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More Geminate Ballast and Clustering in Biblical Hebrew

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A little more than a decade ago, I published evidence from Hebrew, Ugaritic, and Akkadian texts for a hitherto unrecognized literary device that I labeled “Geminate Ballast and Clustering” (Noegel 2004). Since my article appeared in the Journal of Hebrew Scriptures, I think it fitting here to offer additional examples of the device in honor of the journal’s founder and visionary, my dear friend and colleague, Ehud Ben Zvi.

I repeat here my description of the device (Noegel 2004: 1):

My use of the word “geminate” is not restricted to the grammatical geminate forms, i.e., those forms derived from roots whose second and third radicals are identical, but includes any verb or noun derived from roots that contain any two identical root consonants, whether second and third, first and third, or even more rarely first and second. Since reduplicated and some quadrilateral forms also constitute gemination of this sort I include them as well. The device has as its primary characteristic the clustering of geminate forms in close proximity, often, but not strictly in parallelism. I say not strictly, because the main aim of the device appears to have been a general sense of ballast, and unlike word-pairs which are employed as parallels of sense or meaning, geminate clusters belong generally to the realm of sound devices, and serve to balance one stich’s use of gemination with gemination in another.

To demonstrate, I again turn to Ps 74:13–14.

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2. I hold Ehud’s invitation to become Assistant General Editor of his then fledgling journal as a badge of pride, and I appreciate his willingness to allow me to found the journal’s book review section.
3. I adopted the term “clustering” from a similar phenomenon observed by J. Greenfield (1990).
You parted the sea by your strength, you broke the heads of the Tannin in the waters.

You crushed the heads of Leviathan, and gave him for food to the people of the wilderness.

In this passage one finds three true geminate forms (i.e., רפר, תנן, ררצץ) and a first and third radical geminate ננתן. Moreover, the latter appears in the 2nd person with a suffix to permit the gemination of both the נ and the ת, a type of formation I call “imitation gemination.” We also may add the imitation geminate והמים ‘the waters’. Since poets often choose rare lexemes to serve literary purposes, it is likely that the prophet selected the uncommon noun ציימים ‘wilderness’, because it geminates the consonant י. Moreover, while one can find strengthened consonants in most passages that use words containing a dageš ḥazaq, the doubling of the consonant ו in עזז ‘your strength’ is noteworthy, because it represents a true geminate root עזז. Such examples demonstrate that one geminate form often inspired bards to employ another either in parallelism or in close proximity to create poetic ballast.

Having provided an overview, I now present thirty-one additional cases from the Hebrew Bible. I divide them into (1) those that accomplish geminate ballast and parallelism in a single verse, and (2) those that employ it over several verses to form a cluster.

1. Geminate Ballast and Parallelism in a Single Verse

My first example comes from Jacob’s last words to Dan, in which he proclaims: ‘Dan shall be a serpent upon the way, an adder upon the path that bites the horse’s heel, so that its rider falls backward’ (Gen 49:17). Here again the poet selected a rare word, in this case the hapax legomenon שפילון ‘adder’, in order to achieve geminate ballast with the more common geminate סוס ‘horse’.

Geminate ballast also appears in the prose narrative describing the ark’s procession into Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:16). As the narrator informs us, Michal peeked

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4. On rare lexemes in the service of alliteration, geminate clustering, paronomasia, and polysemy, see, e.g., Noegel, 2004, 2013a, 2013b; Rendsburg 2008.

5. Since the acoustic effects of gemination and that of consonantal doubling due to dageš ḥazaq are not identical, I do not treat the latter here unless it conveys a true geminated root. Nevertheless, I do not doubt the possibility that poets sometime exploited linguistic environments of doubling (by way of dageš ḥazaq) by adding geminates. Indeed, there are several other cases of dageš ḥazaq in this passage, which likely accentuated the acoustic impact.

6. One finds many poetic figures in prose including alliteration, chiasm, parallelism, punning, and ring structure, to name a few. Scholars have opined that such devices bespeak a poetic
out of her window during the celebration and saw David “leaping and dancing before Yahweh.” The passage creates a geminate hendiadys by paralleling two uncommon words: the piel participle מְפַזֵ֤ז ‘leaping’ (from פזז) and the pilpel participle מְכַרְכֵר֙ ‘dancing’ (from כרר).

Another case of geminate ballast and parallelism occurs in Hab 3:6:

דֶּדוֹ נַתְמוּ אֱלֹהִים עָמַ֑ם וַיֶּתֶֽפוּצֶנְוּ הֲלוֹ֥ם הָמָֽיִם וַיָּֽשָׁרֶ֖ת אֶ֥רֶץ רָ֖אָה שָׁ הַגִּבְעֵ֑ים וַיַּתֵּלֶ֖ה הַרְרֵי בְּעֵ֥בֹדֶת עָ֣לָ֣ם לֽוֹ. He stood and shook the earth, he looked, and he made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed—but he marches on forever.” This verse contains three geminate forms: דֶּד ‘he shook’, וַיֶּתֶֽפוּצֶנְו ‘crumbled’, and הַרְרֵי ‘mountains’. Note again the selection of the rarer form הַרְרֵי, instead of the usual הָרֵי. The two verbs also constitute geminate parallelism.

