalms” can rightly be attached to this older collection.

Compare the **26x26** verselines and the 16x**17** occurrences of **YHWH** in Book II!

Precisely as the doxology in 41:14, the doxology in 72:18-19 was integral to the older collection and should therefore not be attributed to the compilers of Book II.

They were supplemented with the three remaining Davidic psalms (68-70) and Psalm 72, which was attributed to Solomon for a specific reason: to make the Davidic dynasty a focus of attention.

The other component of Book II is the present group of **7** Korahite psalms (42-49), which comprise only seven of the original Korahite collection.

This is how the one-time Korahite collection can be reconstructed:

### The One-Time Korahite Collection (42-49 + 84, 85, 87, 88 + 89)

<b>42-43 44 45 46 47 48 49</b>	7 psalms	<b>119 (7x17)</b>
<b>84 85 + 87 88</b>	4 psalms	66
<b>89</b>	1 psalm of Ethan to round off ( <i>including</i> the doxology!)	53
In total <b>12</b> psalms, including Psalm 89		<b>238 (14x17)</b> .

Being labeled Ezraite *maskils*, Psalms **88** (Heman) and **89** (Ethan) belong together and simply cannot be separated. This means that Psalm 89 was part and parcel of the Korahite collection. This also holds true for the doxology attached to it, in line with what we found in the case of Psalm 41 and Psalm 72. It is important to keep this in mind when we explore the compositional structure of Book III.

Note that the **7** Korahite psalms are separately sealed with **119 (7x17)** verselines. Including the **4** remaining Korahite psalms (which are positioned in Book III) and Psalm 89, these **12** psalms were composed of **238 (14x17)** verselines. At the formation of Books II and III, the compilers broke this sealed collection open in order to realize their conception of the architecture of the two new books.

**This is the compositional structure of Book II:**

42-43 44 45 46 47 48 49	7 psalms of Korah	119 (7x17) +
50	1 psalm of Asaph with a bridge function	23 +
51 52 53 54 55 56 57	7 psalms of David	104 (4x26) +
58 59 60 61 62 63 64	7 psalms of David	88 +
65 66 67 68 69 70 71	7 'mixed' psalms	149 +
72	1 psalm of Solomon to round off ( <i>including</i> doxology)	22 = 505.

**Elohim** occurs 197x and **YHWH** 32x + YH 2x (Psalm 68) = **34x** (2x17).

No doubt Books II and III attained their present form as a result of negotiations between the Korahite and Asaphite priestly guilds. Accordingly, a sub-group of 7 Korahite psalms (42-49) would be given pride of place at the beginning of Book II, while 11 Asaphite psalms (73-83) would be positioned at the beginning of Book III. The remaining Asaphite **Psalm 50** would get a place in Book II as a buffer between the Korahite sub-group and the Davidic sub-groups, while the remaining Korahite psalms (84-85, 87, 88, and 89) would be positioned in Book III.

It is hard to tell whether it was the compilers of the Psalter who sealed the 7 Korahite psalms with **119** (7 x 17) verselines, because they could have already been sealed in the older Korahite collection.<sup>28</sup> Whatever the case may be, in their new context, as a sub-group of 7, they set the tone for the arrangement of the psalms in Book II on the basis of the number 7 as ordering principle.

In the One-time Davidic Collection, the 18 Davidic psalms were probably arranged in the pattern 15 + 3. The 15 psalms were divided into two sub-groups, each of which was sealed with **104** (4 x 26) verselines in the following way:

Psalms 51-57	7 psalms	<b>104</b> (4 x 26) verselines
Psalms 52-65	8 psalms	<b>104</b> (4 x 26) verselines. <sup>29</sup>

In their new context they were supplemented with 3 nameless psalms (66, 67 and 71) and arranged in three groups of 7 psalms to conform to the 7 Korahite psalms.

This group of 21 psalms (51-71) constituted a new compositional unity delineated by the Asaphite **Psalm 50** at the beginning and the Solomonic **Psalm 72** at the end, in much the same way as **Psalm 9+10** and **Psalm 18** encompass and delineate the sub-group of 7 (11-17) in Book I.

It is intriguing to note that the 18 Davidic psalms have altogether 290 verselines (NB **289** = 17x17!) and together with the 3 nameless psalms the 21 'mixed' psalms have 341 verselines (290 + 51 = 341; NB **340** = 20x17!). The 28 Korahite-Davidic-Nameless psalms have altogether 460 verselines (**119** + 290 + 51 = 460; NB **459** = 27x17!). I wonder whether I have counted an extra verseline. For particulars, see the overview at the end of this file.

In comparison with Books I, III, and IV, which have all been sealed with a number of verselines that are a multiple of one of the divine name numbers, Book II is an exception with its 505 verselines. The number of Masoretic verses, however, is a multiple of the divine name number **26** (**494** = 19x26)!

Finally, as noted above, the compilers maintained **Psalm 72**, a royal psalm attributed to Solomon (with **156** (6 x 26) words!) to round off the entire corpus of Book II. The editorial comment in 72:20 was also maintained, but now it relates to all the psalms in Books I and II (1-72).

