

Michael Kodzo
Mensah

*I turned back
my feet to your
decrees*
(Psalm 119,59)

Torah in the Fifth Book
of the Psalter

Chapter I: The Torah Question at the End of the Psalter

General Introduction

Recent interest in the theme of Torah in the Psalter can be traced to Childs, whose attentiveness to the “canonical shape of the Psalter” led the scholar to explain the collocation of Ps 1 at the beginning of the Book, as an introduction to the entire Psalter¹. For Childs then, the placing of a Torah Psalm at the opening of the Psalter was “the first hint that the original setting has been subordinated to a new theological function for the future generations of worshipping Israel”². Following the intuition of Childs, Wilson has been most influential in arguing that the Psalter is the result of “purposeful editorial activity”, such that the psalms collocated at the seams of each, introduce the major themes found in the respective Books³.

To the developing interests in the relationship between the collocation of individual psalms and their impact on the surrounding context, an important contribution was to be made in 1987 by Mays, with an article, “The Place of Torah-Psalms in the Psalter”⁴. The question to which Mays sought to respond was the vacuum left in previous research as to the role of these Psalms (1; 19; 119), which appeared not to fit any single fixed “form”, by which the Form Critical Approach had sought to categorise various psalms⁵. Mays argued that even if the three psalms showed differences in form and content, one thing was distinctive about them; they are psalms in which “the instruction of the Lord is the central organizing topic”⁶. Mays thus insisted that the study of Torah Psalms was not a question of their interpretation as “isolated pieces”, but rather what their presence in the Psalter means for the way the psalms are to be viewed and read⁷.

1 Cf. B.S. CHILDS, *Introduction*, 513.

2 B.S. CHILDS, *Introduction*, 514.

3 Cf. G.H. WILSON, *Hebrew Psalter*, 199. For a brief summary of studies dedicated to the question of the composition of the Psalter, cf. E. JAIN, *Psalmhandschriften*, 226–237.

4 J.L. MAYS, «Torah-Psalms», 3–12.

5 While Gunkel categorised Ps 1 as a wisdom Psalm, he saw Ps 19 as a hymn, while Ps 119 was classified among “mixed psalms”. Cf. H. GUNKEL, *Einleitung*, 403.

6 J.L. MAYS, «Torah-Psalms», 3.

7 Cf. J.L. MAYS, «Torah-Psalms», 3.

In this regard, Mays made three important observations:

- i. That all three psalms are “the work of poets who are bringing together elements of vocabulary, style and theology from various parts of the emerging Hebrew canon of scripture”⁸.
- ii. That the theme of Torah is not reserved to these three Psalms but that “other expressions of this theology can be found scattered throughout the Psalter”⁹, in which regard Mays identifies fourteen psalms, which develop the same theme (Pss 18; 25; 33; 78; 89; 93; 94; 99; 103; 105; 111; 112; 147; 148).
- iii. That Torah Psalms appear to be paired with other psalms, which have an eschatological dimension, presupposing such a context for a piety based on Torah¹⁰. By implication, adjoining psalms were to be understood as providing the immediate context for the reading of the individual psalm.

This study, following Mays’ initial intuition, is then dedicated to the theme of Torah in the Fifth Book of the Psalter. If the influence of the Torah at the opening of the Psalter is evident, the question may still validly be posed regarding the closing of the same.

1. The Problem, Method, Organisation and Limitations of the Study

The present chapter will seek to discuss the exegetical problem, the methods to be applied, the organisation and finally the limitations of the study.

1.1 The Problem of Torah in the Fifth Book of the Psalter

While the question posed by Mays, with regard to the role of Torah at the beginning of the Psalter, has attracted a good number of articles and monographs, the same cannot be said, at least proportionately, of the theme of Torah in the Fifth Book of Psalms¹¹. The source of the problem is not too difficult to imagine. Any study that attempts to deal with the subject is faced

8 J.L. MAYS, «Torah-Psalms», 4.

9 J.L. MAYS, «Torah-Psalms», 8.

10 In this regard, Mays equally affirmed the relationship that exists between Torah and Royal Psalms in the Psalter. This admission did not however diminish the importance the scholar assigned to the Torah Psalms as such. Cf. J.L. MAYS, «Torah-Psalms», 10–11.

11 To mention just a few, cf. G. T. SHEPPARD, *Wisdom*, 136–144; B. J. DIEBNER, «Motto», 7–45; E. ZENGER, «Wegweiser», 29–47; J. WEHRLE, «Tor zum Psalter», 215–229; A. WÉNIN, «Encadrement», 151–176; B. RENAUD, «Psautier», 225–242; P. J. BOTHA, «Interface», 189–203; D. SCAIOLA, «Porta», 11–17;

unavoidably with the problem of Ps 119 which presents significant difficulties, not simply because of its length, but even more fundamentally, due to the problem of its coherence and hence its message. In this regard, Gunkel was of the opinion that the poet, in a bid to construct a poem to the praise of Torah, only succeeded in filling the acrostic format with any thought or literary form related to this idea, with little or no consideration for the psalm's coherence¹². Thus, the conclusion of Duhm – “jedenfalls ist dieser „Psalm“ das inhaltloseste Produkt, das jemals Papier Schwarz gemacht hat”¹³ – has almost become axiomatic of the problem of Ps 119.

1.1.1 Review of Relevant Literature

The above question of Torah, in the Fifth Book in general, and in Ps 119 in particular, has yet to be resolved definitely, as may be illustrated by a cursory review of the most important monographs dedicated to the problem¹⁴. The first of these was Deissler's *Psalm 119 (118) und seine Theologie* (1955), in which the scholar, precisely in reaction to Gunkel's classification of the psalm as a “Mischgattung”¹⁵, sought to explain the psalm's coherence in terms of an anthological composition. The poet, he argued, had not simply repeated words, motifs and literary forms from other parts of Hebrew literature, but had succeeded in creating a coherence, in as much as the material transposed into Ps 119 now served a new theological purpose¹⁶.