In Ps 3:7 we find: לֹא־אִירָא מֵרִבְב֥ות עָ֝ם אֲשֶׁ֥ר סָ֝בִ֗יב שָׁ הֲלִיכ֥ות עולָ֑ם לֽוֹ. “I shall not fear the myriads of people, who surround and assail me.” The poet achieves geminate ballast by using מֵרִבְב֥ות ‘myriads’ in the A stich, and סָ֝בִ֗יב ‘surround’ in the B stich, both of which alliterate the consonant ס.

Observe similarly Ps 9:14: חָֽנְנֵ֬נִי יְהוָ֗ה רְאֵ חָֽנְנֵ֬נִי מִשְֹנְאָ֑י מְ֝רומְמִ֗י מִשַ֥עֲרֵי מָֽוֶת. “Have mercy on me, O Yahweh, see how my haters afflict me, raise me from the gates of death.” Here the geminate verb חָֽנְנֵ֬נִי ‘have mercy on me’ in the A stich achieves ballast and parallelism with מְ֝רומְמִ֗י ‘raise me’ in the B stich. Though the latter is a polel of רומְמִי, the aural effect is the same.

In Ps 107:32 we find: וּוִיְרֹמְמוּה יְהַלְלֽוּה וּבְמושַׁ֖ב זְקֵנִ מְ֝רומְמִ֗י בִקְהַל־עָ֑ם וּבְמושַׁ֖ב זְקֵנִ יְהוָ֗ה. “Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people, and praise him in the council of the elders.” Observe how וּוִיְרֹמְמוּה ‘exalt him’ chiastically parallels וּוִיְרֹמְמוּה ‘exalt him’.

See also the father’s advice to his son in Prov 6:25: אלַתְּהַמֵּר יָ֭פְיָהּ בִּלְבָבֶ֑ךָ וְאַל־אַל־תַחְמֹ תִ֝קָֽאהָ בְעַפְעַפֶֽיהָ. “Do not lust in your heart after her beauty, or let her take you with her eyelids.” Here the geminate noun בָּבּ ‘your heart’ and reduplicated noun בָּבּ ‘her eyelids’ achieve geminate ballast and parallelism.

2. Geminate Clusters

The previous examples illustrate how Israelite bards accomplished geminate ballast and parallelism over a single verse. However, more often they sustained the device over multiple verses, thus forming a cluster. Such is the case in the prose account of Abraham’s battle.
Genesis 14:5–7

(5) In the fourteenth year, Qedarlaomer and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Rephaites in Asheteroth Qarnaim, the Zuzites (הוזים) in Ham, the Emites in Shaveh Qiriyataim, (6) And the Horites in the hill country (הררים) of Seir, as far as El Paran near the desert. (7) Then they turned back and went to Ein Mishat, that is Qadesh, and they conquered the whole territory of the Amaleqites, as well as the Amorites who were living in Hazezon (חزةון) Tamar.

Each of the verses contains a geminate form: הוזים ‘Zuzites’ (v. 5), הררים ‘hills’ (v. 6), and חزةון ‘Hazezon’ (v. 7). Here again, the author employed the rarer form הררים, rather than the expected הרם, to complete the cluster. 9

Genesis 49:23–24

(23) They showed him bitterness (וּוַֽיְמָרֲרֻ֖ה) and they shot (וּוָרֹ֑ב) at him, the archers acted hostilely.
(24) But his bow remained steady, the arms of his hands stayed limber (וּוַיָפֹ֖ז).

We already have seen a geminate cluster accomplished over a single verse in Jacob's last words to Dan. Here Jacob addresses Joseph by using three verbal geminates: וּוַֽיְמָרֲרֻ֖ה ‘they showed him bitterness’, וּוָרֹ֑ב ‘they shot’ (from רבב), and וּוַיָפֹ֖ז ‘stayed limber’ (from the rare verb פזז). Though the latter two verbs do not geminate their second radicals orthographically, their use of the dagesh haqaz reminds us that both derive from geminate verbs. Observe similarly the poet's use of the unique expression בֵּית הָעִצְּמִים ‘lords of arrows’ (i.e., ‘archers’), which allows for the geminate noun עִצְּמִים ‘arrows’ (from הערץ).

Deuteronomy 32:2–43

This poem offers the most prolonged demonstration of a geminate cluster in the Hebrew Bible. Since the text is lengthy, I shall cite only the relevant geminates. The first is רְבִיבִים ‘showers’ (v. 2), which is followed by הָעִצְּמִים ‘perfect’ (v. 4). We then find מְמוּמָם ‘their blemish’ paralleling the unique reduplicate adjective חִצִּים ‘crooked’ (v. 5). The imitation geminate יִגְּזֵז ‘he created you’ (polel of כון) then follows (v. 6). The cluster continues in v. 10 with the geminates לְיִלְי ‘howling’ and מַטְלִיל ‘he surrounded him’, and the imitation form לְיִנָּה ‘he cared for him’ (hithpolel ofabin). In v. 12, we find לְיִלְי ‘alone’. Contributing to the cluster are מְחֹלְלֶה ‘who gave birth to you’ (v. 18), מְרִירִי ‘bitter’ (v. 24), לְיִלְי ‘if not for’ (v. 27), בְּרָבָה ‘myriad’ (v. 30), מְפְלַלָם ‘judges’ (v. 31), מְרַעֲת ‘bitterness’ (v. 32), and חִצִּים ‘serpents’ (v. 33). The cluster concludes with לְיִלְי ‘slain’ (v. 42) and the imitation geminate construction לְיִלְי ‘rejoice’ (v. 43). The duplicated expression לְיִלְי

9. I thank V. A. Hurowitz (ל"ז) for suggesting this cluster.
10. The verb appears also only in 2 Sam 6:16, itself a geminate cluster (see above).
11. It appears only here.
'generation to generation' (v. 7) and the imitation geminate נִבְנֵים 'nations' (v. 8) also add to the effect.