<sup>28</sup> Pieter van der Lugt in a private communication.

<sup>29</sup> It is intriguing to note that the 15 Davidic Psalms in Book V are likewise made up of **208** verselines!

## The Compositional Structure of Book III (Psalms 73-89)

The main component of **Book III** is the sub-group of **11** Asaphite psalms, coming from an existing older collection of **12** Asaphite psalms, which had been finalized as a distinct compositional entity and sealed with **272** (16x17) verselines:

### The One-time Asaphite Collection (50 + 73-83)

**50** The precise positioning of Psalm 50 is unknown 23 +  
**73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83** in total **12** psalms 249 = **272** (16x17).

By removing **Psalm 50** from the older collection the compilers achieved a group of eleven psalms, primarily because the number **11** was a well-established ordering principle, but also because, being an *uneven* number, it has a natural mathematical centre to function as a focal point (**11** = 5+1+5). In this case, they positioned the magnificent *maskil* **Psalm 78** at the centre of the sub-group, a position it did not have in the original 12-psalm collection.

Taking the eleven selected Asaphite psalms as the basis for Book III, the compilers supplemented them with **6** psalms: the remaining **5** Korahite psalms (84, 85, 87, 88, and 89) and the solitary Davidic psalm (86). In this way they achieved in total **17** psalms, which was no doubt consciously intended. These psalms were obviously adapted so as to let them have altogether exactly **374** (22 x 17) verselines in order to seal the book as a distinct literary entity:

**73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83** 11 psalms of Asaph 249  
**84 85 86 87 88 89** 6 'mixed' psalms 125  
 In total, **17** psalms (*including* the doxology in 89:53) **374** (22x17).

Elohim 36x in 73-83, 7x in 84-89; YHWH 13x in 73-83, 31x in 84-89; JH (in 77:12).

The unity of the sub-group of **11** is reinforced by **7** instances of the key-word Elyon (73:11; 77:11; 78:17; **78:35**; 78:56; 82:6; 83:19) running like a red thread through the fabric of the text in the same way as the **7** instances of the name Moses in Book IV, and e.g., the **7** occurrences of the name YHWH in Psalm 92.

To crown it all, the middle occurrence of Elyon (**7** = 3 + 1 + 3) falls precisely in the middle verseline of the **77** verselines of **Psalm 78**, verse 35 (**77** = 38 + 1 + 38)!

What is most intriguing to note is that the Masoretes have marked in the margin of Codex L the middle of the Book of Psalms in terms of verses, after Ps. 78:35. It is, however not certain whether v. 35 (or 36) is indeed the middle verse of the Psalter.<sup>30</sup>

The key-word Elyon is the hallmark of the sub-group. This is not surprising, because the leading theme of the Asaphite psalms is the problem of divine justice and the mysterious rule of *the Most High*, over the world. The problem is most eloquently put on the agenda at the very beginning of the sub-group: "Is there knowledge in *the Most High*?" (**73:11**). The problem is put in a nutshell in **77:11b**: "Has the right hand of *the Most High* changed?" and ultimately resolved in the last verse (**83:19**), the prayer for the universal recognition of YHWH as '*the Most High over all the earth*'. I regard this as incontrovertible evidence of the sub-group's compositional unity. The remaining **6** psalms constitute a sub-group of their own, with the Ethanite *maskil*, Psalm 89, concluding the entire corpus.

<sup>30</sup> See note 2 in the [General Introduction](#) to Logotechnical Analysis.

The occurrence of a single Davidic psalm in Book III (Psalm 86) and 2 in Book IV (101 and 103) shows that the editors of the Psalter wanted to have at least one or two of this important category in each of the five books (**37** in Book I, **18** in Book II, **1** in Book III, and **17** in Books IV-V).

**Psalm 89**, the *maskil* of Ethan the Ezrahite, with its **52** verselines (53, including the doxology) had already been the conclusion to the One-Time Asaphite Collection, but now it functions as the grand finale of Book III.<sup>31</sup>

The fact that Book III has **17** psalms and that the Asaphite psalms occupy pride of place is no doubt something the Asaphites had insisted on in their negotiations with the Korahites. Given their manifest influence on the formation of Book III, it stands to reason that they had an important hand in the formation of Books IV and V as well, if not that of the entire Psalter. According to the book of Chronicles, Asaph, together with Ethan and Heman, was given charge by king David personally of 'the service of the song' (see 2 Chron. 6:24ff. (39ff.), 16:4-7; 25:1 and compare Ezra 3:10-11). The Asaphites were in all likelihood the authors of the book of Chronicles, so why couldn't they have played a leading role also in the formation of the Book of Psalms?

Recently, Susan Gillingham tentatively answered this question in the affirmative.<sup>32</sup>

## The Compositional Structure of Book IV (Psalms 90-106)

Book IV marks the beginning of the second half of the Psalter, for there is nowhere else in the book of Psalms a stronger caesura than the one between Psalm 89 and 90, i.e., between Book III and Book IV. Despite this, Book IV has been composed in such a way that it reflects a close connection between the two books. From a structural point of view, Book IV is an exact copy of Book III, consisting of **17** psalms arranged in the pattern **11 + 6**.