Notwithstanding Deissler's noble intention of demonstrating the coherence of Ps 119 and its supposed new theological perspective, the results, judging

B. WEBER, «Directive», 237–260; S. GILLINGHAM, «Entering and Leaving», 383–393; R. L. COLE, *Gateway*, 1–45; J. KARTJE, *Epistemology*, 85–90.

12 As Gunkel notes, “der Dichter, der seinen Psalm zum Lobe des Gesetzes verfassen wollte, hat den weitgespannten Rahmen nur ausfüllen können, indem er alle irgend nur möglichen Gedanken und Formen herbeizog, die eine Beziehung auf das Gesetz zuließen”. H. GUNKEL, *Einleitung*, 403.

13 B. DUHM, *Psalmen*, 427.

14 This is not to discount the importance of several commentaries and articles, which have contributed substantially to the discussion. These contributions will be subsequently acknowledged and debated. At present however, I limit myself to the discussion of a handful of monographs representative of the major trends that have defined the nature of research into the question.

15 H. GUNKEL, *Einleitung*, 403.

16 He notes, “ferner hat der Psalmist [...] eine ganze Reihe von Wendungen mit theologischer Tragweite in selbständige Weise umgeprägt und damit in neue Zusammenhänge transponiert. Dies alles zeigt, daß die anthologische Stilart bei aller Bindung an Schrifttexte keine Stagnation bedeutet, sondern das Alte verlebendigen, in neue Perspektiven stellen und so die Bewegung nach vorn offenhalten will und kann”. A. DEISSLER, *Psalm 119*, 269.

from the evaluation of Soll, have been modest. The latter has questioned whether Deissler's approach is any less "atomistic" than Gunkel's, observing, "whereas in Gunkel's approach each verse is assigned to a different genre, Deissler examines each verse in the light of its vocabulary, and derives each from a different text, which may be found anywhere in Scripture. Rarely are the verses of the psalm used to shed light on each other"¹⁷. In a word, Deissler does not do enough to explain the coherence of Ps 119.

A second monograph dedicated to the Psalm was Soll's *Psalm 119: Matrix, Form and Setting* (1991). The scholar's respectable contribution was to argue for a coherent reading of the psalm as a psalm of lament. In this direction, Soll argued that a six-part division of the psalm was able to show a logic, namely, that the "movement of the individual lament from complaint to assurance is recapitulated several times"¹⁸. Scholarly assessment of Soll's thesis has been generally positive. Even if his proposal of Jehoiachin as the Davidic king has been strongly contested¹⁹, Freedman and Welch are right in asserting, "Soll has made a significant step in elucidating Psalm 119, simply by rejecting previous scholars' dismissive verdict on its creativity and form"²⁰.

While the results of Soll's study were clearly commendable, the scholar still left an important problem unresolved. On the one hand, Soll was convinced that the poet had constructed a logically coherent poem suited to the genre of lament; on the other hand, he asserted, "we cannot, of course, know what led him [the poet] to structure his poem the way he did"²¹. The curious admission would appear to have reopened an old wound, as to whether the psalm did after all possess a thematic coherence. In any case, Freedman and Welch rightly point out, that while Soll's "conscientious attempt to trace the thematic logic of the psalm is not exhaustive, it sets a standard for future interpreters"²².

Inspired by Soll's innovation in treating Ps 119 as a coherent whole, a number of studies subsequently attempted using Structural Analysis to demonstrate the unity of the psalm. One monograph representative of this kind of analysis in Ps 119 was Auffret's *Mais tu élargiras mon cœur. Nouvelle étude structurelle du psaume 119* (2006). The detailed study of the interrelationships between the strophes and the divisions of the psalm finally proposes a structure of two balanced halves²³. While the effort on the part of Auffret is

17 W. M. SOLL, *Psalm 119*, 66.

18 W. M. SOLL, *Psalm 119*, 110.

19 Cf. K. A. REYNOLDS, *Torah*, 23.

20 D. N. FREEDMAN – A. J. WELCH, review of W. M. SOLL, 775.

21 W. M. SOLL, *Psalm 119*, 110.

22 D. N. FREEDMAN – A. J. WELCH, review of W. M. SOLL, 775.

23 Cf. P. AUFFRET, *Nouvelle étude*, 67–372.

no doubt worthy of acknowledgement, the results especially with regard to the psalm's thematic coherence are rather modest. Nocquet, in his review of the monograph, pretty much sums up this sentiment when he notes, that those on the quest for the meaning of the psalm should not expect very much from Auffret's analysis, which sadly over-emphasizes the psalm's formal elements to the detriment of its theological import²⁴.

Another study dedicated to the subject under discussion has been the González Zugasti's unpublished doctoral dissertation *Trazado del Salmo 119* (2009). The scholar, revisiting the charge that Ps 119 represents a tautological composition²⁵, proposes to demonstrate that the psalm does contain an intrinsic dramatic development built around four characters, namely, God, the Psalmist, the enemies and the friends²⁶. In this respect, González Zugasti rejects the linear framework that the Psalm's acrostic format suggests²⁷, arguing instead from the poet's use of varying verbal tenses and the progressive introduction of new terms, which, he argues, are responsible for the changes in the mood of the Psalmist who passes from a great determination to a crippling weakness or vice versa²⁸.

At least two difficulties immediately emerge upon scrutiny of the above thesis. González Zugasti's rejection of a linear outline to the psalm creates a new problem since he provides no clear alternative structure to its reading²⁹. Moreover, the scholar's attempt to emphasise the concept of "*dramatis*

24 "Mais ceux qui sont en quête de sens ne doivent rien en attendre, car l'analyse n'articule que fort peu cette décortication avec des significations et une portée spirituelle. On peut être dérouteré par le contraste entre la technicité formelle extrême et l'absence de significations théologiques fortes". D. NOCQUET, review of P. AUFFRET, 619.

25 In this respect González Zugasti points to M. Mendelssohn's 1783 critique of Ps 119 in which the author asserts, "wer diese unaufhörliche Tautologie in 176 Versen nach einander weg liest, kann unmöglich Geschmack daran finden. Auch sind diese Verse nicht gemacht, so nach einander hin abgelesen zu werden. Es sind gleichsam 176 Sinnschriften, gleiches Inhalts". M. MENDELSSOHN, *Psalmen*, 285. Cf. J. GONZÁLEZ ZUGASTI, *Trazado*, 4–5.