**Isaiah 17:9–14**

(9) In that day its strong (מָעֻז) cities, which they left (עָזְב֔ו) because of the Israelites, will be like places abandoned to thickets and undergrowth. And all will be desolation (שְׁמָמָֽה).

(10) You have forgotten God your savior, you have not remembered the Rock, your fortress. Therefore, though you plant the most pleasant (נַעֲמָנִ֔ים) plants and sow imported cuttings (וּוּזֹ֥רַת זָ֖ר תִזְרָעֶֽנ),

(11) Though on the day you set them out, you make them grow (תְּשַגְשֵ֔ג), and on the morning when you sow them (ךְזַרְעֵ), you make them bud. Yet the harvest will be as nothing in the day of disease and incurable pain.

(12) Woe to the many nations (עַמִים) that rage—they rage like the raging sea (יַמִים)! Woe to the peoples (לְאֻמִ֔ים) who roar—they roar like the roaring of great waters (מַ֤יִם).

(13) Although the peoples (לְאֻמִ֔ים) roar like the roar of surging waters (מַ֤יֵּים), when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed (וּכְגַלְגַ֖ל) before a gale.

(14) In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone (וּאֵינֶ֑נ)! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us (לְבֹזְּזֵֽינ).

Isaiah’s geminate cluster begins with מָעֻז ‘its strong’, whose dageš ḥazaq reminds us that it derives from עז, It continues with שְׁמָמָֽה ‘desolation’ (v. 9), and the rare form נַעֲמָנִ֔ים ‘most pleasant’ (v. 9), which duplicates both the נ and מ. The prophet then employs the equally rare form תְּשַגְשֵ֔ג ‘you make them grow’ in the next verse.12 Gemination resumes with כְגַלְגַ֖ל ‘tumbleweed’ (v. 13), and concludes with אֵינֶ֑נ ‘they are gone’ and לְבֹזְּזֵֽינ ‘those who plunder us’ (v. 14). Adding to the effect is the prophet’s use of the consonant clusters יַמִים ‘seas’ (v. 12) and repeated use of מַ֤יֵּים (vv. 12–13) also provide additional alliteration in the service of gemination, as do מִבְנֵים ‘nations’ (v. 12) and לְאֻמִ֔ים ‘peoples’ (vv. 12–13).13

**Isaiah 29:8–9**

(8) And it will be like when the hungry dreams he is hungry, and behold he is eating, but he awakens and his appetite (נַפְשׁו) remains empty, and like when the thirsty dreams, and behold he is drinking, but he awakens faint and his throat is pulsating (שׁוקֵֵקָ֑ה וְנַפְשׁ֖ו). So will it be with the hordes of all the nations who fight against Mount Zion.

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12. Both forms occur only here.
13. There is much repetition in vv. 12–13 including רַבִּים (vv. 12–13), the root יהיה ‘make noise’, itself a geminate root, but hidden here (3x in v. 12), and the root וָרָאש ‘roar’ (4x in vv. 12–13).
Isaiah’s use of gemination in this passage is incredibly sophisticated. Not only does he achieve geminate ballast by following שׁוקֵֵקָ֑ה ‘pulsate’ (from שָׁקָֽק) in v. 8 with the reduplicated verbs וּ � וּתְמָהוּ הִתְמַהְמְה ‘linger’ (hithpalpel of הּֽתְמַהְּ) and וּֽהִשְׁתַֽעַשְׁע ‘behave as blinded’ (hithpalpel of שׁוע) in v. 9, but the latter two verbs constitute geminate parallelism. Moreover, each of the three verbs and the noun שָׁנֶפֶי is polysemous. Thus, the expression וּשׁוקֵֵקָ֑ה וְנַפְשׁ֖ו can mean ‘his throat is pulsating’ or ‘his being attacks’ (cf. Isa 33:4, Prov 28:15). As the former it harkens back to the dreamer who dreams of hunger and thirst. As the latter, it anticipates those who fight against Zion. It is thus a case of Janus Parallelism. The verb וּ� וּתְמָהוּ can mean ‘linger’ (hithpalpel of הּֽתְמַהְּ) or ‘be dumbfounded’ (hithpalel of הּֽתְמַהְּ). In both meanings it anticipates the staggering objects of Isaiah’s prophecy. The verb וּֽהִשְׁתַֽעַשְׁע can mean ‘cry’ (from שוע), but also ‘take delight in’ (hithpalpel of שָׁעְע I, e.g., Ps 19:16) and ‘behave as blinded’ (hithpalpel of שָׁעְע II, Isa 32:3). As ‘cry’ it matches וּ שֹׁ֑ע ‘cry out’, as ‘take delight in’ it anticipates the mention of wine, and as ‘behave as blinded’ it foreshadows the shutting of eyes in v. 10: “For Yahweh has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep, He has shut your eyes, the prophets, and He has covered your heads, the seers.” The overall effect causes one to linger and be dumbfounded as to the exact meaning of the prophecy. Finally, I note that the passage’s context of a dream and Isaiah’s apparent interpretation of it fits well the widespread use of polysemy in Near Eastern oneiromancy.