**90 91 92 | 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 | 100** 11 psalms 142

**101 102 103** 104 105 106 supplemented with **6** psalms 196

In total **17** psalms, including the doxology in 106:48 **338 (13x26)**

YHWH **104x** (4x**26**) YH 3x Elohim 19x El 6x Elyon 2x Adonay 2x Adon 1x

The compositional unity of the **17** psalms is reinforced by the **7** occurrences of the name Moses (90:1; 99:6; 103:7; 105:26; 106:16.23.32), in the same way as the keyword Elyon reinforces the unity of the Asaphite psalms in Book III. They are finalized as a distinct compositional entity by the doxology in 106:48 and sealed by the divine name number **26**, with a significant number of verselines, **338** (13 x **26**). Compare the **374** (22 x **17**) verselines of the **17** psalms in Book III.

The basic component of the sub-group of eleven (90-100) is the *seven* divine kingship psalms (93-99). They are bound together by their common leading theme: YHWH as King and Judge. From a structural point of view, Psalms 90-92 at the beginning and Psalm 100 at the end encompass the group of seven; in much the same way as Psalm 9+10 and Psalm 18 surround the seven psalms of 11-17. The concluding corner psalm, Psalm 100, is a psalm of thanksgiving, in my judgement, thanksgiving specifically for YHWH's rule in the world. This makes it a most fitting conclusion to the sub-group of **11** psalms.

<sup>31</sup> For particulars about the number of verselines, see the [Introduction to Book III](#).

<sup>32</sup> See her paper read in Louvain in 2008, "Temple Liturgy, Levitical Singers and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter," in: *The Composition of the Book of Psalms* (BETL), Leuven, 2010.

The compilers arranged the seven psalms in such a way that **Psalm 95** formed the pivot of the eleven psalms, in the same way as **Psalm 78** was positioned at the centre of the eleven Asaphite psalms. Note that Psalm 95 is made up of **11** verselines and that Psalm 78 has **7 x 11** verselines. For the central position of Psalm 95 and its significant numerical features, see my [analysis](#).

As in Book III, the sub-group of **11** is supplemented with a sub-group of **6** psalms, namely **2** Davidic psalms selected from a third older Davidic collection, 101 and 103, and **4** non author-related (new?) psalms, 102, 104, 105, and finally 106, which has a doxology attached to it. Including the doxology, Book IV has **338** (13 x **26**) verselines, which is a clear indication that it has been finalized and sealed. And once again, analogous to Book III, the sealing on verseline level is reinforced by the **104** (4 x **26**) occurrences of the divine name. Moreover, the significant number of Masoretic verses, **323** (19 x **17**), underlines the compositional unity of these **17** psalms:

Psalms 90-100	<b>11</b> psalms	<b>136</b> (8 x <b>17</b> ) verses
Psalms 101-106	<b>6</b> psalms	<b>187</b> ( <b>11</b> x <b>17</b> ) verses.

It is important to note that Book IV has an apparent open end. There is no clear break between 106 at the end of Book IV and 107 at the beginning of Book V, because 107 is very closely related to 105-106, all three being ‘episodic poems’, as I have shown in my [Analyses](#). This means that the seam between Book IV and Book V is rather artificial, in contrast to the strong caesura between Psalm 89 and 90, and between Psalm 119 and the Songs of Ascents.

This brings us to the compositional structure of Book V, which I shall discuss in two parts: **Book Va** (107-117) and **Book Vb** (118-150).

## The Compositional Structure of Book Va (Psalms 107-117)

<b>107 108 109 110</b> 111 112 <b>113</b> + 114 115 116 <b>117</b>	<b>11</b> psalms
Psalm 107-110 1 nameless and 3 Davidic, together	<b>4</b> psalms
Psalm 111-113 all 3 with <i>halleluyah</i> at the <i>beginning</i>	<b>3</b> psalms
Psalm 114-117 all 4 with <i>halleluyah</i> at the <i>end</i>	<b>4</b> psalms
A sub-group of <b>11</b> psalms, finalized and sealed with	<b>170</b> ( <b>10x17</b> ) verselines
<b>118 119</b> 2 psalms with a bridge function, with altogether	<b>205</b> verselines.

In search of the seams in order to delimit the various sub-groups in Book V, it was not difficult to identify the first major caesura, namely, after **Psalm 117**. This psalm stands out not only as being very short (2 verselines and 15 words), but also because it is a song of praise like Psalm 100, the corner psalm of the previous sub-group. **Psalm 117** is a typical *coda* and functions as the corner psalm at the end of the present sub-group of **11**. The use of a coda as a well-established device for conclusion is a compositional technique to be found in a great number of psalms.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, in my opinion, **Psalms 107-117** constitute a consciously designed compilation of **11** psalms, which has been finalized and sealed with 10x17 verselines.