26 As the author notes, "se quiere demostrar que Sal 119 es una obra que, en la invariable forma alfabética y con todas sus variaciones lexicográficas y métricas, contiene un intencionado desarrollo dramático interior". J. GONZÁLEZ ZUGASTI, *Trazado*, 7.

27 He argues, "a largo de este análisis, se ha podido observar, que el trazado del Salmo no es lineal, en contra de lo que sugiere la frontera establecida por el alfabeto; y, en este sentido el contenido no se adecua a la forma del continente". J. GONZÁLEZ ZUGASTI, *Trazado*, 334.

28 Cf. J. GONZÁLEZ ZUGASTI, *Trazado*, 335.

29 While the scholar suggests that the poet's use of verbal forms and progressive use of new terms provide the logic for reading the psalm, he curiously returns to

personae” leads him to the rather unlikely conclusion that Torah is not the primary theme of Ps 119³⁰.

A fifth monograph on the subject has been Reynolds’ *Torah as Teacher*. The Exemplary Torah Student in Psalm 119 (2010). The scholar, departing from the attempt to establish a coherent reading of Ps 119, returned to Deissler’s concept of an “anthological” poem though he criticised the latter for not having “a precise methodology for establishing the nature of relationship between texts”³¹. Reynolds’ method thus consisted in identifying in Ps 119, what he described as “traditional religious language”, namely pre-existing material drawn from the Hebrew Bible “regardless of the specific relationship between all of the texts”³². The consequences of the scholars approach are quite predictable. Rather than explaining the difficulties of coherence in the psalm, Reynolds asserts that the Psalmist’s “goal is not to create perfect coherence between figurative language and literary techniques”³³. The scholar’s proposal, to understand the Psalmist as a student of Torah, does not lack credibility; neither is there much difficulty in accepting that Ps 119 shows links with pre-existing material in Israel’s religious tradition. However, Reynold’s explanations for the “logical gaps” in Ps 119 as having suasive functions, run a huge risk of circularity³⁴, and remain woefully inadequate in absolving the psalm, or its poet for that matter, of Duhm’s original charge – an empty product!

Another monograph, Meynet’s *Les huit psaumes acrostiches alphabétiques* (2015), though not entirely dedicated to Ps 119, is another effort worthy of mention. Meynet argues that the key to reading Ps 119 is to be found in vv. 81–96, which focalise on the threat of death by the Psalmist’s adversaries. The psalm, he insists, is to be understood as the supplication of one who has come to the realisation that it is not fidelity to the Law that saves, but rather YHWH’s mercy³⁵. Apart from the objections, which could arise

what could only be described as a linear reading of the psalm in his conclusion. Cf. J. GONZÁLEZ ZUGASTI, *Trazado*, 334–342.

30 He asserts, “la Torah no es lo más importante del Salmo 119. Aunque ni su centralidad ni su fecundidad se pueden obviar, lo fundamental en el Salmo es la íntima relación del salmista con Dios”. J. GONZÁLEZ ZUGASTI, *Trazado*, 28.

31 K. A. REYNOLDS, *Torah*, 28.

32 K. A. REYNOLDS, *Torah*, 56.

33 K. A. REYNOLDS, *Torah*, 90.

34 It should appear a rather convenient but circular argument to explain a lack of coherence in Ps 119 by saying the Poet did not seek to be coherent. Neither is there any compelling evidence, in my opinion, that the poet needed to be illogical in order to be persuasive. Cf. K. A. REYNOLDS, *Torah*, 102–103.

35 He notes, “si l’on considère aussi l’architecture du poème focalisé sur la menace du mort [...], le psaume apparaît alors comme la supplication de qui constate que ce n’est pas sa fidélité à la loi qui peut le sauver de la mort, mais la miséricorde et

from the fact that the scholar bases his structural analysis on his French translation of the Hebrew text³⁶, Meynet's conclusion runs into difficulty on an important issue. He earlier concedes, the interior enemy, namely sin, represents, without doubt, a greater peril to the Psalmist who seeks to observe YHWH's commandments³⁷. If the scholar agrees, that the question of sin is much more perilous to the Psalmist in Ps 119 than the threat of death posed by the adversaries, then it casts doubt on his proposal of vv. 81–96 as containing the key to reading the psalm, and suggests that the thematic centre of Ps 119 is to be found elsewhere.

A final word should be reserved for a range of studies, which have attempted to situate Ps 119 into the Fifth Book of the Psalter. These efforts, to mention a few, include that of Westermann, who suggested that Ps 119 once concluded the Psalter at some earlier stage of its formation³⁸. While the proposal has received wide attention by scholars, the evidence to support the position remains inconclusive. Wilson subsequently argued for the centrality of Ps 119 in the Fifth Book, while curiously assigning it to the group Pss 118–134³⁹. Another, that of Grant, was to propose that Pss 118 and 119, following the logic of the Royal-Torah theme characteristic of the Deuteronomistic Kingship Law, occupies the centre of the Fifth Book⁴⁰. The scholar's attempt has however not escaped the scrutiny of scholars like Gillingham⁴¹ and Williamson⁴² who have challenged Grant's reading of Ps 118

la puissance du Seigneur". R. MEYNET, *Huit psaumes*, 270–271. It would remain curious though, that this psalm would so clearly emphasize fidelity to Torah, only to arrive at the conclusion that it was of minimal importance.

36 For Girard's objections to such an approach, cf. M. GIRARD, *Psaumes 1–50*, 99.

37 Meynet observes, "l'ennemi de l'intérieur, le péché représente sans doute un péril plus grand encore pour celui qui entend rester fidèle aux commandements du Seigneur". R. MEYNET, *Huit psaumes*, 177. By the scholar's own admission, the question of sin is more critical than that of persecution and confirms the position I subsequently seek to advance.