Jeremiah 51:1–4

(1) Thus, says Yahweh: Behold (הִנְנִי), I will stir up the spirit of a destroyer against Babylon (בָבֶל) and the people of Leb Qamay. 19

(2) I will send to Babylon (בָבֶל) foreigners to winnow her (בָבֶל רָזִים) and to devastate (רֶבֶךְ) her land. They will oppose her on every side on the day of her disaster.

14. Note also the use of נַפְשׁו meaning ‘his appetite’ (v. 8). The repeated use of the same lexeme with different meanings constitutes antanaclasis. See Noegel 2013b: 179.

15. A Janus Parallelism is a widespread device in which a polysemic faces back to a previous line in one of its meanings, and forward to a following line in another meaning. See Noegel 1996a.


17. Isaiah’s juxtapositioning of similar sounding roots is reminiscent of the use of an infinitive absolute derived from one root with a finite verb derived from another. On this device, see Noegel 1998a, 1998b.


19. Jewish tradition regards בָבֶל רָזִים “Leb Qamay” as an atbash cipher for כשדים “Chaldeans” (see the Targum’s rendering כסדאי). On Jeremiah’s atbash ciphers, see Noegel, 1996b, 1996c, 1996d.
(3) Against he who bends (his bow) let the archer bend his bow (ךְּיִדְרֹךְ הַדֹרֵךְ֙ יִדְרֹ֤ו), and (likewise) to the one who dons his armor. Do not spare her young men, destroy (בַּחֲרִ֖ימּוּ) her army.
(4) They will fall slain (חֲלָלִ֖ים) in Chaldea, fatally wounded in her streets.

Jeremiah’s cluster begins with ‘behold I’ and the two-fold mention of ‘Babylon’ (vv. 1–2). Following them are ‘devastate’, ‘every side’ (v. 2), and ‘slain’ (v. 3). Supporting the cluster is the clever expression “foreigners will winnow her” (v. 2), which juxtaposes the roots זָרִים וְזֵרוּהָ, thus allowing him to duplicate the consonant cluster זָר. Note similarly his three-fold use of the root דרך (v. 3): “Against he who bends (his bow) let the archer bend.” Jeremiah’s interest in repeating consonants is evident also in her young men, destroy” (v. 3). The phrase employs different roots that permit the duplication of the consonant cluster זָר. The concatenation of so many repeated consonant groups lends greater force to the cluster.

Nahum 2:3–8

(3) Indeed, Yahweh will restore the exultation of Jacob like the exaltation of Israel, though destroyers have destroyed them (בֹֽקְקִים בְקָקוּם֙) and they have ruined their vines.
(4) The shield(s) of the soldiers are rouged, the warriors are ruddy. The metal on the chariots flashes on the day they are made ready, the spears of juniper are brandished.
(5) The chariots move madly (וּיִתְהולְל֖וּ) through the streets, rushing back and forth (יִֽשְׁתַקְשְׁק֖וּן) through the squares. They look like flaming torches, they dart about (וּיְרוצֵֽצְּךָ) like lightning.
(6) He remembers his mighty ones, they stumble on the way, they hasten to its wall, prepared is the protector.
(7) The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace dissolves.
(8) It is appointed, she will be exiled and taken up. Her female slaves will moan like the sound of doves, beating upon their breasts (עַל־לִיבְבֵהֶֽן מְתֹפְפֹ֖ת).

Nahum’s cluster opens with the geminate phrase בֹֽקְקִים בְקָקוּם “destroyers have destroyed them” (v. 3). It continues in v. 5 with the true geminate verbs תֵּילֵהוֹלוֹלָהוֹלִים ‘move madly’ and יֵקֵשְׁקִים ‘rushing back and forth’ (hithpalpel of שָׁקֵק, שָׁקֵק), and the imitation geminate יֵשָׁקִים ‘dart about’ (polel of רָעִים). The latter two also establish geminate parallelism. The cluster concludes in v. 8 with two true geminates: מְתֹפְפֹ֖ות ‘beating’ (polel of תָּפַף) and לִבְבֵהֶֽן ‘their breasts’ (lit., ‘their hearts’). Note that the prophet again achieved the parallelism and cluster by using rare hithpalpel and polel forms. 20

20. The polel of שָׁקֵק appears only here, and that of רָעִים, only here and Ps 121:5. The polel מְתֹפְפֹ֖ות occurs only here.
Zechariah 2:11–15

(11) Woe, Zion, escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon (בבל).
(12) For thus says Yahweh of Hosts who sent me after glory to the nations that spoiled (שׁלָל) you: "Surely, he who touches you touches the pupil (בב) of his eye.
(13) For behold (והני), I will shake my hand over them, they will be a spoil (שׁל) to those who served them, and you will know that Yahweh of Hosts has sent me.
(14) Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold (והני), I come, and I will dwell in your midst (בהון), says Yahweh.
(15) And many nations will join themselves to Yahweh in that day, and shall be my people, and I will dwell in your midst (בהון), and you will know that Yahweh of Hosts has sent me to you."

Inspiring this cluster is the name בבל ‘Babylon’ (v. 11), to which the prophet twice adds שׁל ‘spoil’ (vv. 12–13) and והני ‘behold’ (vv. 13–14). In addition, he employs the hapax legomenon geminate בב ‘pupil’ (v. 12) and twice uses בהון ‘in your midst’ (vv. 14–15), to geminate the consonant ב.

