Psalm 87— Logotechnical Analysis

Guidelines

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

Specific features of Psalm 87

- Psalm 87 is the second of the two Korahite psalms about Zion after Psalm 48, its famous predecessor. It is made up of 48 words, the numerical value of צִיּוֹן, 'Zion', which occurs in the first verseline. Psalm 87 shares this feature with part of the text in Psalm 48, and with the 48-word Zion Psalm 126.
  At the same time, Psalm 87 is the third of the four Korahite psalms in Book III (84-85 and 87-88), arranged in two pairs around the single Davidic Psalm 86.

- The Masoretic text is clearly disordered, seeing the truncated v. 1b and the obviously displaced v. 5c. Despite this, the Masoretic version apparently represents the 'canonical' text, since it is to a considerable extent supported by the ancient versions. In addition to my analysis of the MT version, I shall also analyse Jan Fokkelman's reconstruction, which may approximate the original form of the poem.

- As noted by Van der Lugt (unpublished manuscript), Psalm 87 elaborates on the expectation about the nations in Ps. 86:9.
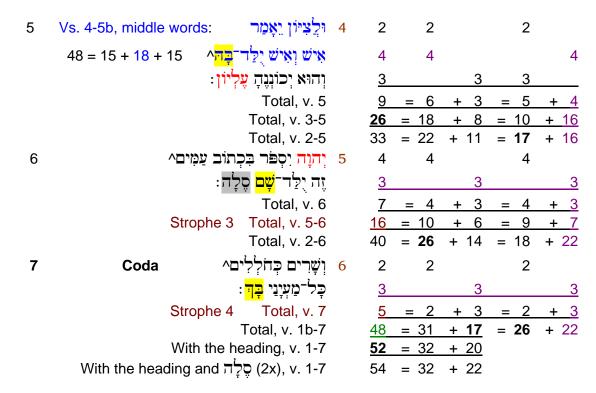
Strophic structure

- Van der Lugt: 1-3, 4-5, 6-7 (3 strophes with 6 verselines and 15 cola, taking vs. 1 and 2 as a single verseline).
- Fokkelman: 1-3, 4-5, 6-7 (3 strophes rearranged, with **7** verselines and 15 cola).
- Labuschagne: 1-3, 4, 5-6, 7 (4 strophes with 6 verselines and 15 cola).

Logotechnical analysis

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the non-speech sections; **d**: words in direct speech.
- he numbering of the verselines is shown in brown.

		Total	a	b	c	d
1a	לִבְנֵי־קֹרַח מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר^ Heading	4	= 4	+ 0		
1b	יְסוּדָתוֹ בְּהַרְרֵי־קֹדֶשׁ: 1	3	3		3	
2	אֹהֵב יְהוָה שַׁעֲרֵי צִיּוֹן^ **48** = צִיּוֹן	4	4		4	
	מִכֹּל מִשְׁכְּנוֹת יַעֲקֹב: **87** = מִשְׁכְּנוֹת	3		3	3	
3	נִכְבָּדוֹת מְדֻבָּר בָּךְ^ 2	3	3		3	
	עִיר הָאֱלֹהִים סֶלָה:	2		2	2	
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 1b-3	15	= 10	+ 5	= 15	+ 0
4	אַזְכִּיר רַהַב וּבָבֶל לְיֹדְעָי 3	4	4			4
	הִנֵּה פְלֶשֶׁת וְצוֹר עִם־כּוּשׁ^	5	5			5
Middle colon: 15 = **7** + 1 + **7**	זֶה יֻלַּד־שָׁם:	3		3		3
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 4	12	= 9	+ 3	= 0	+ 12
	Total, v. 3-4	**17**	= 12	+ 5	= 5	+ 12
	Total, v. 1b-4	27	= 19	+ 8	= 15	+ 12