38 As Westermann proposes, "es gab demnach einmal einen Psalter, der mit 1 begann und mit 119 endete". C. WESTERMANN, «Sammlung», 338–339. The argument which leans on the uniqueness of Ps 119 and the "inclusio" it forms with Ps 1 is however not enough evidence to suggest that the Psalter once concluded with Ps 119.

39 Cf. G. H. WILSON, *Hebrew Psalter*, 223.

40 Cf. J. A. GRANT, *Exemplar*, 240–244.

41 Cf. S. GILLINGHAM, review of J. A. GRANT, 147–149.

42 Williamson in his review of Grant's monograph argues, "the weakest link concerns Psalm cxviii, which is not a royal psalm in the usually accepted sense of the term, so that here Grant has to work hard to maintain his case". H. G. M. WILLIAMSON, review of J. A. GRANT, 129.

as a “Royal Psalm”⁴³. Zenger⁴⁴ and Ballhorn⁴⁵ have meanwhile accorded Ps 119 a structurally central place in the Fifth Book. While these latter proposals are perfectly plausible, the question is, to what extent such assertions are reliable, if the basic problem of the message of Ps 119 remains unresolved. In the words of Snearly, Ps 119 represents a “*crux criticorum* within the macrostructure of Book V”⁴⁶, an assertion which underlines the importance of resolving the psalm’s thematic unity as a step towards understanding the organization of the Fifth Book.

1.2 Methodology

My discussion of the appropriate methodology to be adopted in this study touches on two major concerns. These are the methods used in the exegesis of the individual psalm and the question of the structural and contextual study of sequences of psalms within the Psalter, which constitute the subject for immediate consideration.

1.2.1 *Torah in the Individual Psalm*

The discussion of the exegetical problem made it quite evident, that a study of the theme of Torah in the Fifth Book of the Psalter must first address the question of Torah in the individual psalm. The idea of Torah is primarily to be found in the single psalm, which, as Mays observed, is a work of poetry⁴⁷, and which for that matter, requires a method, which takes seriously its particular language, and poetic style, which are the vehicles for expressing a particular theological view⁴⁸.

43 My position of the matter, briefly, is that the royal elements in Ps 118 cannot be discounted, even if its designation by Grant as a “Royal Psalm” might be somewhat controversial. Cf. J. H. EATON, *Kingship*, 61–63. Whether Ps 118 should therefore be separated from Pss 113–117 and paired with Ps 119 is however another matter, which I intend to take up subsequently.

44 I agree largely with Zenger’s proposal that collocates Ps 119 in the centre of the Fifth Book, even though I retain his association of the psalm to the feast of “*Shabuot*” debatable. Cf. E. ZENGER, «Composition», 98.

45 Cf. E. BALLHORN, *Zum Telos*, 362–369.

46 M. K. SNEARLY, *Return*, 133. I entirely agree with Snearly on the above and on his assertion that Ps 119 should be considered as “its own macrostructural unit within Book V”. *Id.*, 137. His treatment of the psalm is however rather terse (pages 129–139) and would hardly resolve the “*crux criticorum*” that the scholar himself acknowledges.

47 Cf. J. L. MAYS, «Torah-Psalms», 4.

48 In this regard, Barbiero’s criticism of those methods, which neglect the in-depth study of the individual psalm as the starting point for establishing the relationship between sequences of psalms, is valid. Cf. G. BARBIERO, *Einheit*, 19.

The question of treating the Psalms as poetry is a question that itself long preceded the observation of Mays. Lowth's discovery of the phenomenon of *parallelismus membrorum* might very well have been the birth of the poetic consciousness with regard to Psalm research⁴⁹. Alonso Schökel should however be credited with the systematic description of the poetic method⁵⁰, around which an abundance of scholarship has developed⁵¹ regarding the analysis of the structure⁵², syntax⁵³, figures of speech⁵⁴ and other literary aspects of the poetic text.

a) *Analysis of the Structure*

One of the above-mentioned methods needs to be singled out for special consideration, namely Structural Analysis⁵⁵. The method is particularly relevant to the study since two out of the three psalms under study (Pss 111; 119) are alphabetic acrostics. The difficulty of dealing with this poetic form is perhaps best illustrated by Alonso Schökel who argues, "the technique does not help the internal unity and coherence of the poem"⁵⁶. This general view of the acrostic form has engendered three trends, which are well illustrated in the scholarly discussions on the structure of the alphabetical acrostic psalms.

The first of the above-mentioned trends has been the denial of the existence of any structure besides the acrostic format⁵⁷. This has often resulted in a verse-by-verse reading of the given psalm with little or no reference to subdivisions into strophes or stanzas, which might unite a certain theme or

49 Cf. R. LOWTH, *De Sacra Poesi*, 205–227. For a historical survey on the question of Hebrew Poetry, cf. L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL, *Manual*, 1–7.

50 Cf. L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL, *Estudios*, 55–534.

51 To mention just a few of the most influential authors, cf. J. L. KUGEL, *Poetry*, 1–58; R. ALTER, *Poetry*, 3–214; W. G. E. WATSON, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 1–385; J. P. FOKKELMAN, *Poetry*, 15–209.

52 I am referring, in this regard, to the scholarship regarding the use of parallelism and recurrence. Cf. P. J. NEL, «Parallelism», 135–143; A. WAGNER, «Parallelismus», 1–26; A. BERLIN, *Dynamics*, 1–17. For its application in Psalm research, cf. P. AUFFRET, *Sagesse*, 139–404; M. GIRARD, *Psaumes 1–50*, 13–136.

53 For the verbal form in Hebrew Poetry, cf. A. NICCACCI, «Verbal System», 247–268; T. VEIJOLA, «Tempora», 129–143; T. NOTARIUS, «Temporality», 275–305. For the grammar of Hebrew Poetry cf. E. TALSTRA, «Poetry», 101–126; D. T. TSUMURA, «Vertical Grammar», 167–181.

54 For the use of metaphors in the Psalter, cf. B. DOYLE, «Metaphor», 61–82; A. BASSON, *Metaphors*, 63.244; P. VAN HECKE, «Metaphors», xi–xxxiv.

