Psalm 61— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

- Please read the General Introduction as well as the Introduction to Book I and Book II.
- For common features found in the numerical analysis charts, see the "Key to the charts".

Specific features of Psalm 61

- The regular poetic structure of the poem is combined with an ingenious numerical structure in which the divine name numbers are woven into the fabric of the text.
- The use of the numerical value of a keyword to define the number of words is a feature Psalm 61 shares with Psalms 53, 54, 57, 58, 59 and 60. In this case, it concerns two keywords: כְּנָפֶיךָ, 'your wings' (63), to define the total number of words, and אֶחֱסֶה, 'I find refuge' (29), to envelop the meaningful centre.
- Being phrased throughout as a prayer, Psalm 61 differs from the preceding psalms, in which the two directions of address are used as a structuring device. A special feature is the use of syntax and a numerical chiasmus to enhance the striking features of the numerical structure.

Strophic structure - Canto/Stanza boundary: ||

- Van der Lugt and Labuschagne: 2-3, 4-5 || 6-7, 8-9 (2 cantos, 4 strophes, 8 verselines and 16 cola).
- Fokkelman: similarly, except that he finds 17 cola, taking v. 3 as a tricolon.

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the main clauses; **d**: words in the subordinate clauses.
- The numbering of the verselines is shown in brown.

				Total	a	b	c	d
1	63 = נְגִינַת	לַמְנַצֵּחַ עַל־נְגִינַת לְדָוִד׃		4	4			
	(14 + 3 + 10 + 14 + 22)	Heading, v. 1		4	= 4	+ 0		
2		שִׁמְעָה אֱלֹהִים רִנָּתִי^	1	3	3		3	
		הַקְשִׁיבָה תְּפִלָּתִי׃		2		2	2	
		Total, v. 2		5	= 3	+ 2	= 5	+ 0
3		מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ אֵלֶיךָ אֶקְרָא בַּעֲטֹף לִבִּי^	2	6	6		6	
		בְּצוּר־יָרוּם מִמֶּנִּי תַנְחֵנִי׃		4		4	4	
		Total, v. 3		10	= 6	+ 4	= 10	+ 0
	Strophe 1	Total, v. 2-3		15	= 9	+ 6	= 15	+ 0
4		כִּי־הָיִיתָ מַחְסֶה לִי^	3	4	4			4
		מִגְדַּל־עֹז מִפְּנֵי אוֹיֵב׃		4		4		4
		Total, v. 4		8	= 4	+ 4	= 0	+ 8
5	29 = אֶחֱסֶה	אָגוּרָה בְאָהָלְךָ עוֹלָמִים^	4	3	3		3	
	(1+8+15+5)	אֶחֱסֶה בְסֵתֶר כְּנָפֶיךָ סֶּלָה׃		3		3	3	
	63 = כְּנָפֶיךָ (11+14+17+10+11)	Total, v. 5		6	= 3	+ 3	= 6	+ 0
	Strophe 2	Total, v. 4-5		14	= 7	+ 7	= 6	+ 8
	Canto I	**Total, v. 2-5**		**29**	= 16	+ 13	= 21	+ 8

		Hebrew	v.					
6 Middle word		כִּי־אַתָּה אֱלֹהִים שָׁמַעְתָּ לִנְדָרָי^	5	5	5			5
Meaningful centre		נָתַתָּ יְרֻשַּׁת יִרְאֵי שְׁמֶךָ:		4		4		4
63 = 29 + 5 + 29		Total, v. 6		9 = 5	+ 4	= 0	+ **9**
		Total, v. 4-6		23 = 12	+ 11	= 6	+ **17**
		Total, v. 2-6		38 = 21	+ **17**	= 21	+ **17**
7		יָמִים עַל־יְמֵי־מֶלֶךְ תּוֹסִיף^	6	5	5		5	
		שְׁנוֹתָיו כְּמוֹ־דֹר וָדֹר:		4		4	4	
		Total, v. 7		9 = 5	+ 4	= 9	+ 0
Strophe 3		Total, v. 6-7		18 = 10	+ 8	= 9	+ 9
		Total, v. 4-7		32 = **17**	+ 15	= 15	+ **17**
		Total, v. 2-7		47 = **26**	+ 21	= 30	+ **17**
8		יֵשֵׁב עוֹלָם לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהִים^	7	4	4		4	
		חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת מַן יִנְצְרֻהוּ:		4		4	4	
		Total, v. 8		8 = 4	+ 4	= 8	+ 0
Prayer for the king		Total, v. 7-8		**17** = 9	+ 8	= **17**	+ 0
		Total, v. 6-8		**26** = 14	+ 12	= **17**	+ 9
9		כֵּן אֲזַמְּרָה שִׁמְךָ לָעַד^	8	4	4		4	
		לְשַׁלְּמִי נְדָרַי יוֹם יוֹם: (13+6+10) **29** = יוֹם		4		4	4	
		Total, v. 9		8 = 4	+ 4	= 8	+ 0
Strophe 4		Total, v. 8-9		16 = 8	+ 8	= 16	+ 0
		Total, v. 6b-9		**29** = 13	+ 16	= 25	+ 4
		Total, v. 2-5		**29** = 16	+ 13	= 21	+ 8
Canto II		Total, v. 6-9		**34** = 18	+ 16	= 25	+ 9
Numerical chiasmus, v. 2-9				**63** = **34**	+ **29**	= 46	+ **17**
With the heading, v. 1-9				67 = 38	+ **29**		
With סֶלָה (1x), v. 1-9				68 = 38	+ 30		