		Hebrew	v	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
5	Vs. 4-5b, middle words:	וּלֲצִיּוֹן יֵאָמַר	4	2	2		2	
	48 = 15 + 18 + 15	אִישׁ וְאִישׁ יֻלַּד־בָּהּ^		4	4			4
		וְהוּא יְכוֹנְנֶהָ עֶלְיוֹן:		3		3	3	
	Total, v. 5			9	= 6 +	3	= 5 +	4
	Total, v. 3-5			**26**	= 18 +	8	= 10 +	16
	Total, v. 2-5			33	= 22 +	11	= **17** +	16
6		יְהוָה יִסְפֹּר בִּכְתוֹב עַמִּים^	5	4	4		4	
		זֶה יֻלַּד־שָׁם סֶלָה:		3		3		3
	Total, v. 6			7	= 4 +	3	= 4 +	3
	Strophe 3 Total, v. 5-6			16	= 10 +	6	= 9 +	7
	Total, v. 2-6			40	= **26** +	14	= 18 +	22
7	**Coda**	וְשָׁרִים כְּחֹלְלִים^	6	2	2		2	
		כָּל־מַעְיָנַי בָּךְ:		3		3		3
	Strophe 4 Total, v. 7			5	= 2 +	3	= 2 +	3
	Total, v. 1b-7			48	= 31 +	**17**	= **26** +	22
	With the heading, v. 1-7			**52**	= 32 +	20		
	With the heading and סֶלָה (2x), v. 1-7			54	= 32 +	22		

Observations

1. This psalm is generally regarded as one of the most difficult poems in the Psalter, because the Masoretic text appears to be disordered: the apparently incomplete v. 1b misses an antecedent, and v. 5c seems to be out of place in its immediate context: it disturbs the presumed originally intended placement of the direct speeches in the last colon (as in vs. 6 and 7). No wonder that scholars have often tried to restore the text by rearranging it conjecturally.[1]

   The most recent reconstruction is that by Jan Fokkelman, who regards v. 2 as the beginning of the poem, followed by 5c + 1, leaving the rest of the text as it is, contrary to Zenner (1906) Gunkel (1926), Herkenne (1936), and Kraus (1978), who started with 2 + 1 + 5c (in this order!), but rearranged vs. 3-7 as well, in different ways (pointed out to me by Pieter van der Lugt). I myself would prefer the latter order: 2 + 1 + 5c to that suggested by Fokkelman.[2]

   Since I consider his proposal the most convincing of all, I shall analyse his reconstructed text logotechnically, in order to gauge its plausibility. For the outcome, see below "Logotechnical analysis of Psalm 87 reconstructed".

   I agree in principle with John Emerton, when he states: 'It seems better to try to make sense out of the order in the MT, while granting the possibility that some corruption may have taken place."[3]

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[1] For an overview of earlier restorations, see Th. Booij, "Some Observations on Psalm lxxxvii", *VT* 37 (1987), pp. 16-25.

[2] See his *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible at the interface of Prosody and Structural Analysis*, Volume III, Royal Van Gorcum, Assen, The Netherlands, 2003, pp. 149-154.

[3] J.A. Emerton, "The Problem of Psalm lxxxvii", *VT* 50 (2000), pp. 183-199 (p. 183).

The fact that the MT is to a considerable extent supported by the ancient versions strongly suggests that it may have constituted the 'canonical' text in its final redaction. In that case we have to take it seriously, because it was at that time considered to make sense despite its evident mangled state. This seems to suggest that the dislocation of the two problematic cola must have taken place before the final redaction. How that could happen remains as yet a mystery.

2. The Masoretic text of the psalm consists of **48** words – the numerical value of צִיּוֹן, 'Zion' (18 + 10 + 6 + 14), an amount of words to be found in at least two other Zion Psalms, 48 and 126. See Observation 3 in my Analysis of Psalm 48, in which 48 words surround the core. See also my Analysis of the 48-word Zion Psalm 126.

By means of the atnach and the differentiation between 'non-speech' (Column c) and 'direct speech' (Column d), the words are arranged in such a way that several divine name numbers are woven into the fabric of the text:

vs. 3-4	**17** words in total
vs. 3-5	**26** words in total
vs. 2-5	**17** words in Column c
vs. 2-6	**26** words before atnach
vs. 1-7	**17** words after atnach and **26** in Column c.

Including the 4-word heading the total number of words amount to **52** (2 x **26**).

Finally, the text is also structured by the number of fullness, **7**, resulting in **7** cola on either side of the central colon: 15 cola = 7 + 1 + 7. We may consider counting also **7** verselines, by regarding the incomplete v. 1b as a separate (monocolic) verseline.

3. This brings us to the search for the meaningful centre. There are 6 words in the middle of the text, in v. 4b-c (48 = 21 + 6 + 21), but they can hardly be regarded as constituting the meaningful centre:

^{4b-c} וְצוֹר עִם־כּוּשׁ ∧ זֶה יֻלַּד־שָׁם׃

^{4b-c} and Tyre, with Kush // such a one was born there.