Zechariah 9:16–17

(16) And Yahweh will save them on that day as the flock of his people, for they will be as the stones of a crown, glittering (מִֽתְנוס֖ות) over his land.
(17) For how great is their goodness, and how great is their beauty! Grain will make the young men flourish (יְנובֵב) and the new wine the maidens.

Zechariah creates geminate ballast again by employing rare lexemes, in this case the verbs מִֽתְנוס֖ות ‘glittering’ in v. 16 (from נסס) and יְנובֵב ‘flourish’ in v. 17 (polel of נב). Moreover, he anticipated the cluster with ‘I stir’ (v. 13).

Zechariah 11:2–3

(2) Wail (הילל), O cypress-tree, for the cedar is fallen, because the glorious ones are destroyed (שׁדד). Wail (הילל), O you oaks of Bashan, for the strong forest is come down.
(3) Hark! The wailing (יילה) of the shepherds, for their glory is destroyed (שׁדד). Hark! The roaring of young lions, for the thickets of the Jordan are destroyed (שׁדד).

Zechariah adeptly makes use of three geminate forms: הילל ‘wail’, שׁדד ‘destroyed’, and יילה ‘wail’ (v. 2); and then repeats them in varied form: יילה ‘howling’, שׁדד and יילה, both ‘destroyed’ (v. 3).

21. The verb נסס appears only here and Isa 59:19; Ps 60:6—the latter also in a geminate cluster (see below). The verb נב occurs also in Ps 62:11; 92:15; Prov 10:31. The polel occurs only here.
Malachi 1:3–4

(3) But Esau I hated, and made his mountains a desolation (נופל), and gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness.
(4) Whereas Edom said, "We are beaten down (שוי), but we will return and rebuild the ruins."

Malachi accomplishes geminate ballast by following the geminate noun נופל 'desolation' (v. 3) with the rare verb שוי 'we are beaten down' (v. 4). 22

Psalm 8:3–4

(3) From the mouth of babes (עולמים) and sucklings you have founded strength, on account of your enemies (ךֶצֵרִים), to still the adversary and avenger.
(4) When I behold your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars (כוכבים), which you have established (כונתה).

Three true geminates form the basis of the psalmist’s cluster: עולמים 'babes' and צערים 'your enemies' (v. 3), and כוכבים 'stars' (v. 4). Adding to the cluster is the imitation construction כונתה 'you have established' in v. 4 (polel of בות).

Psalm 18:4–6

(4) I called to He who is praiseworthy (Mahon), and I have been saved from my foes.
(5) The cords of death engulfed me (אפים), the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.
(6) The cords of Sheol surrounded me (סבון), the snares of death confronted me.

This passage contains a true geminate in each verse: מוסל 'who is praiseworthy' (v. 4), אפ 'engulfed me' (v. 5), and סב 'surrounded me' (v. 6). The latter two constitute geminate parallelism.

Psalm 18:26–27

(26) With the kind, you show yourself kind (תחמש), and with the blameless man (تأكيد), you show yourself blameless (תחפש),
(27) With the purified, you show yourself pure (תם), and with the devious, you show yourself tortuous (תפתת).

This crafty cluster employs two geminate roots (i.e., תפש and תפתת) in תפש 'show yourself blameless' (v. 26) and 'show yourself pure' תפתת (v. 27), and combines them with two additional hithpael forms. The four verbs therefore also geminate the consonant נ. In addition, the three-fold repetition of roots as nouns followed

22. Jer 5:17 is the only other occurrence of the root.
by hithpael verbs lends a reduplicating effect that bolsters the gemination. Moreover, the gemination present in the root ברר is anticipated alliteratively by the otherwise superfluous noun גבר 'man' (v. 26).

Psalm 27:5–7

(5) For he will protect me (יִצְפְּנֵי) in his covering in the day of evil, he will hide me in the shelter of his tent and set me high (יְרומֵֽנִי) upon a rock.

(6) And now my head will be exulted above the foes who surround me (כִּבְּרֵ֣בִים). Let me sacrifice at his tent, sacrifices of shouting, let me sing and let me make song to Yahweh.

(7) Hear, O Yahweh, my voice when I call, have mercy on me (וְחָנֵ֥נִי) and answer me (וַעֲנֵֽנִי).

This cluster combines the geminate כִּבְּרֵ֣בִים 'surround me' (v. 6) with four imitation forms: יִצְפְּנֵי 'he will protect me', יְרומֵֽנִי 'set me high' (v. 5), וְחָנֵ֥נִי 'have mercy upon me', and וַעֲנֵֽנִי 'answer me' (v. 7). With the exception of יְרומֵֽנִי (a polel of רום), the other verbs attach the 1st person singular object suffix (i.e., נ), which allows the poet to geminate the consonant נ.

Psalm 31:10–14

(10) Have mercy upon me (חָנֵ֥נִי), Yahweh, for I am in distress. My eyes grow weak (עָשְׁשָ֖ה) with sorrow, my soul and body with grief.

(11) My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning, my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak (שׁעָשֵׁ). (12) Because of all my enemies (צֹרְרַ֨י), I am a reproach, to my neighbors especially, and a dread to those who know me, those who see me on the street flee (נָדְד֥) from me.

(13) I am forgotten as if I were dead. I have become like broken vessel (כִּכְלִ֥י). (14) Indeed, I hear many whispering, "Terror surrounds (מִסָ֫בִ֥יב) them and conspire against me and plot (זָמָֽמ) to take my life.