This sub-group is in two parts: one of **7 psalms** (107-113), and one of **4** (114-117), in accordance with the 7 + 4 pattern. See my [Numerical Secrets of the Bible](#), pp. 56-67. The sub-group of **7** (107-113) can be outlined in a menorah pattern, with the royal **Psalm 110** at the centre, which stands out because of its unusual content and compositional structure, which is based on the royal inaugural ceremony.

<sup>33</sup> See the paragraph “The use of a coda as a device for conclusion” in [General Introduction](#).

It has been given pride of place here as an important link in the chain of royal psalms: 2, 8, 18, 20, 21, 72, 89, 110, and 132.

The following three psalms (111-113) share a strikingly similar structure and belong inseparably together – see the “Specific features” in my analyses of these psalms.

Additionally, they are all marked by the *hallelu-yah* at the *beginning*.

The *hallelu-yah* in MT at the *end* of Psalm 113 was probably removed from its place at the beginning of Psalm 114 (where it was positioned in LXX when 114 and 115 were combined to form a single psalm) and relocated to its present position at the end of 113, where it functions as a device for the conclusion of the sub-group of seven (107-113).

The sub-group of 4 psalms (114-117) constitutes the second part of the 7 + 4 pattern. Contrary to Psalms 111-113, which has *hallelu yah* (two separate words!) at the *beginning*, 114-117 has the *hallelu-yah* (two hyphenated words!) at the *end*:

Psalm 111	<i>hallelu yah</i> at the beginning
Psalm 112	<i>hallelu yah</i> at the beginning
Psalm 113	<i>hallelu yah</i> at the beginning
Psalm 114	<i>hallelu-yah</i> at the end
Psalm 115	<i>hallelu-yah</i> at the end
Psalm 116	<i>hallelu-yah</i> at the end
Psalm 117	<i>hallelu-yah</i> at the end.

The concluding function of *hallelu-yah* at the end of the last four psalms (114-117), rounding off the first sub-group of eleven in Book V, would then be strikingly analogous to the *hallelu-yahs* at the end of the last five psalms (146-150) rounding off the second sub-group of eleven (135-145). In the case of Psalms 146-150, the rounding off function of their *hallelu-yahs* is reinforced by their having *hallelu-yahs* at the beginning as well. For particulars see the Introduction to Book V, [Table XX](#).

If my delimitation of Psalm 107-117 is correct – and I have no reason whatsoever to be in doubt – it follows that the so-called Egyptian Hallel (**113-118**) has never existed as a consciously designed compositional entity. There is no evidence for considering Psalm 113 and Psalm 118 as the corner psalms of the presumed Hallel. Moreover, there is no caesura either between 112 and 113 or between 118 and 119 which could suggest that 113-118 constitute a deliberately designed compilation. As I have argued above, 113 is integral to 107-117, and as I shall show presently, 118 and 119 are inseparable twin psalms.

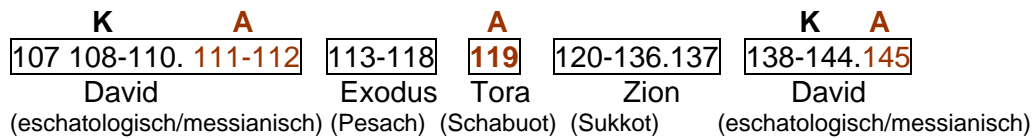
In my opinion, the six psalms of the so-called Egyptian Hallel were selected long after the coming into being of the Psalter. They were singled out in view of using them for the purpose of religious worship in the synagogue. Therefore, they should be regarded as a post-biblical *liturgical* selection and not as a *compositional* entity.

Psalms 107-117 are rightly considered a consciously designed compositional entity by R.G. Kratz (following G. H. Wilson),<sup>34</sup> taking these eleven psalms as constituting the first of the three segments of Psalms 107-145: 107-117 118-135 136-145, although I doubt whether there is a break between 135 and 136.

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<sup>34</sup> G.H. Wilson, a.w., en zie R.G. Kratz, “Die Tora Davids. Psalm 1 und die doxologische Fünfteilung des Psalters”, *ZThK* 93 (1996).

Erich Zenger, on the other hand, divides Psalms 107-145 into five segments, with Psalm 119 at the centre: <sup>35</sup>



**K** = Königpsalm and **A** = Akrostischer Psalm.

Misguided by the supposition that the Egyptian Hallel (113-118) constitutes a compositional entity, Zenger assumes that there is a caesura not only between 112 and 113 but also between the twin psalms 118 and 119. This makes his rather artificial structuring of the text highly improbable in comparison with the simple architecture presented here.

This brings us to the status of **Psalms 118** and **119**:

My logotechnical analysis of 118 and 119 has revealed that they form a closely connected pair, i.e., they are inseparable twin psalms. In fact, **118** may have been composed consciously in order to prelude on the alphabetic acrostic **119** in much the same way as **Psalm 33** preludes on the alphabetic acrostic **Psalm 34**. Moreover, 118 and 119 are not provided with *hallelu-yah* like the preceding psalms, and, unlike the following Songs of Ascents, they lack headings. Finally, they contain altogether exactly **52** (2 x **26**) occurrences of the divine name (46x YHWH and 6x YH), which strongly underscore their coherence.