55 For a general survey of the various methodological approaches to Structural Analysis, cf. P. R. RAABE, *Psalms Structures*, 9–28.

56 L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL, *Manual*, 191.

57 Cf. D. N. FREEDMAN, «Acrostic», 429. With regard to Ps 111 Pardee makes such a claim. Cf. D. PARDEE, «Acrostics», 137.

thought in a section of the poem⁵⁸. The second, to the other extreme, is the claim that these psalms possess multiple structures of equal value for the understanding of the poem⁵⁹. The result is the proposal of a myriad of structures, even sometimes conflicting, with no clear relationship between them. The third is the proposal of a definite structure, which attempts to discern a specific theme or thought movement in the psalm⁶⁰.

The need for a method of structural analysis, that remedies some of the above-mentioned difficulties, can therefore not be over-emphasized. Alonso Schökel himself admits, in spite of the challenges he envisages, that “it is also possible that this artificial alphabetic composition has a robust poetic structure which gives it a far deeper dimension”⁶¹. Ridderbos is even more optimistic when he argues, “the difficulty which many authors envision in the use of this poetic device, is largely overstated”⁶². The possibility of proceeding with a structural examination of these poems arises, as Ridderbos observes, from the very nature of Hebrew Poetry, which might be summarised in the following affirmations:

- i. Hebrew poems, particularly the psalms, reveal a way of composition in which “individual sentences are not arbitrarily placed next to each other [...] They arrange themselves in units. There is a progression in thought”⁶³.
- ii. While a strophe is a unit of poetry that might be determined, based on material or formal elements, Hebrew Poetry, in very many cases, cannot be divided into formal units and must therefore be divided based on content⁶⁴.

58 With regard to Ps 111 cf. D. PARDEE, «Acrostics», 137. In the case of Ps 119, cf. A. DEISLER, *Psalm 119*, 86–263; K. A. REYNOLDS, *Torah*, 188–212.

59 So P. AUFFRET, «Grandes», 196.

60 Van der Lugt’s conclusion that the entire composition of Ps 119 expresses “human failure to understand the depth and creative power of God’s instruction” represents such an attempt at understanding the thematic coherence of the psalm. Whether this conclusion is convincing is an entirely different question. P. VAN DER LUGT, *Cantos*, III, 344.

61 L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL, *Manual*, 191.

62 Cf. N.H. RIDDERBOS, «Style-figures and Structure», 61.

63 N.H. RIDDERBOS, «Style-figures and Structure», 49–50.

64 Cf. N.H. RIDDERBOS, «Style-figures and Structure», 49. It has to be pointed out that Ridderbos’ insistence on the content for the determination of the structure of Hebrew poetry comes on the background of previous scholarship especially beginning with Köster who had first underlined logical content (“Sinn-Abschnitten”) as the most important criterion in the determination of strophic limits. Cf. F. KÖSTER, «Strophen», 40–114. For subsequent scholarship following in the same direction

- iii. When the division of a psalm is based on its content, one “will frequently find that between these material units there is also a formal correspondence”⁶⁵.

The above criteria, which favour the content over formal elements in the determination of the structure, have not gone without critique⁶⁶. Beaucamp, for instance, has pointed out the huge danger of subjectivity, if the determination of strophes is left entirely to content⁶⁷. Girard, in the same direction, has proposed six criteria⁶⁸, which the scholar retains, should restore objectivity to the method. These would include,

- i. The use of the text in the original language.
- ii. The priority of relationships between words to those between ideas.
- iii. The priority of repetition of words to other verbal relationships such as synonyms, antithesis or synthesis.
- iv. The individual psalm as the starting point for the discussion of the structure.
- v. A critical distinction of the text into varying levels or strata.
- vi. The rejection of the imposition of preconceived structures on the text.

A conciliatory position between the above two approaches, in my opinion, is a fair means of proceeding in this study⁶⁹. Van der Lugt is perhaps best representative of this effort when he stresses that while we “should never disregard the aspect of the development of the thought content [...], thematic analysis frequently depends on a formal approach to unravel the structure of the poem”⁷⁰. In other words, the study of the formal elements of the psalm is not unrelated, as Girard seems to suggest, from the determination of units of logical content within a psalm.

The above-indicated attention to both the content and formal elements represents the basic principle, which undergirds the Structural Analysis to be applied in this study. The unit delimitation of each psalm under consideration would seek principally “to combine the verses to form a group, if they develop

cf. K. SCHLOTTMANN, «Strophenbau», 473–492; F. DELITZSCH, *Die Psalmen*, 21–24; A. CONDAMIN, *Poèmes*, 18; N. W. LUND, «Chiasmus», 281–312.

65 N. H. RIDDERBOS, «Style-figures and Structure», 76.

66 For much earlier objections to the position, cf. E. SIEVERS, *Metrische Studien*, 134–141; H. GRIMME, *Psalmenprobleme*, 147–149.

67 As Beaucamp observes, “prétendre, comme le fait N. H. Ridderbos, *art. cit.*, que le point de vue matériel doit toujours avoir le pas sur le point de vue formel, nous paraît un dangereux *a priori*, car le sens d’un passage «material point of view», depend souvent de la manière dont on coupe le texte”. E. BEAUCAMP, «Structure strophique», 209, n. 26.

