

Hidals framställning gör oss också uppmärksamma på att gränsen mellan exempelvis bibelvetenskap, religionshistoria och filologi är flytande och i sämsta fall artificiell. För den som vill förstå Främre Orientens historia är det nödvändigt att känna till de bibliska böckerna och deras källor, men också att samarbeta med forskare från olika vetenskapliga områden. Denna lärdom tycks tyvärr allt för ofta ha försvunnit hos mina religionshistoriska kollegor som idag oftast går mot ökad specialisering på bekostnad av breda jämförelser över tid och rum. På denna punkt tror jag att Hidal och jag kan förenas med våra företrädare Engnell och Widengren som båda (trots sina olikheter) framhöll behovet av att förstå Främre Orienten ur ett bredare perspektiv. För att förstå det område som idag benämns som Mellanöstern behövs kunskaper om historia, riter, myter och språk liksom samtida politik och internationella relationer. Denna uppgift kan knappast tillhöra *ett* vetenskapsområde, och istället för att isolera oss i olika ämnesdiscipliner behövs breda samarbeten och kritiska tvärvetenskapliga ansatser som inkluderar ett stort antal forskare med olika bakgrunder.

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The Design of the Psalter: A Macrostructural Analysis

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In *The Design of the Psalter*, Peter C. W. Ho makes an ambitious attempt to “understand the logic and design of the MT Psalter and whether any overarching architectural schema can be assigned to it” (2). Three main questions are asked: 1) What are the main organizing principles of the Psalter?; 2) How is the Psalter organized macrostructurally?; and 3) Is there a coherent overarching theme and logical design to the Psalter? The focus of the investigation is stated to be the “Hebrew MT Psalter (TR-150),” and Ho uses a “macrostructural” and “literary” approach, leaving diachronic and canonization issues aside (4).

The book is structured into six chapters. The first provides an introduction. Ho presents his aim, questions, method, and main results, and gives an overview of the history of research. Going through some of the more important studies (Childs, Wilson, Zenger, etc.), as well as studies relevant to his own analysis (esp. Labuschagne), he identifies no less than 32 organizational principles (formal and tacit) used in the shaping of the collection, and notes that a comprehensive discussion of them is lacking. Very few studies have taken the whole of the collection into consideration, a gap that Ho aims to fill.

The second chapter focuses on the “macrostructure.” Ho starts by identifying eight compositional levels: 1) the individual psalm; 2) psalm pairs; 3) sub-collections; 4) collections/sub-groups; 5) groups; 6) books; sections; and 7) the entire “Psalter.” New to psalms research are especially levels five and seven, whose structural function will constitute the core of Ho’s argument as he argues that they provide the main framework for the “Book” of Psalms, which is divided into three sections consisting of four groups each. These sections and groups (as well as “collections”) also have concentric shapes that emphasize certain motifs, which, in turn, relate to both macrostructural organization and overall message:

Section 1: book 1, groups 1–4; Pss 3–14; 15–24; 25–34; 35–41

Section 2: books 2–3, groups 5–8; Pss 42–49; 50–72; 73–83; 84–89

Section 3: books 4–5, groups 9–12; Pss 90–103; 104–119; 120–134; 135–150

The identified structures are further examined in chapter three. According to Ho, each group has “a significant motif at the center of a structural unit”—a “group central motif” (GCM)—that reveals an unfolding metanarrative about the fall and re-establishment of the Davidic kingship and Zion (191) when read linearly (“the concentric structure is actually linear,” 164). To further substantiate this, Ho argues that editors have used a “Pan-Psalter Occurrence Scheme” (POS)—“a technique based on careful use and placement of certain word/phrases as strategic locations across the entire Psalter to make or reinforce a rhetorical

point” (133). Several examples are discussed and traced through both linear and concentric readings, and they are all argued to contain “a central motif highlighting YHWH’s victorious kingship” (192).

In chapter four, Ho focuses on the role of five “Davidic collections”: Pss 3–41; Pss 51–70; Pss 101–103; Pss 108–110; and Pss 138–145. Ho first argues that a messianic understanding is likely to have been present at the time of the final composition, and then proceeds to a synchronic reading of the five collections informed by the concentric sections and groups studied in earlier chapters, and some additional POS. The emanating narrative overlaps with chapters 2–3: The establishment (by YHWH) and fall of a human monarch, followed by the establishment of an ideal messianic Davidic king, “who ushers in the paradisiac shalom for the people of God” (264).