In terms of verselines, 118 and 119 (29 + 176 = **205**) do not belong to the preceding finalized and sealed sub-group of eleven (107-117). <sup>36</sup> Neither do they belong structurally to the following Songs of Ascents, but as I shall argue below, they were *originally* part of a one-time collection of Songs of Ascents, where they functioned as the overture to that collection.

At the final stage of the formation of the Psalter, when the Songs of Ascents were added, 118 and 119 were positioned between the well-fixed cycles: 107-117 and 120-145, where they have an unmistakable bridge function, analogous to that of Psalms 30 and 31 in Book I and Psalm 50 in Book II. On the one hand, they served to conclude a larger corpus of **Psalms 1-119**, in which the two Torah Psalms, **1** and **119**, function as the corner psalms delimiting this corpus, and on the other hand, they continued their original function of introducing the Songs of Ascents.

<sup>35</sup> Erich Zenger, “Komposition und Theologie des 5. Psalmsbuchs” (BN 82, 1996), 97-116.

<sup>36</sup> Klaus Koch regards Psalm 119 as a ‘nachcompositionelle Zusatz’. See his contribution “Der Psalter und seine Redaktionsgeschichte”, in: K. Seybold / E. Zenger (Hrsg.), *Neue Wege der Psalmsforschung* (HBS 1), Freiburg, p. 255. In my opinion this holds true also for 118.

## The Compositional Structure of Book Vb (Psalms 120-150)

The basic components of Book Vb were, first, a smaller collection of Psalms of Ascents, and second, a number of Davidic psalms (138-145) belonging to a larger one-time Davidic collection, originally comprising 18 psalms. We can reconstruct both older collections by defragmenting the psalms of Books IV and V. Let us start with the one-time Davidic collection by bringing together the Davidic psalms scattered all over these two books, including the single Davidic psalm (86) to be found in Book III.

### The One-Time Third Davidic Collection (Altogether 18 Psalms)

<b>86</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>10 psalms</b>
17	14	22	13	30	8	10	9	5	4	132 verselines
4	2	11	1	7	3	3	4	2	1	38x YHWH
<b>138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145*</b>										<b>8 psalms</b>
10	23	13	12	11	17	20	22*			128* verselines <sup>37</sup>
6	3	7	3	3	4	4	10*			40x YHWH

The **18** Davidic psalms have **260** (10x26) verselines and the name YHWH occurs **78x** (3x26), which means that they constituted a finalized and sealed compilation, although we are completely in the dark as regards the order in which they were arranged, except for the **8** concatenated psalms (138-145) which may reflect their original order.

It is also not clear why the collection contained **18** psalms, which seems to have been intentional. Compare the **36** (2x18) psalms of the One-Time First Davidic Collection and the **18** Davidic psalms of the One-Time Second Davidic Collection:

One-Time First Davidic Collection	<b>36</b> (2 x <b>18</b> ) psalms	<b>32x17</b>
One-Time Second Davidic Collection	<b>18</b> psalms (+ 1 Solomonic)	<b>12x26</b>
One-Time Third Davidic Collection	<b>18</b> psalms	<b>10x26.</b>

### The One-Time Psalms of Ascents with 118-119 as Overture

The presumed older collection of Psalms of Ascents can be reconstructed by removing the 5 author-related psalms: the 4 Davidic psalms (122, 124, 131, and 133) as well as the solitary Psalm of Solomon (127). Then we get the following picture of the remaining *non author-related* Songs of Ascents:

**120 121** || **123** || **125 126** || **128 129 130** || **132** || **134** **10 psalms 81 verselines.**

The 15 Songs of Ascents in MT have altogether	117 verselines
The 4 Davidic Songs of Ascents have altogether	28 verselines
The 1 Solomonic Song of Ascents has	8 verselines
The 10 non author-related Psalms of Ascents have	<b>81</b> verselines.

In light of the fact that from a numerical point of view Psalms 118 and 119 did not form part of the preceding sub-group (107-117) but stood on their own, I wondered whether they perhaps functioned originally as the overture to the Songs of Ascents. This supposition is of course purely hypothetical, but I was amazed to find that the **81** verselines of the ten non author-related psalms together with the **205** verselines of the similarly non author-related Psalms 118 and 119 amount to **286** (**11x26**).

<sup>37</sup> Including the *nun*-verseline which is missing in MT. See my analysis of [Psalm 145](#).

This seems to suggest that the One-Time Songs of Ascents constituted a finalized and duly sealed collection of **12** psalms, including the twin Psalms 118 and 119. Compare the **12** One-Time Korahite Psalms and the **12** One-Time Asaphite Psalms. This older collection formed the basis for the second component of Book V, which the compilers supplemented with five author-related psalms, which they labeled ‘Song of Ascents’: the four psalms ascribed to David (122, 124, 131, and 133) and the psalm ascribed to Solomon (127) to form the new, enlarged group of **15** Songs of Ascents. The purpose of these supplements was obviously to connect the Songs of Ascents to the Davidic dynasty and to buttress the single non author-related royal **Psalm 132** (now significantly flanked by two Davidic Psalms!).