68 Cf. M. GIRARD, *Psaumes 1–50*, 98–104.

69 In this regard, cf. H. MÖLLER, «Strophenbau», 240–256.

70 P. VAN DER LUGT, *Cantos*, I, 76.

the same thought”⁷¹. By the term “strophe”, I will refer to the most basic of such combination of verses to form a “thought unit”⁷²; by the term “stanza”, a combination of two or more strophes⁷³, while the term “canto” will refer to a combination of two or more stanzas⁷⁴. Adopting the criteria proposed by Girard above, the determination of the various levels of poetic units will equally take into consideration the presence of formal elements, above all the repetition of key words⁷⁵, and their symmetric distribution to form *inclusios*⁷⁶, chiasms, concentric and alternative structures⁷⁷, as well as the transitional techniques adopted between various units⁷⁸. The above will then make it possible to observe and describe with some objectivity, the semantic, symmetric and ultimately the thematic relationships, between the strophes, stanzas and cantos of the given psalm, and to interrogate whether the psalm demonstrates a thematic unity or develops a coherent thought pattern.

b) The Poetic Dimension

Not unrelated to the above discussion of the analysis of the structure, is Berlin’s insistence on the need to take into consideration, what she describes as the “poetic function”, arguing, “the structuring of a poem involves parallelism on many levels of language at once”⁷⁹. The scholar in this way has emphasised other types of parallelism beyond the syntactic and semantic which are equally important in the study of Hebrew poetry. Watson has similarly stressed, that “both the poem as a whole and its separate units should be looked at with an eye to structural and non-structural devices (such as

71 E. J. KISSANE, *Psalms*, I, xl.

72 The above is without prejudice to the smaller divisions, which may be identified within the strophe, such as the colon or the verse. For further discussions on terminology, cf. P. R. RAABE, *Psalms Structures*, 11–13.

73 Cf. similarly, W. G. E. WATSON, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 160–168.

74 This nomenclature, especially as employed in the discussion of Ps 119, differs significantly from that proposed by P. van der Lugt. By “strophe” I refer to what van der Lugt terms “canticle”; by “stanza” I refer to what he terms “canto”; by “canto” I refer to what he terms sections/subsections. Cf. P. VAN DER LUGT, *Cantos*, I, 75–92; III, 329–333.

75 For the “Key Words” in Hebrew Poetry, cf. L. J. LIEBREICH, «Psalms 34 and 145», 181–192. For repetition in Hebrew Poetry generally, cf. J. MAGNE, «Répétitions», 177–197; J. GOLDINGAY, «Variation», 146–151.

76 Cf. A. R. CERESKO, «Alphabetic Thinking», 32–46.

77 For chiasms, cf. R. ALDEN, «Chiastic Psalms I», 11–28; A. R. CERESKO, «Chiasmus», 1–10.

78 Cf. H. V. D. PARUNAK, «Transitional», 525–548.

79 A. BERLIN, *Dynamics*, 17.

word-pairs, enjambment, metaphor, the break-up of stereotype phrases)⁸⁰. While these considerations may not be prioritized over the already-discussed criteria for the structure of the psalms under study, my attention to the various poetic devices⁸¹, whether phonological, lexical-semantic or grammatical will complement the “inner-strophic analysis”, demonstrating how these devices influence the cohesion of the individual strophe⁸².

A final word needs to be reserved for the particular nature of each of the three psalms under study. Girard, who has argued most vehemently for an objective method for the study of the psalms, himself admits, that the method applied to a psalm might ultimately depend on its peculiar characteristics, for instance, its length⁸³. Thus, while a shorter text (Pss 111 and 147) might favour working from the macro structural level to smaller units, the reverse is more practical in unlocking the structure of a longer poem like Ps 119⁸⁴. Such particularities thus underlie certain divergences in the application of the method to these three psalms.

1.2.2 *Torah, Psalms and the Context of the MT Psalter*

The discussion regarding the collocation of Psalms within the Psalter, or their organisation in groups or sequences, requires certain methodological clarifications. Foremost among these is the distinction between the “Synchronic” approach, which concerns itself with the text, and in this case, the Psalter in its final or “Canonical”⁸⁵ form, and the “Diachronic” approach, which pays

80 W.G.E. WATSON, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 19. For alliteration as the earliest form of “Sprachbindung” and its use in the Psalter, cf. P. HUGGER, «Alliteration», 81–90.

81 For a fuller description and discussion of these poetic devices, cf. L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL, *Manual*, 20–179; A. BERLIN, *Dynamics*, 31–126.

82 With regard to the question whether there exists some hierarchy by which it might be determined which structural device should be prioritized, Watson has pointed out “there are no hard and fast rules”. W.G.E. WATSON, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 163. It is however possible to state generally, in my opinion, that lexical repetitions often take precedence over phonological considerations, exceptions notwithstanding.

83 “Comment, plus concrètement, assurer la mise en œuvre de cette opération? Tout dépend de la longueur du texte analysé”. M. GIRARD, *Psaumes 1–50*, 116.

84 In this regard, Nodder’s approach, which proceeds from intra-strophic analysis to inter-strophic analysis is particularly relevant, and is adopted in the study of Ps 119. Cf. M. NODDER, «Psalm 119», 323–342.

85 For the terminology “canonical”, cf. B.S. CHILDS, *Introduction*, 511–522; J.A. SANDERS, *Torah*, ix–xx. For an overview of “Canonical Criticism” including recent discussions and an ample bibliography, cf. D. OLSON, «Canonical Approach», 196–218.

greater attention to the historical processes which shaped the final text. While scholars generally agree on the complementarity of the two approaches for exegetical research, Barbiero has pointed out the risks that might arise from a lack of clarity in the application of the two approaches in a single exegetical study⁸⁶. The foregoing informs the decision to proceed in this study with the Synchronic Approach, without prejudice to the benefits the other approach affords⁸⁷.

An important consequence of the above-mentioned Synchronic Approach has been the understanding of the Psalter as a book⁸⁸, as opposed to a mere collection of disjointed psalms⁸⁹. To this end, scholars engaged with the question of the “shape of the Psalter”⁹⁰, have pointed to a number of indicators and techniques within the Psalter, which support such an organisation of individual psalms into groups and sequences⁹¹. These techniques comprise the most basic principles of “juxtaposition” and “concatenation”⁹², which could be expanded to include diverse expressions of “stereometry” and “motif-binding”⁹³. To these may be added the phenomenon of “psalm pairs”⁹⁴, sequences of common psalm titles⁹⁵ and, not least, the distribution of doxologies that underlines the

86 “Synchrone und diachrone Methode sind Komplementär, aber die Mischung der beiden Methoden ist nicht unproblematisch”. G. BARBIERO, *Einheit*, 20. For a similar critique of Zenger’s mixing of the two approaches, cf. M. MILLARD, «Psalmenexegese», 316–321; R. RENDTORFF, «Anfragen», 330.