In the penultimate chapter five, Ho focuses on numerical devices, the placement of acrostics and alphabetic compositions, and numerical techniques in the superscriptions. He makes a case for the significance of symbolic numbers by slightly modifying the approaches of, for example, Labuschagne. Focus is on \mathfrak{M}^L , and Ho counts every word to identify what he labels “nexus words” (“word[s] at the center of a psalm text, which is connected in some way to other nexuswords across psalms,” 276). When read in light of each other, these words contribute to the proposed macrostructure and affirms the metanarrative. Similar conclusions are drawn in relation to the acrostics and the superscriptions.

Lastly, in chapter six, Ho summarizes his conclusions and proposes some avenues for future research. He restates the importance of a macrostructural perspective, since studies that have a limited focus will not be able to detect the techniques argued in the study:

[T]he 150 poems may appear to be a series of independent units chronologically linked to each other. But they are a nexus of overlapping motifs skillfully structured into a single composition through a range of formal and tacit devices for emphasis, artistry, and rhetoric,” intended to provide a “relecture of the Davidic covenant” (336–337).

In all, Ho has provided a very detailed and innovative study. His attempts to present and synthesize various canonical approaches is welcome, and novel ideas such as the GCM and POS are refreshing. The possible importance of concentric structures is also worth discussing further, as is the call for approaches that deal with the entire “Book” of Psalms. This said, I am unfortunately not persuaded that the “Book” of Psalms has been designed in the way argued by Ho, for a number of reasons.

First, the overall argument contains many contradictions. Are Pss 1–2 a single composition (65, 80), a psalm pair (83) or two psalms (68–69, as in TR-150)? Are Pss 104–106 a “Janus collection” (117–120), or are Pss 104–107 a “unit” (120–124, 334)? Is the GCM of group 11 Pss 125–129 (116) or Pss 122, 127 and 132 (160)? Is the GCM of group 10 a “victorious Davidic king and Torah glorified” (160), or that “YHWH establishes an afflicted Davidic king in Zion” (116)? Does the “Book” of Psalms have 150 psalms (328), or 149 (מ^ל)? Do the third and fourth Davidic collections form a chiasmus with Ps 103 and 108 at its center (241), or do they form two separate concentric structures around Pss 102 and 109 respectively (257)? Although contradictions such as these may perhaps be solved, the lasting impression is that of a manuscript that should have been worked through a bit more. This is emphasized further by the unfortunate fact that the book is very poorly typeset and inadequately proof read. Spelling mistakes and inconsistencies abound, and treatment of the book’s 80(!) figures leaves the “final form” in a quite messy state.

Second, there are many unaddressed problems with the techniques argued by Ho. Is, for example, a “GCM” a *motif*, a *psalm*, or *several psalms*? As introduced, it is the first, but as employed in the book, it is the two latter. But since a psalm, let alone a sequence of psalms, does not often have one single easily identifiable motif, it is unclear on what grounds Ho distills the motifs so central for his study. Unfortunately, such methodological inconsistencies affect many of the proposed intentional structures. Ho claims, for example, that the distribution of the noun זכח (a POS) reveals a significant change in “book” five, so that

“the sacrifices of thanksgiving ... are made by God’s people *after* they have been delivered from the jaws of death *or* captivity” (224, italics mine). But he fails to mention that a sacrifice of thanksgiving is present already in Ps 50 (by means of the verb). Although criteria for identifying lexical links are briefly discussed in the introduction, they seem not to be used in the work itself, and the reader is left wondering how and why Ho has identified the POS. The same can be said about the numerical devices, where the significance of the “nexus words” are not at all clear. None of the “nexus words” in Pss 120–134 do, for example, mention temple or kingship (the alleged central focus). Instead, words like “for,” “olive,” and “the beard of Aaron,” are highlighted. There is also a recurring (random?) side-stepping of parameters set up when demarcating a certain focus of study. Pss 71–72 are, for example, deemed as significant to the discussion of Davidic collections, despite the chapter being demarcated to a narrative unfolding through *psalms with Davidic superscriptions only* (194).

Third, in his conclusion, Ho claims that a proto-MT *Vorlage* was compiled before the mid-second century BCE (340), and that the final form, although possibly revealing “multiple editorial layers” (332), would have been composed by “a single editor or small group of editors” who used a range of techniques, including the POS and numerical devices (340). But Ho also claims that it is “unclear if the various poetical techniques identified in this book were already developed in extant pre-Masoretic non-Qumran psalms manuscripts” (339). Did editors use these techniques or did they not?

In the end, I hope that Ho will straighten out some of these question marks in his future studies, and that he also will address the fact that many of the features that Ho *needs to be fixed*—sequences, segmentations, and superscriptions—*are not stable* in the Second Temple period. So, although I am unconvinced by the central arguments of the study, I am looking forward to a continuing dialogue on these fascinating topics. In this dialogue, Ho has proven to be a fresh and creative voice.

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