Psalms 118 and 119, which were formerly the overture to the One-Time Songs of Ascents, retained their original function, but in the new context they came to serve as a bridge between the preceding and following sub-groups.<sup>38</sup>

### Here is an overview of Book Vb (Psalms 120-150)

120 121 122 123 124 125 126	127	128 129 130 131 132 133 134	15	117
135 136 137	138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145		11	187 (11x17)
146 147 148 149 150	Concluding Hallel: 5 Hallelujah-psalms			60

**Book Vb (Psalms 120-150)** has **31** psalms, with in total **364 (14x26)**  
 The name YHWH occurs 237x and YH 13x; Elohim **7x** (in Psalm 108 en 150).

### Psalms 120-134, the Songs of Ascents

Three key-words, woven like a red thread through the group, underscore its unity:

<i>Zion</i> <b>7x</b>	125:1 126:1 128:5 <b>129:5</b> 132:13 133:3 134:3
<i>Shalom</i> <b>7x</b>	120:6 120:7 122:6 <b>122:7</b> 122:8 125:5 128:5
<i>Brk</i> <b>7x</b>	128:4 128:5 129:8 <b>132:15</b> 134:1 134:2 134:3.

Note that the middle occurrence of *brk* falls in the royal **Psalm 132**, symbolizing that the blessing depends on the survival of the Davidic dynasty!

There is no consensus yet about the precise structure of the Songs of Ascents, since various divisions have been put forward. Karel Deurloo, e.g., proposed a division into three cycles according to the pattern 3 + 3+3 + 3+3. Each cycle begins with the key-word *rabbat*, ‘enough!’ (120:6, 123:4, 129:1) and the attribute ‘*who made heaven and earth*’ is to be found in every cycle (121:2, 124:8 and 134:3):

$$\underline{120-122} + \underline{123-125} + \underline{126-128} + \underline{129-131} + \underline{132-134}.$$
<sup>39</sup>

Susan Gillingham, on the other hand, divides the 15 psalms in terms of content according to the pattern 3 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 3, in a concentric arrangement:

Pss. 120-122:	arriving in Zion
Pss. 123-126:	psalms of lament ending in confident trust
<b>Pss. 127-129:</b>	<b>God’s blessing from Zion</b>
Pss. 130-131:	psalms of penitence ending in confident trust
Pss. 132-134:	departing from Zion. <sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Alistair G. Hunter, *An Introduction to the Psalms*, T&T Clark Approaches to Biblical Studies, London: T&T Clark, 2008, p. 83, regards Psalms 118-134 as a coherent group, which had a function in connection with ‘an autumn pilgrimage’.

<sup>39</sup> See the volume: VOOR DE KINDEREN VAN KORACH: Dramatiek en Liturgische Gestalte van de Psalmen II, *De Liederen van Opgang*, Prof. Dr. G. van der Leeuw-Stichting, Amsterdam, 1989, with a brief introduction by K.A. Deurloo, pp. 8-9.

In my opinion, however, the **15** Songs were structured in the pattern **7 + 1 + 7**, a model to be found also in Psalm 92 and in the One-Time Second Davidic Collection. The single Solomonic **Psalm 127** got pride of place at the centre in order to highlight the building of the temple, the final destination of the returning exiles.

### **Psalms 135-145, the last sub-group of 11, and the Concluding Hallel**

Since the Songs of Ascents constitute a finalized and sealed sub-group, **Psalm 135** must be the corner psalm of the next sub-group, which is evidently **Psalms 135-145**. **Psalm 135** marks the beginning of the songs of praise leading up to the Concluding Hallel, **Psalms 146-150**. Having identified no less than five sub-groups of **11**, I was not surprised to find that 135-145 constitutes another group of **11** psalms.

Its main component is a collection of **8** Davidic psalms (138-145) selected from the One-Time Third Davidic Collection. The compilers intentionally supplemented these **8** Davidic psalms with three non author-related (new?) psalms: 135, 136, and 137, in order to attain the last sub-group of **11**. **Psalm 135**, which opens the sub-group, is especially marked by *hallelu-yah* at the beginning and at the end, probably to prelude on the Concluding Hallel (146-150), in which all six psalms are marked in this way.

The closely connected twin psalms **135** and **136**, known as the Great Hallel, function as the corner psalms of the sub-group, with **Psalm 145** as their counterpart, which is also a song of praise. In its heading, Psalm 145 is significantly called a *tehillah*, 'Song of Praise', being the only psalm in the entire Psalter explicitly called a *tehillah*. In this capacity, Psalm 145 was obviously intended to conclude the Davidic psalms, as shown by the fact that it is provided with a doxology (145:21). At the same time, being a song of praise, it preludes on the Concluding Hallel (146-150).

The sub-group of **11** psalms was finalized as a distinct compositional entity by this 'preliminary' doxology and sealed by having **187** (**11 x 17**) verselines. This strongly suggests that 135-145 were originally intended to round off and conclude the Psalter. However, the compilers of the Psalter obviously regarded this as unsatisfactory; that is why they composed a little pentateuch (146-150) as the grand finale and definitive conclusion: the Concluding Hallel.