87 In this direction, cf. F.-L. HOSSFELD, «Konkurrenz», 235–247.

88 Cf. G. H. WILSON, «Editorial Divisions», 337–352; E. ZENGER, «Psalter als Buch», 1–57; J.-M. AUWERS, «Livre biblique», 67–89.

89 Cf. E. S. GERSTENBERGER, «Psalter als Buch», 3–13.

90 For a survey of studies dedicated to the contextual and structural relationship between the Psalms, cf. D. M. HOWARD, *Structure*, 1–22.

91 In this regard, I must make mention of the dissertation of R. Ribera-Mariné, who to my knowledge, was the first student of the P. I. B., Rome, to use such a method of exegesis of the Psalter in his dissertation, which was defended in 1991. The author, who only recently published an extract of this dissertation, has noted, “el tema no era fácil, no solo por la cantidad de bibliografía publicada sobre los salmos [...] sino también porque quería ser una aproximación nueva al Salterio, de algo que este momento solo intuía, que se podría resumir con una frase tan simple como ésta: *el Salterio es un libro*”. R. RIBERA-MARINÉ, *Salmos 138–145*, 5. Since then, at least three dissertations at the P. I. B., have been defended using a similar approach. Cf. S. K. AHN, *Salmi 146–150*; S. ATTARD, *Ordering*; M. PAVAN, *Memory*.

92 C. BARTH, «Concatenatio», 30–40; B. JANOWSKI, «Kleine Biblia», 381–420; G. BARBIERO, *Einheit*, 20–21.

93 Cf. B. JANOWSKI, «Kleine Biblia», 384–397.

94 Cf. W. ZIMMERLI, «Zwillingspsalmen», 105–113; D. SCAIOLA, *Una cosa*, 247–349.

95 Cf. B. S. CHILDS, «Psalm Titles», 137–150; E. SLOMOVIC, «Titles», 350–380.

five-fold division of the Psalter⁹⁶. The consequence of the foregoing research has been the observation of certain theological interests, which may have contributed to the shaping of the Psalter⁹⁷, among which the Torah⁹⁸, the Royal⁹⁹, Wisdom¹⁰⁰ and the Eschatological¹⁰¹ have all been underlined¹⁰².

The above-described area of Psalm research has not passed without just scrutiny, especially regarding the objectivity of the methods applied in the study of the relationship between adjacent psalms. Millard has for instance questioned the use of “*Stichwörter*” or chiasmic structures as a binding principle in adjoining psalms, especially if these words occur frequently in the Psalter¹⁰³. Whybray has put down the phenomenon of concatenation to mere coincidence¹⁰⁴, while Murphy has objected to a possible anarchy resulting from a “pluriformity of contexts” behind the reading of the Psalter as a book¹⁰⁵. It remains remarkable, notwithstanding some of the methodological divergences, that Whybray, himself a critic, puts forward a number of “points of agreement” regarding this area of Psalm research¹⁰⁶. These include:

- i. The significance of the positioning of Ps 1 and other psalms to the study of the structure and theological meaning of the Psalter.
- ii. The fact that some “Psalm pairs”, and other small psalm groups, were formed by the redactors, while some earlier ones were retained by the final redactors of the Psalter¹⁰⁷.

96 Cf. H. GESE, «Büchereinteilung», 159–167; E. BALLHORN, *Zum Telos*, 44–61; C. LEVIN, «Entstehung», 83–90.

97 Cf. J.L. MAYS, «Context», 16–17.

98 Cf. J.L. MAYS, «Torah-Psalms», 3–12.

99 To mention a few of these attempts, cf. G.H. WILSON, «Seams», 85–94; R.G. KRATZ, «Die Tora Davids», 1–34; J.A. GRANT, *Exemplar*, 25–27.

100 Cf. J. REINDL, «Weisheitliche Bearbeitung», 333–356; J.K. KUNTZ, «Wisdom Psalms», 144–160.

101 Cf. D.C. MITCHELL, *Message*, 297–303.

102 For proposals of other theological interests at play in the shaping of the Psalter, cf. W. BRUEGGEMANN, «Bounded», 63–92; J.F.D. CREACH, *Refuge*, 74–105.

103 Cf. M. MILLARD, *Komposition*, 24–25.

104 Cf. R.N. WHYBRAY, *Reading*, 121.

105 Cf. R.E. MURPHY, «Reflections», 27–28.

106 For the seven “points of agreement” which Whybray lists, cf. R.N. WHYBRAY, *Reading*, 30–31. The extent to which other scholars might agree with Whybray is itself open to discussion. What I seek to emphasise here is however the scholar’s openness to the possibility of a sequential reading of psalms in the Psalter.

107 In this regard, Ribera-Mariné notes, “se trata, pues, al inicio de una cuestión genética: imaginar como se había podido formar el Salterio a partir de un pequeño grupo de poemas nucleares, y los criterios con que se ha llegado a confeccionar, unos criterios lógicos ciertamente para los que los han usado, pero alejados de la manera actual de estructurar un texto, criterios que podemos intuir gracias a la

- iii. The evidence of a movement from the traditional cultic usage towards the Psalter as “a source of instruction or an aid to theological reflection”¹⁰⁸.

It should be clear, that while valid objections might be raised with regard to some of Whybray’s “points of agreement”, particularly, the purely speculative attempt to account for the redaction of the Psalter¹⁰⁹, it remains valid, as the scholar concedes, “to examine the Psalter as it stands in its final form and to seek in its contents some clues as to its character and intention”¹¹⁰. The study of elements of “concatenation” and “*Stichwörter*”, or chiasmic structures, as applied to this study, are fundamentally descriptive of the final shape of the Psalter, and respond to the question of how the Book was and is to be read “*consecutively*, from beginning to end”¹¹¹. As Lohfink has pointed out, whatever the intentions of the final redactors were, or were not, the question remains valid, to what extent these “*Stichwörter*” and thematic linkages contribute to making the Psalter a Book of meditation¹¹², which lends itself to a “*lectio continua*”¹¹³. To this, even Whybray admits, “there is

exégesis de los rabinos antiguos y de los autores del Nuevo Testamento cristiano”. R. RIBERA-MARINÉ, *Salmos 138–145*, 5. Cf. similarly, C. WESTERMANN, «Sammlung», 336–343; G. BARBIERO, «Secondo e terzo», 145–146.