Several geminate forms ballast this cluster including חָנֵ֥נִי 'have mercy upon me' and עָשְׁשָ֖ה 'grow weak' (v. 10), the latter of which repeats in varied form (v. 11). Two geminates follow: צֹרְרַ֨י 'my enemies' and נָדְד֥ 'they flee' (v. 12). The passage concludes with two more: מִסָ֫בִ֥יב 'surrounds' and זָמָֽמ 'they plot' (v. 14). Adding to the device are two imitation geminates: כִּכְלִ֥י 'like a vessel' (v. 13) and עִתֹתָ֑י 'my times' (v. 16).

Psalm 34:3–5

(3) I will glory (לְתִתְהַל) in Yahweh, let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

(4) Glorify Yahweh with me, let us exalt (וּנְרומְמָ֖ה) his name together.

(5) I sought Yahweh, and he answered me (וְעָנָ֑נִי), he delivered me from all my fears.
The cluster in this acrostic employs the true geminate לִתְהַלֵי ‘I will glory’ (v. 3), with the imitation constructions וּנְרומְמָה ‘let us exalt’ in v. 4 (polel of רומא) and וְעָנָ֑ני ‘he answered me’ in v. 5.

Psalm 42:4–12

(4) My tears have been my food day and night (םוָלָ֑יְלָה יומָ), while people say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”
(5) Let me remember these things as I pour out my soul: how I passed among the throng leading them (אדַדֵ֗ם) to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festival (חוגֵֽג) crowd.
(6) Why, my soul, are you downcast (תִשְׁת֬וחֲחִי)? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.
(7) My soul is downcast (תִשְׁחָת) within me. Therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.
(8) Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls, all your breakers and waves (ךָּגַלֶ֗י) have swept over me.
(9) By day (בָּלַיְלָה) Yahweh directs his love, at night (בָּלַיְלָה) his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life.
(10) I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by a foe?”
(11) My bones suffer mortal agony as my enemies (וצרְרָ֑י) taunt me, saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?”
(12) Why, my soul, are you downcast (תִשְׁת֬וחֲחִי)? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

This cluster contains no less than ten geminate forms, three of which repeat in various ways. Thus, לִתְהַלֵי ‘day and night’ (the former an imitation form with adverbial מ, and the latter a true geminate noun) appears twice (vv. 4, 9), and the true geminate verb לִתְהַלֵי ‘downcast’ occurs three times (vv. 6, 7, 12). Geminate forms occurring once include אֶדַדֵ֗ם ‘leading them’, חוגֵֽג ‘festival’ (v. 5), and צִרְרַ֑י ‘my enemies’ (v. 11).

Psalm 60:3–10

(3) God you have rejected us, breached upon us, you have been angry—restore us (תְּשׁוֹבֵּ֥ב)!  
(4) You have shaken the land and torn it open. Heal its fractures, for it quakes.  
(5) You have shown your people difficulty, you made us drink wine (יִנֶּ֣י יַ) that makes us stagger.  
(6) But you have given (נָ֮תַ֤תָה) to those who fear you a banner to be unfurled (לְהִתְנוסֵ֑ס) against the bow. Selah.  
(7) In order that those who love you (ךָּיְדִידֶ֑י) would be rescued, your right hand saves and answers us (עֲנֵנ).  
(8) God spoke from his sanctuary: “Let me exalt, let me parcel out Shechem and measure off (אֲמַדֵֽד) the Valley of Sukkoth.
(9) Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine. Ephraim is the strength of my head, Judah is my scepter (ךָיְדִידֶ֑י).
(10) Moab is my washbasin, on Edom I toss my sandal, over (ךָיְדִידֶ֑י) Philistia I shout in triumph (ךָיְדִידֶ֑י)."

The psalmist begins his cluster with בֵ֥ב ‘restore us’ in v. 3 (polel of בָּב֖וּ, and continues with בֵּית ‘wine’ (v. 5), and the rare geminate מַלְּאָהְסָס ‘to be unfurled’ in v. 6 (from מַלְּאָהְסָס). 23 Three true geminates follow: יָדוּדַי ‘those who love you’ (v. 7), מַלְּאָהְסָס ‘my scepter’ (v. 9). Finishing the cluster is עַל נַעֲלִי ‘I will shout in triumph’ (v. 10). Providing additional imitation gemination are יָדוּדַי ‘you have given’ (v. 6), מַלְּאָהְסָס ‘answers us’ (v. 7), and the clever use of נַעֲלִי ‘sandal, over’ (v. 10). 24 Note also that each of the last four verses ends with one of the aforementioned geminate forms.

**Psalm 129:1–6**

(1) A Song of Ascents: “They have greatly oppressed me (ךָּרָרַ֑י) from my youth,” let Israel say:
(2) “They have greatly oppressed me (ךָּרָרַ֑י) from my youth, but they have not gained the victory over me.
(3) Plowmen have plowed my back and made their furrows long.
(4) But Yahweh is righteous, he has cut (קִצֵּ֗ץ) the cords of the wicked.”
(5) May all who hate Zion be turned back in shame.
(6) May they be like grass on the roofs (גַג֑ות), which withers before it can grow.

This passage clusters three geminate forms, one of which it repeats: כָּרָרַ֑י ‘they have oppressed me’ (vv. 1–2), קִצֵּ֗ץ ‘he has cut’ (v. 4), and גַג֑ות ‘rooves’ (v. 6).