By the addition of the Concluding Hallel, the **31** psalms of Book Vb (120-150), **15** in 120-134, **11** in 135-145 (together **26**) and **5** in 146-150, have altogether **364** (**14x26**) verselines, which shows that Book Vb was considered a finalized sealed compilation.

The addition of Book Vb to the preceding corpus of Psalms 1-119 significantly changed its scope by strongly bringing into focus the leading themes of its two sub-groups (120-134 and 135-145): particularly, the theme of the exile and the hope for restoration, the temple as the religious centre on Mount Zion, the Davidic dynasty as the mainstay of national existence, and, last but not least, the happiness about YHWH's blessing emanating from his abode on Mount Zion, which culminates in the abundant praises at the end of the book. The idea of happiness is strongly underlined by the **26** occurrences of the word 'happy' woven as a red thread into the Psalter from 1:1 through 146:5. See Observation 3 in my Analysis of [Psalm 1](#).

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<sup>40</sup> See note 32 above.

## Conclusions

The present investigation into the numerical features of the Psalter has brought to light that the book of Psalms is a consciously designed, meticulously planned, numerical composition, which the compilers have structured to a great extent by means of the numbers **7** and **11** as ordering principles. In addition, they used the two divine name numbers **17** and **26** in relation to the number of verselines to finalize and 'seal' their compositions.

By the discovery of these compositional techniques we now have at our disposal an unparalleled *objective* criterion to gauge and check our delimitation of the various sub-groups in the five books. This has enabled me in this study to lay bare the compositional architecture of the Psalter in all its simplicity. At the same time, I was able to reconstruct the older, author-related compilations, which formed the basis for the book of Psalms in its present form, to see how these one-time collections were supplemented with new psalms and rearranged to function in their new context.

Another important conclusion to be drawn from the present investigation is that the book of Psalms is the result of a *linear, incremental* compositional process in which the five books were successively composed, finalized and sealed or 'canonized', and appended to Book I as the Basic Psalter. In my opinion, the compositional process has taken place in six stages, starting from this Primary Davidic Psalter, and resulting in **5** Scrolls (like the **5** Megilloth) analogous to the **5** books of the Pentateuch.

This is how I visualize the linear incremental compositional process:

### The Formation of the Psalter as a Linear Compositional Process

1. **Book I** composed as the **Primary Davidic Psalter: 1-41**
2. **Book II** added to form the **First Expanded Davidic Psalter: 1-72**
3. **Book III** added to form the **Second Expanded Davidic Psalter: 1-89**
4. **Books IV and Va** added to form the **Third Expanded Davidic Psalter: 1-119**
5. **Book Vb** (120-145) added to form the **Preliminary Davidic Psalter: 1-145**
6. **Book Vb** (146-150) added to form the **Final Davidic Psalter: 1-150**.

The final product is essentially a *Davidic Psalter*. This is expressed by the presence of Davidic psalms as a unifying backbone in all five books: altogether **72**, with **36** in Book I, **18** in Book II, **1** in Book III, **2** in Book IV, and **15** in Book V. Therefore, it is not surprising that in Jewish tradition the book of Psalms as a whole was ascribed to David.

In fact, the Psalter was deliberately designed to support in its own way the restoration movement after the loss of the land and the exile, particularly the revival of the Davidic Dynasty and the restoration of the temple service.

The book of Psalms was also purposefully composed as a *Liturgical Pentateuch*, to match the five books of the Mosaic Torah. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that the great themes of the Deuteronomistic History - which, in my view, comprises the whole literary corpus from Genesis – 2 Kings -, all clearly reverberate in the book of Psalms:

the creation of the world,  
the deliverance from slavery in Egypt,  
YHWH's relationship with and care for the people of Israel,  
the settlement in the Promised Land,  
the election of David and his dynasty,  
the disasters due to Israel's apostasy,  
the loss of the land, the destruction of the temple, the exile, and last but not least,  
the persistent hope for restoration based on YHWH's everlasting faithfulness,  
which is so strongly articulated in the book of Deuteronomy.

Additional evidence for the literary unity of the five books, and of the Psalter as a whole, is the hard fact that the doxologies at the end of Books I-IV (41:14, 72:18-19, 89:53, and 106:48) were not inserted into the Psalter at the final redaction to mark the seams between the five Books. As I have shown in my analyses of the four concluding psalms in the first four books, the doxologies were part and parcel of the psalms in question. Each of them in turn concludes and finalizes the book in question and preludes on the Concluding Hallel. They function as stepping-stones leading to the universal praise at the end of the book.

In the present investigation, I consciously refrained from addressing questions relating to the *historical* formation process of the Psalter. I have limited myself to the formal aspects of the *compositional* process from the perspective of the compilers, whose activities, in my view, should be dated in the post-exilic period. The precise historical setting of this process is a matter for future study, and I sincerely hope that my colleagues will now take up the gauntlet to help address these questions in a new way and from a new perspective.