A more plausible candidate may be found in v. 4c, the middle colon (15 = 7 + 1 + 7), but its meaningfulness is not evident.

We may also consider the 18 middle words of the psalm: vs. 4-5b (15 + 18 + 15), which happen to coincide precisely with the 5 middle cola (15 = 5 + 5 + 5):

⁴ אַזְכִּיר רַהַב וּבָבֶל לְיֹדְעָי   הִנֵּה פְלֶשֶׁת וְצוֹר עִם־כּוּשׁ ∧ זֶה יֻלַּד־שָׁם׃

^{5a-b} וּלֲצִיּוֹן יֵאָמַר   אִישׁ וְאִישׁ יֻלַּד־בָּהּ∧

⁴ "I shall mention Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me. Behold, Philistea and Tyre, with Kush: Such a one was born there."
^{5a-b} And of Zion it shall be said: "This one and that one were born in her".

These words may indeed constitute the consciously designed meaningful centre: YHWH's intention to inscribe 5 important *foreign peoples* in his register (v. 4; cf. v. 6) and the statement about Zion and her *native population* (v. 5a-b). The fact that 5c falls outside the meaningful centre should not surprise us, since this colon does not fit into its immediate context. See my remarks on Fokkelman's reconstruction below.

4. Van der Lugt (and Fokkelman – see below) find 3 strophes: 1-3, 4-5, and 6-7. However, seeing the placement of the two *selahs*, after v. 3 and after v. 6, both of which have a demarcating function in my view, I would propose a division into 4 strophes: 1-3, 4, 5-6, and 7.

The special position of v. 4, the divine monologue as a singular element in the text, warrants a separate strophe. The same can be said of v. 7, which is in fact a coda:

> Singers and dancers [alike say]: "All my springs are in you!"

Christensen, who also finds 3 strophes (vs. 1-3, 4, and 5-7), is on the right track by regarding v. 4 as a separate strophe constituting the centre of the text. However, his disregard for the demarcating function of the *selah* after v. 6 is questionable in light of the position of v. 7. See Observation 4 in his logoprosodic analysis.

5. The apparent 'concentric pentacolon' in vs. 3-7, pointed out by Mark Smith in his short note "The structure of Psalm lxxxvii", *VT* 38 (1988), pp. 357-358 (highlighted in the chart), does not detract anything from the proposed strophic structure, because vs. 3-7 do not constitute a strophe.

   The concentric pentacolon pattern overlies the strophic structure, its function being, in my opinion, not to structure the text, but to emphasize its unity. This concatenating function of the 5 little 'keywords' strongly reminds us of the concentric pentacolon in Psalm 48, as pointed out by Smith, and also of the spectacular use of the keywords in Psalm 67 for the same purpose– see Observation 4 in my Analysis of Psalm 67.

   Here is the concentric pattern of the 5 'keywords' detected by Smith in Psalm 87:

   > בָּךְ, 'in you' (v. 3a)
   > שָׁם, 'there' (v. 4c)
   > בָּה, 'in her' (v. 5b)
   > שָׁם, 'there' (v. 6b)
   > בָּךְ, 'in you' (v. 7b).

   His conclusion drawn from the pattern in question, that the placement of Zion's establishment by God in v. 5 "at the centre of vv. 3-7, recapitulates Zion's central position and importance in the world" should in my opinion be challenged. The evidence based solely on these 'structural markers' is too meagre to justify the claim in regards the central position of v. 5. I agree with Christensen's criticism in this respect – see Observation 2 in his analysis.

   There are other structural elements of greater importance than these 'markers', namely the meaningful centres of the entire poem on different levels. All of them point unanimously to v. 4 as the centre of the text, being the central verseline, within which the six middle words as well as the central colon are positioned. The paramount importance of v. 4 is significantly enhanced by the fact that it is phrased as a *divine monologue*. It deals with the new relationship between the foreign nations and YHWH on mount Zion: they are acknowledged by YHWH as belonging to him, and should be inscribed in his register of nations (cf. also v. 6).

   As pointed out by Van der Lugt, the (Korahite!) Psalm 87 clearly elaborates on the theme 'foreign nations', explicitly introduced in the preceding (Davidic!) Psalm 86 – precisely in the middle of the meaningful centre, 86:9! This sheds new light on the relationship between psalms supposed to be of different provenance.