108 R.N. WHYBRAY, *Reading*, 31.

109 In this respect, Nasuti has emphasized the distinction between Gerald Wilson’s approach that seeks also to determine the purpose and the intention of the editors of the Psalter and that of Brevard Childs, which fundamentally concerns the final edition. He observes, with regard to Wilson’s approach, “while such a concern is obviously legitimate and important, it should be noted that it does not entirely cohere with the canonical approach of Brevard Childs to which Wilson sees himself indebted”. H.P. NASUTI, «Editing», 14.

110 R.N. WHYBRAY, *Reading*, 35.

111 R.N. WHYBRAY, *Reading*, 11.

112 As Lohfink notes, “meine Frage [...] sei, inwiefern solche Stichwortbezüge, und mit ihnen auch die inhaltlichen Zusammenhänge zwischen einem Psalm und den ihn umgebenden Psalmen, dazu beitragen, daß der Psalter als ganzer zu einem Meditationstext wird, den man auswendig lernen und immer wieder neu vor sich hin murmeln kann”. N. LOHFINK, «Meditation», 197.

113 With regard to the benefits of such a “*lectio continua*”, Pavan observes, “one can grasp dynamics of focalisation, antithesis or *climax*, as well as the modulation and variation of motifs within the sequences, in such a way that the adhesion to the canonical order involves, in a «temporal» sense, the progressive unveiling of the Psalter’s message”. M. PAVAN, *Memory*, 25. Sumpter has also drawn attention to the “presence of an implicit ‘narrative element’ as the reality within which the diverse psalms of our collection cohere”. P. SUMPTER, «Psalms 15–24», 195.

nothing intrinsically improbable in the notion of private consecutive reading of the Psalms”¹¹⁴.

1.3 The Organisation of the Study

In the light of the above methodological clarifications, both to the study of the individual psalm and groups of psalms, this study of Torah in the Fifth Book of the Psalter is organised in four chapters as follows:

- i. Chapter I introduces the study by discussing the exegetical problem and evaluates the attempts to resolve it. The methods applied to the study of the individual psalm and sequences of psalms are subsequently examined. A brief presentation of the study followed by its limitations bring the chapter to a close.
- ii. Chapter II is divided into two parts. Part I is dedicated to the study of Ps 111 in the context of the Fifth Book. This part offers a translation, and textual criticism. Subsequently, the problem of the structure of Ps 111 is discussed, concluding with a proposal of a four-stanza structure. The exegesis of the psalm enters into the question of the theme and builds a case for the consideration of Ps 111 as dealing with the theme of Torah. Finally, the psalm is studied in the light of the subsequent Ps 112 showing how the Torah theme is developed in the latter.

Part II, dedicated to Ps 147, also offers a translation and preliminary considerations of Textual Criticism. A discussion of the unity of the psalm and its division into three stanzas precedes an exegetical study which focuses particularly on the third stanza, seeking to discuss the effect of reading the psalm in the light of the cluster of Torah terms in Ps 147,15–20. A subsequent examination of the context of the Psalm involves the discussion of the Torah theme as a binding element in Pss 146–150.

- iii. Chapter III is divided into two parts, the first dealing with the Torah theme in Ps 119, while the second is dedicated to the question of its collocation in the Fifth Book. Part I begins with a translation and brief annotations regarding the text, followed by an overview of previous scholarship relating to the question of the structure of Ps 119. The discussion of the structure of the 22-stanza psalm proceeds by the examination of the thematic content of individual strophes, the grouping of stanzas into cantos, and the interrogation of the thematic movement, which links the cantos of the psalm. The subsequent discussion of the structural organisation of the Fifth Book, in Part II, examines the consequences of the thematic coherence of Ps 119 for understanding its collocation in the Psalter.

114 R.N. WHYBRAY, *Reading*, 124. For Snearly’s defence of the validity of such a reading, cf. M.K. SNEARLY, *Return*, 9–53.

- iv. Finally, Chapter IV concludes the study with a synthesis of the findings and brief closing remarks.

1.4 Limitations to the Study

Any research regarding the question of Torah in the Fifth Book of the Psalter faces notable methodological challenges. The first regards the sheer length of texts that the researcher faces¹¹⁵. This is true, not only with regard to the length of the Torah Psalm 119, but equally applies to the Fifth Book, which is comprised of forty-four psalms (Pss 107–150), the longest of the five Books of the Psalter. Scaiola has noted rightly, that the analytical nature of exegetical study has always tended to favour the study of smaller circumscribed textual units, a situation which arouses suspicion towards any attempt to consider larger sections of the Biblical text¹¹⁶.

The foregoing thus poses some limitations to what I expect to achieve in this study. Firstly, I must limit myself to the above-mentioned three psalms, omitting Pss 112 and 148, which Mays included in his consideration of psalms that show interest in Torah. Secondly, the study does not rigorously consider the content of every psalm in the Fifth Book in discussing the organisation of the book, a process which would represent the ideal, but which scope runs well beyond the possibilities of the present study¹¹⁷. My observations in this respect could only be at the service of a subsequent, fuller and more exhaustive study of every psalm in the Fifth Book.

115 Cf. K. A. REYNOLDS, *Torah*, 158.

116 “Questo forse dipende dal fatto che l’esegesi, per sua natura, tende a essere analitica e quindi gli esperti si concentrano volentieri su sezioni testuali circoscritte, guardando con sospetto chi si azzarda a proporre analisi di ampio respiro”. D. SCAIOLA, «Conclusion», 280.

117 The above notwithstanding, Whybray acknowledges the validity of such an inquest noting, “there is, however, another method by which the Psalter may be shown to have a kind of literary unity. This does not require a minute examination of each psalm and its relationship with its neighbours, but is concerned with a much broader treatment of the material”. R. N. WHYBRAY, *Reading*, 84.