## Table 1: The Numerical Features of the Five Books

**Book I (Psalms 1-41)** The rows in **blue** contain extra additions

Sub-Group	Verselines	Mas. verses <sup>41</sup>
Psalms 1-8 (8)	87	88
<b>Psalms 9-17</b>	<b>104 (4x26)</b>	<b>105</b>
Psalm 18	<b>52 (2x26)</b>	<b>51 (3x17)</b>
Psalms 9-18 (9)	<b>156 (6x26)</b>	150
<b>Psalms 1-18 (17)</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>238 (14x17)</b>
Psalms 19-29 (11)	<b>170 (10x17)</b>	155
Psalms 30-31 (2)	41	38
Psalms 32-41 (11)	<b>221 (13x17)</b> (excluding doxology)	206 (excluding doxology)
Psalms 1-41 (40/41)	<b>676 (26x26)</b> (including doxology)	637 (including doxology)

## Book II (Psalms 42-72)

Sub-Group	Verselines	Mas. verses
Psalms 42-49 Korahite (7)	<b>119 (7x17)</b>	120
Psalms 51-57 Davidic (7)	<b>104 (4x26)</b>	98
Psalms 58-65 Davidic (8)	<b>104 (4x26)</b>	103
<b>Psalms 51-65: Davidic (15)</b>	<b>208 (8x26)<sup>42</sup></b>	<b>201</b>
Psalm 68, 69, 70 Davidic (3)	82	79
Psalms 51-70: All Davidic (18)	290! ( <b>289? = 17x17</b> )	280
Nameless Psalms 66, 67, 71 (3)	<b>51 (3x17)</b>	<b>52 (2x26)</b>
<b>Davidic and Nameless (21)</b>	<b>341! (340? = 20x17)</b>	<b>332</b>
<b>Davidic+Nameless+Korahite</b>	<b>460! (459? = 27x17)</b>	<b>452</b>
Psalms 50 and 72 (2)	45	42
Psalms 42-72 (30/31)	505 (including doxology)	<b>494 (19x26)</b> (including doxology)

<sup>41</sup> The Masoretic verse division is based on a totally different agenda than that of the psalmists and the compilers of the psalms, who work with the poetic verselines. Moreover, the Masoretes included the verses containing headings in their tally, which fall outside the main bodies of the psalms. For the precise status of the headings, see Obs. 1 in my analysis of Psalm 3: [www.labuschagne.nl/ps003.pdf](http://www.labuschagne.nl/ps003.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> Compare the 15 Davidic Psalms in Book V, which are likewise made up of **208 (8x26)** verselines.

### Book III (Psalms 73-89)

Sub-Group	Verselines	Mas. verses
Psalms 73-83 (11)	249	245
Psalms 84-89 (6)	125	123
Psalms 73-89 Total: (17)	<b>374 (22x17)</b> (including doxology)	368 (including doxology)

### Book IV (Psalms 90-106)

Sub-Group	Verselines	Mas. verses
Psalms 90-100 (11)	142	<b>136 (8x17)</b>
Psalms 101-106 (6)	196	<b>187 (11x17)</b>
Psalms 90-106 Total: (17)	<b>338 (13x26)</b> (including doxology)	<b>323 (19x17)</b> (including doxology)

### Book V (Psalms 107-150)

Sub-Group	Verselines	Mas. verses
Psalms 107-117 (11)	<b>170 (10x17)</b>	171
Psalms 118-119 (2)	205	205
Psalms 120-134 (15)	117	101
All Davidic Psalms (15)	<b>208 (8x26)<sup>43</sup></b>	<b>187 (11x17)</b>
Psalms 135-145 (11)	<b>187 (11x17)<sup>44</sup></b>	168
Psalms 146-150 (5)	60	59
Psalms 120-150 (31)	<b>364 (14x26)</b>	328
Psalms 107-150 (44)	739/MT 738	704

## Table 2: The Psalter as a Whole in Terms of Verselines

When I tallied the number of verselines in the five books, the following picture emerged:

Book I: Psalms 1-41	<b>676 (26 x 26)</b> verselines
Book II: Psalms 42-72	460 ( <b>459= 27x17?</b> ) verselines
<b>Psalms 50 and 72</b>	<b>45 verselines</b>
Book III: Psalms 73-89	<b>374 (22 x 17)</b> verselines
Book IV: Psalms 90-106	<b>338 (13 x 26)</b> verselines
Book Va: Psalms 107-117	<b>170 (10 x 17)</b> verselines
<b>Psalms 118-119</b>	<b>205 verselines</b>
Book Vb: Psalms 120-150	<b>364 (14 x 26)</b> verselines
Books I-V: Psalms 1-150 Grand total	2632 (2631?) verselines

**Books I, IV, and Vb** have multiples of the divine name number **26**.

**Book III and Va** (without 118-119), on the other hand, have multiples of **17** verselines.

<sup>43</sup> Compare the 15 Davidic Psalms in Book II, which are likewise made up of **208 (8x26)** verselines.

<sup>44</sup> MT has 186 verselines, because it misses the *nun*-verseline in Psalm 145. Intentionally?

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