Observations

1. In terms of the 63 words of the poem, the middle word אֱלֹהִים and the 2 words on either side (v. 6a) constitute its meaningful centre: (63 = **29** + 5 + **29**):

   כִּי־אַתָּה אֱלֹהִים שָׁמַעְתָּ לִנְדָרָי, 'for you, God, have heard my vows'.

   The 5-word meaningful centre is embraced by **34** (2 x **17**) words: 29+5 = **34** = 5+29. The pivotal position of אֱלֹהִים, not only in the 5-word colon, but also in the entire poem (63 = 31 + 1 + 31), is highlighted by the fact that it also represents the middle of the three occurrences of the word אֱלֹהִים (vs. 2a, 6a and 8a).

   The *selah* at the end of v. 5, just before the meaningful centre, seems to have the function of drawing attention to the centre. See Observation 6 in my Analysis of Psalm 55, and Observation 3 in that of Psalm 57.

2. Significantly enough, the first of the two pivotal cola, v. 5b, contains the two keywords, whose numerical values have obviously been used to give structure to the text: first, אֶחֱסֶה, 'I find refuge', numerical value: **29**, enveloping the centre, and second, כְּנָפֶיךָ, 'your wings', numerical value: **63**, defining the total number of words.

This can hardly be a matter of coincidence, especially in light of the fact that this is a commonly used device in the Book of Psalms, which features in several preceding psalms. See the General Introduction, "The numerical value of a keyword in the text". What may not be a matter of chance either is the fact that **29** is also the numerical value of each of the two words יוֹם יוֹם concluding the poem. Perhaps this particular phrase was chosen to reinforce the keyword אֶחֱסֶה, 'I find refuge'.

It is worth noting that **63** also happens to be the numerical value of the *hapax legomenon* נְגִינַת in the heading. One wonders whether this particular form of the word was intentionally chosen instead of the current form נְגִינוֹת, because of its numerical value. A deeper investigation into the use of gematria in the biblical writings will shed more light on such devices. In my judgement, we are dealing here with evidence relating to the roots of later kabbalistic gematria.

3. The function of the evident numerical chiasmus in vs. 2-9 is obviously to unite the two sections, vs. 2-5 (Canto I) and vs. 6-9 (Canto II). The *selah* at the end of v. 5 has primarily a demarcating function to indicate the canto structure. A secondary function may be to draw attention to the preceding important keyword כְּנָפֶיךָ, 'your wings'.

4. The two subordinate clauses in the poem, both introduced by כִּי, 'for' (vs. 4 and 6), are made up of exactly **17** words (column d), which means that syntax has been used to weave an extra divine name number into the text. See the General Introduction under "Criteria for logotechnical analysis".

   Note also that the prayer for the king (vs. 7-8) is also made up of **17** words.

5. The divine name numbers feature in the following instances:

vs. 2-6	**17** words after atnach
vs. 4-7	**17** words before atnach
vs. 2-7	**26** words in total
vs. 6-8	**26** words in total
vs. 7-8	**17** words in total
vs. 6+8	**17** words in total
vs. 6+9	**17** words in total
vs. 7+9	**17** words in total
vs. 2-9	**34** (2 x **17**) words before atnach
vs. 1-9	**68** (4 x **17**) words in total, including the heading and *selah.*

6. The name YHWH is absent, but explicitly referred to in vs. 6b and 9a; אֱלֹהִים, 'God', occurs 3x (vs. 2a, 6a and 8a).

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