**Psalm 143:4–5**

(4) My spirit grows faint (ףָּוֶתְעַט) within me, my heart within me is appalled (יִשְׁתומֵ֥ם).
(5) I remember the days (יָמִ֨ים) of long ago, I meditate (אֲשוחֵֽחַ) on all your works and I consider what your hands have done.

Two geminate form this cluster: יִשְׁתומֵ֥ם ‘appalled’ in v. 4 (hithpolel of שם) and אֲשוחֵֽחַ ‘I meditate’ (hithpolel of שוח) in v. 5. Note also the geminated consonant ת in the hithpael form תָּפְרַ֖ע ‘grows faint’ (v. 4), and geminated consonant מ in the plural noun יָמִ֨ים ‘days’ (v. 5).

**Job 26:5–14**

(5) “The dead are in deep anguish (ףָּוֶתְעָלִיל), those beneath the waters (ךָּמי) and all that live in them.

23. The verb מַלְּאָהְסָס appears elsewhere only in Zech 9:16–17 and Isa 59:19, the former also in a geminate cluster (see above).
24. This passage appears nearly verbatim in Ps 108:8–10, with the same cluster of geminates.
More Geminate Ballast and Clustering in Biblical Hebrew

(6) The realm of the dead is naked before God, Destruction lies uncovered.
(7) He spreads out the northern skies over empty space, he suspends the earth over nothing.
(8) He binds (צֹרֵֽר) the waters (מַ֥יִם) in his clouds, yet the storm-clouds (֣ן עָנָ) do not burst under their weight.
(9) He covers the face of the full moon, spreading his storm-clouds (֣ן עֲנָנֽו) over it.
(10) He marks out the horizon (חֹֽק־חָ֭ג) on the face of the waters (מָ֑יִם), for a boundary between light and darkness.
(11) The pillars of the heavens (שָׁמַיִם) quake (יִתְבונָֽן), aghast at his rebuke.
(12) By his power he stillled the sea, by his wisdom he cut Rahab to pieces.
(13) By his breath the heavens (שָׁמַיִם) became fair, his hand pierced (חֹלֲלָה) the fleeing serpent.
(14) And these are but the outer fringe of his works. How faint the whisper we hear of him! Who then can understand (יִתְבּוֹנָֽן) the thunder of his power?"

We first find gemination in וּיְחולָ֑ל, ‘they are in anguish’ (v. 5). The cluster resumes with צֹרֵֽר, ‘binds’ and ֣ן עָנָ, ‘storm-cloud’ (v. 8), the latter of which repeats with variation (v. 9). We then encounter the hapax legomenon וּיְרופָ֑פ, ‘they quake’ (v. 11). Concluding the cluster is חֹלֲלָה, ‘pierced’ (v. 13), and יִתְבונָֽן, ‘understand’ (hithpolel of בין) in v. 14. Contributing to the gemination are מַ֥יִם, ‘water’ (vv. 5, 8, 10), שָׁמַיִם, ‘heavens’ (vv. 11, 13), and חֹֽק־חָ֭ג, ‘He marks out the horizon’ (v. 10).

Song 2:16–17

(16) My beloved (דודִ֥י) is mine, and I am his, grazing among the lilies (שושַׁנִֽים),
(17) Until the day(-wind) blows, and the shadows (הַצְּלָלִ֑ים) flee. Turn, liken yourself, my beloved (דודִ֜י), to a gazelle, or to a fawn of the hinds, upon the mountains of cleavage.

Three geminate forms cluster here: דודִ֥י, ‘my beloved’, (vv. 16–17 [2x]), שושַׁנִֽים, ‘lilies’ (v. 16), and הַצְּלָלִ֑ים, ‘shadows’ (v. 17).

Song 5:1–16

My final example of geminate ballast and clustering is also one of the most sophisticated. Since Song 5 is lengthy, I will highlight only the specific geminates.

25. Geminate ballast is achieved similarly in Song 4:5–6: “Grazing among the lilies (שושַׁנִֽים), until the day(-wind) blows, and the shadows (הַצְּלָלִ֑ים) flee,” though this time without דודִ֥י, ‘my beloved’. This geminate cluster was espied by K. Vermeulen (2012: 147), though she incorrectly characterizes my understanding of the device’s function. In Noegel 2004: 18, n. 12, I cited a personal communication received from W. Watson opining that geminate clusters “may function to denote reiterated action (e.g., Ps 12:7) or multiplicity of object (e.g., Isa 7:19).” However, I do not share this view (see my conclusion here and previously), because most cases give no evidence of this. Nevertheless, I shared the suggestion, because it might explain some cases. On variation as a hallmark feature in the Song, and for the translations of the poem found herein, see Noegel and Rendsburg 2009. The use of gemination is not restricted in the Song to cases that involve “twinning,” as espied first by F. Landy (1983: 94–95), and then Vermeulen (2012).
Inspiring the cluster is the geminate דוד ‘beloved’, which appears twelve times in the chapter (vv. 2, 4, 5, 6 [2x], 8, 9 [4x], 10, 16). Anticipating its frequent repetition is the clever use of דודִֽים ‘love’ (v. 1). We then find the double geminate expression לָֽיְלָה רְסִ֥יסֵי “droplets of the night” (v. 2). Following are אֵיכָ֖ו ‘how’ (v. 4 [2x]), הַסֹּבְבִ֥ים ‘go-about’, and רְדִידִי֙ ‘my shawl’ (v. 7). Also contributing are מֵרְבָֽה ‘a myriad’ (v. 10) and תַּלְתַלִ֔ים ‘curled’ (v. 11). Concluding the cluster are שֽׁושַׁנִ֔ים ‘lilies’ (v. 13), יֵגָּלֵל ‘bracelets’, שֶׁכָ֖ם ‘that you’ (v. 9), מְקִם ‘water’ (v. 12), and מְשַׁפְתּוֹ ‘his lips’ (v. 13). The result is a remarkable cluster of gemination.