6. It is intriguing to note that the numerical value of מִשְׁכְּנוֹת, 'dwellings' (in v. 2b) is 87 (13 + 21 + 11 + 14 + 6 + 22), and that this is the 87th psalm. Has this particular word been chosen for a special purpose? This is certainly the case in Psalm 84, where the numerical value of מִשְׁכְּנוֹתֶיךָ, 'your dwelling place', 108, defines its total number of words – see Observation 1 in my Analysis of Psalm 84.

7. The name יהוה occurs twice (vs. 2a and 6a), while הָאֱלֹהִים and עֶלְיוֹן feature once (vs. 3b and 5c respectively).

Logotechnical analysis of Psalm 87 reconstructed

- Columns **a** and **b** show the number of words before and after the atnach.
- Column **c**: words in the non-speech sections; **d**: words in direct speech.
- The strophic structure of Fokkelman's reconstructed text: 3 strophes (2-3, 4-5, 6-7), with **7** verselines and 15 cola. In my view, however, **7** verselines, 15 cola, but 5 strophes (2, (1+5c)-3, **4**, 5-6, 7).

			Total		a		b		c		d
1	Heading לִבְנֵי־קֹרַח מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר׃		4	=	4	+	0				
2	אֹהֵב יְהוָה שַׁעֲרֵי צִיּוֹן^ **48** = צִיּוֹן	1	4		4				4		
	מִכֹּל מִשְׁכְּנוֹת יַעֲקֹב׃		3				3		3		
	Strophe 1 Total, v. 2		7	=	4	+	3	=	7	+	0
1b+5c	יְסוּדָתָה֯* בְּהַרְרֵי־קֹדֶשׁ^ (1b)	2	3		3				3		
(5c+1b, Fokkelman)	(5c) וְהוּא יְכוֹנְנֶהָ עֶלְיוֹן׃		3				3		3		
	Total, v. 1b+5c		6	=	3	+	3	=	6	+	0
	Total, v. 2+1b+5c		13	=	7	+	6	=	13	+	0
3	נִכְבָּדוֹת מְדֻבָּר בָּךְ^	3	3		3				3		
	עִיר הָאֱלֹהִים סֶלָה׃		2				2		2		
	Total, v. 3		5	=	3	+	2	=	5	+	0
	Strophe 2 Total, v. 1b+5c+3		11	=	6	+	5	=	11	+	0
	Total, v. 2-3		18	=	10	+	8	=	18	+	0
4 Divine monologue	אַזְכִּיר רַהַב וּבָבֶל לְיֹדְעָי	4	4		4						4
Middle colon: **7**+1+**7**	הִנֵּה פְלֶשֶׁת וְצוֹר עִם־כּוּשׁ^		5		5						5
Middle **3** cola: 15 = 6 + 3 + 6	זֶה יֻלַּד־שָׁם׃		3				3				3
Middle **12** words: 18 + 12 + 18 Strophe 3, v. 4			12	=	9	+	3	=	0	+	12
Meaningful centre, v. 4	Total, v. 3-4		17	=	12	+	5	=	5	+	12
5*	וּלֲצִיּוֹן יֵאָמַר^	5	2		2				2		
	אִישׁ וְאִישׁ יֻלַּד־בָּהּ		4				4				4
	Total, v. 5		6	=	2	+	4	=	2	+	4
	Total, v. 1b+5c-5		29	=	**17**	+	12	=	13	+	16
6	יְהוָה יִסְפֹּר בִּכְתוֹב עַמִּים^	6	4		4				4		
	זֶה יֻלַּד־שָׁם סֶלָה׃		3				3				3
	Total, v. 6		7	=	4	+	3	=	4	+	3
	Strophe 4 Total, v. 5-6		13	=	6	+	7	=	6	+	7
	Total, v. 1b+5c-6		36	=	21	+	15	=	**17**	+	19
	Numerical v. 2-3		18	=	10	+	8	=	18	+	0
	chiasmus v. 4-6		25	=	15	+	10	=	6	+	19
	Total, v. 2-6		43	=	25	+	18	=	24	+	19
7 Coda	וְשָׁרִים כְּחֹלְלִים^	7	2		2				2		
	כָּל־מַעְיָנַי בָּךְ׃		3				3				3
	Strophe 5 Total, v. 7		5	=	2	+	3	=	2	+	3
	Total, v. 5-7		18	=	8	+	10	=	8	+	10
	Total, v. 4-7		30	=	**17**	+	13	=	8	+	22
	Total, v. 2-7		48	=	27	+	21	=	**26**	+	22
	With the heading, v. 1-7		**52**	=	31	+	21				
	With the heading and סֶלָה (2x), v. 1-7		54	=	31	+	23				

Remarks on Fokkelman's reconstructed text

1. Fokkelman's restoration of the text involves one simple operation: remove the two problematic cola (vs. 1b and 5c) from their present place, and relocate them – in reversed order, in his view - after the first bicolon verseline (MT v. 2). It is like putting two displaced pieces of a jigsaw puzzle into their proper place:

   ² אֹהֵב יְהוָה שַׁעֲרֵי צִיּוֹן ^ מִכֹּל מִשְׁכְּנוֹת יַעֲקֹב:

   5c+1b וְהוּא יְכוֹנְנֶהָ עֶלְיוֹן ^ יְסוֹדָתוֹ בְּהַרְרֵי־קֹדֶשׁ:

   ² YHWH loves the gates of Zion // more than all the dwellings of Jacob.

   5c+1b For He, the Most High, *established* it: // *his foundation* on the holy mountains.

   This means that the heading (with *soph pasûq*) now constitutes v. 1, and that the **7** verselines of the poem could be numbered 2-8. In the chart I did not change the numbering of the MT, which would only cause confusion. Additionally, we have to fill in an atnach after עֶלְיוֹן in Fokkelman's restored verseline.

   Fokkelman's restoration gains in credibility by his reference to the same word pair in Psalm 24:2 (כון/יסד, *found/establish*). However, in light of the order of the word pair in Psalm 24, the order proposed by Fokkelman in Psalm 87 should be reversed (following Zenner, Gunkel, Herkenne and Kraus): 1b + 5c, which makes even better sense. Moreover, the masculine suffix in יְסוֹדָתוֹ should be changed to feminine, יְסוֹדָתָהּ, 'her (Zion's) foundation':

   בְּהַרְרֵי־קֹדֶשׁ ^ וְהוּא יְכוֹנְנֶהָ עֶלְיוֹן:

   Her *foundation* is on the holy mount, // and He, the Most High, *established* it.

2. The reconstruction leaves the number of words (48) intact, which I consider a strong recommendation in light of the fact that 48 represents the numerical value of the word Zion – see above under "Specific features".

   More importantly, the restoration appears to restore the original, perfect concentric poetical structure of the poem as well as its numerical word structure, with v. 4 at the centre (48 = 18 + **12** + 18):

v. 2	bicolic verseline		7	
1b+5c	bicolic verseline	18	6 ⌉ 13	
v. 3	bicolic verseline		5	
v. 4	**tricolic verseline**		**12**	26
v. 5	bicolic verseline		6	
v. 6	bicolic verseline	18	7 ⌋ 13	
v. 7	bicolic verseline		5	

   V. 4, the divine monologue, constitutes the consciously designed meaningful centre:

   אַזְכִּיר רַהַב וּבָבֶל לְיֹדְעָי   הִנֵּה פְלֶשֶׁת וְצוֹר עִם־כּוּשׁ ^ זֶה יֻלַּד־שָׁם:

   I count Rahab and Babel among those who acknowledge me
   Of Philistia and Tyre, together with Kush,   [I say]: "This one was born there."

   The pivotal position of v. 4 is strongly buttressed by the fact that its middle 12 words coincide precisely with the middle 3 cola (15 = 12 + 3 + 12), and by v. 4 being the only tricolon in the poem. Compare the tricola in the centres of Psalms 82 and 83!

3. The **43** (explicitly **17** + **26**) words of vs. 2-6 are arranged in such a way that the **17** words of vs. 3-4 are flanked by the **26** words of vs. 2-1+5c and 5-6, which are both made up of **13** words. Finally, vs. 2-3 (Strophes 1-2) and vs. 4-6 (Strophes 3-4) are tied together by a numerical chiasmus, which underscores in still another way the demarcating function of the *selah* between vs. 6 and 7.

4. In the reconstructed text, there is no change in the division of words into the categories 'non-speech' (**26** words in Column c) and 'direct speech' (22 in Column d). The divine name numbers feature in the following way:

vs. 3-4	**17** words in total
vs. (1+5c)-5	**17** words before atnach
vs. 4-7	**17** words before atnach
vs. (1+5c)-6	**17** words in Column c
vs. 2-(1+5c) + 5-6	**26** words altogether
vs. 2-7	**26** words in Column c.

5. The logotechnical analysis fully warrants the conclusion that the reconstructed text is in every respect, both numerically and poetically, far superior to that of MT.

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