3. Conclusion

Currently, there are forty-eight known cases of geminate ballast and clustering in the Hebrew Bible, of which twelve occur in a single verse. Twenty also constitute geminate parallelism. Only three appear in prose. While fifteen occur in prophetic texts (mostly Isaiah and Zechariah), the majority (sixteen) appear in the Psalms.

While the creativity with which the Israelites integrated geminate ballast and clustering appears to have known no bounds, the repeated parallelism of some geminate roots in different texts, the use of rare lexemes and verbal formations, 29

26. Of course, דוד appears many other times in the Song, but not in conjunction with so many other geminate forms.

27. Note also the alliterative use of דוד ‘hand’ in vv. 4, 5, 14.

28. These include: Gen 14:5–7; 22:22–25; 49:17 (S); 49:23–24; Deut 32:2–43; Judg 5:28; 2 Sam 6:16 (S); Is 2:4; 7:19; 10:14; 17:9–14; 24:19–20; 29:8–9; Jer 31:22 (S); 51:1–4; Amos 9:13 (S); Jon 2:6 (S); Nah 2:3–8; Hab 2:6–7; 3:6 (S); Zech 2:11–15; 9:16–17; 11:2–3; Mal 1:3–4; Ps 3:7 (S); 6:8 (S); 8:3–4; 9:14 (S); 12:7 (S); 18:4–6; 18:26–27; 27:5–7; 31:10–14; 34:3–5; 42:4–12; 60:3–10; 74:13–14; 107:32 (S); 129:1–6; 143:4–5; Prov 6:25 (S); Job 3:5–9; 12:16–17; 16:12–16; 26:5–14; Song 2:16–17; 4:5–6; 5:1–16. The siglum (S) marks those that occur in a single verse. If we add the three cases in n. 8 (i.e., Gen 49:12; Ps 72:6; Song 3:7), and two from the previous study (i.e., 135:9; 139:21) that appear in a single stich, the number totals fifty-three.


30. For the third (Gen 22:22–25), see Vermeulen (2012: 140–14), who examines geminate clusters as a form of doubling employed in conjunction with references to “twins” and other sets of two (and puns on the word שעשע ‘two’). To her observations I add Gen 49:12: “His eyes will be dark (ךְךֶלֶל) from wine (יִיִּין), his teeth (שִׁנַיִם) white from milk.” The brief verse combines two geminate forms in conjunction with the dual form עֵינַיִם ‘eyes’, and שעשע ‘teeth’, itself suggestive of two.

31. Both Ps 18:4–6 and Jonah 2:6 employ the geminates פסף ‘engulf’ and סבב ‘surround’ in parallelism.

32. See, e.g., Gen 14:5–7; 49:17 (H); 49:23–24; Deut 32:5; Judg 5:28 (H); Is 7:19 (H); 10:14; 17:9–14; 24:19–20; Nah 2:3–8; Hab 2:6–7 (H); 3:6; Zech 2:11–15 (H); 9:16–17; Mal 1:3–4; Ps
and the frequency with which some true and imitation geminate forms appear, demonstrate the underlying existence of a learned convention.

In my previous examination, I concluded that the device's use in Ugaritic and Akkadian texts similarly suggests that it was passed down in scribal circles along with other compositional techniques. I also noted that while it relates in some ways to parallelism and alliteration, strictly speaking, it does not belong to either. Instead, geminate ballast and clustering is fundamentally a form of repetition. It is no coincidence that several cases also involve the repetition of a geminated root either verbatim or with variation. If we consider also that many passages had a musical setting, then we might opine whether the geminates served a rhythmic or accentual function. Of course, this assessment is only preliminary since it is likely that many more examples await discovery. Nevertheless, the current evidence allows us to recognize geminate ballast and clustering as a well-established and learned device among the Israelite literati.

60:3–10; 74:13–14; 135:9; Job 3:5–9 (H); 16:12–16; 26:5–14 (H). The siglum (H) represents passages that employ hapax legomena.

33. Among the “favorite” geminate roots are: דוד, ב anomal, חלל, חו, חל, חל, דו. Commonly used polel roots include: ב, בר, ב, ב. Frequent geminate nouns are: עפעף, עפעף, עפעף, עפעף.

34. See Deut 32:2–43; Isa 17:9–14; Zech 11:2–3; Ps 42:4–12; 129:1–6; Job 3:5–9; 26:5–14; Song 2:16–17; 5:1–16. The relationship between geminate forms and repetition is most pronounced in Psalms 145 and 150, which repeat the geminate verb ההלל twelve and thirteen times, respectively. While technically speaking, these poems also cluster geminates, their use of only one geminate root makes them unlike the other cases studied here. Other geminate clusters, such as Isa 17:9–14 and Jer 51:1–4, also repeat consonant clusters.

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