

Linguistic and Philological Studies of the Hebrew Bible and its Manuscripts

Edited by Vincent D. Beiler
& Aaron D. Rubin

Linguistic and Philological Studies of the Hebrew Bible and its Manuscripts

in Honor of Gary A. Rendsburg

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Aaron D. Rubin



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Hidden Waters: The Sounds of Sinking in the Song of the Sea

Scott B. Noegel

It is an honor to dedicate this article to my Doktorvater, colleague, and friend Gary Rendsburg, from whom I have learned so much. My contribution brings together a number of our honoree's interests as demonstrated in a variety of publications, including paronomasia, linguistic registers, visual poetics, and the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1–18).

Indeed, the Song of the Sea will be my focus here. It has been the object of intense study for many years, yet it continues to resist scholarly consensus concerning how to divide the poem's units,¹ how to define its genre,² or when to date it,³ though all generally agree that the structure is sophisticated and that the poet has loaded the poem with archaic poetic features, whether truly archaic or not.⁴

1 For a useful survey of proposals, see Brian D. Russell, *The Song of the Sea: The Date of Composition and Influence of Exodus 15:1–21* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), who concludes that the poem dates to the 12th century B.C.E.

2 Proposals have included a hymn, thanksgiving psalm, and victory song.

3 Representative of those who see the poem as truly archaic are Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 121–144; David N. Freedman, "Early Israelite History in the Light of Early Israelite Poetry," in Hans Goedicke and James J.M. Roberts (eds.), *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp. 3–35; and Russell, *The Song of the Sea*. For arguments proposing a post-exilic date, see Martin L. Brenner, *The Song of the Sea: Ex. 15:1–21* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991); and Ian Douglas Wilson, "The Song of the Sea and Isaiah: Exodus 15 in Post-monarchic Prophetic Discourse," in Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin (eds.), *Thinking of Water in the Early Second Temple Period* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 123–147.

4 With regard to the poem's structure, often noted is the poet's use of staircase parallelism in Exod 15:6–7a, 11, 16b. See Chaim Cohen, "Studies in Early Israelite Poetry I: An Unrecognized Case of Three-Line Staircase Parallelism in the Song of the Sea," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 7 (1975), pp. 13–17. For a discussion of the poem's structure with attention to poetics, see J.P. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible: At the Interface of Hermeneutics and Structural Analysis. Volume 1: Ex. 15, Deut. 32, and Job 3* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1998), pp. 24–53.

Commenting on the later Masoretic stichography of the poem,⁵ our honoree observed that the end-frame visually depicts the division of the sea in line 19, and thus provides compositional reinforcement for the poem's central theme. The line break is placed after the word מַי *mē* 'waters of', after which we read:

הַיָּם	וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵלְכוּ בִּיבֶשֶׁת בְּתוֹךְ	הַיָּם
<i>hay-yām</i>	<i>u-bnē yiśrā'el hālķū bay-yabāšā batōk</i>	<i>hay-yām</i>

'... the sea, and the Israelites marched on dry ground in the midst of the sea'

As he explains, "The effect is to give a visual image of the Israelites walking in the midst of the sea."⁶

The interest in visually rendering the sea via its compositional form is not restricted to the later stichography. Pieter van der Lugt has argued that the poem's original compositional structure possesses a linearly alternating design that imitates a wave-like motion, another example of the poet's "form follows content" approach.⁷

5 Stichography is the laying out of a text by means of spacing. See Shem Miller, "The Oral-Written Textuality of Stichographic Poetry in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 22 (2015), pp. 162–188.

6 Gary A. Rendsburg, "Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible: An Eclectic Collection," in Scott B. Noegel (ed.), *Puns and Pundits: Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2000), pp. 137–162 (159). Miller, "The Oral-Written Textuality of Stichographic Poetry," has examined the Exodus fragments from Qumran and has concluded that though the stichography is slightly different from the later Masoretic system, at Exod 15:19 it also included *vacats* after each 'sea'. Though this passage marks the narrative end-frame of the poem, it demonstrates an ancient interest in visually emphasizing the word 'sea'. As Miller adds (p. 171): "The Song of the Sea attests that later Masoretic scribes did not create the special layout from a *carte blanche*, but were heirs to an earlier inchoate system." Rabbinic texts prescribe that one should write the Song of the Sea stichographically according to the principle "one-half brick over whole brick, whole brick over one-half brick" (b. Meg 16b; y. Meg 3:8 [74b]; Sotah 12:9). Other texts requiring special stichography include the Song of Moses (Deut 32:1–43), the list of Canaanite kings (Josh 12:9), the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:1–31), and the list of Haman's sons (Esth 9:7–9).

7 Pieter van der Lugt, "The Wave-like Motion of the Song of the Sea (Ex 15:1–18) and the People of Israel as a Worshipping Community," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 128 (2016), pp. 49–63, argues that "the poem consists of three 6-line cantos, vv. 1–5, 6–10 and 11–16b, which are concluded by a canto consisting of three lines of poetry (vv. 16c–18)" (p. 54). Thus, he delineates the structure of the poem as ll. 1–2, 3–5 | 6–8, 9–10 | 11–13, 14–16b | 16c–18 > A.B | A'.B' | A".B" | A". The structure reveals some parallels between the strophes, including the enemies sinking like a stone (l. 5), sinking like lead (l. 10), and being still as stone (l. 16b).

While such studies have demonstrated the poet's mastery of poetic structures, it is my contention that the poet's equal dexterity with devices of sound has gone largely unappreciated.⁸ Thus, in what follows, I should like to demonstrate that the poet has bolstered the theme of sinking in the sea by employing paronomasia and grammatical features that imitate the sounds of water.⁹ The majority of these exploit the alliterative effect of repeated *m*-sounds. Recall that the alphabetic letter מ *m* itself represents 'water', and that in a literary context that describes the drowning forces of the sea, it takes on added conspicuousness, especially when appearing frequently.¹⁰ Particularly productive in this regard is the poet's use of so-called 'poetic' or 'archaic' 3 m.pl. forms (i.e., מו- *mō*), prepositions with enclitic *mem* (e.g., כְּמוֹ *kəmə*), and other words containing *mem* that echo the word מַיִם *mayim* 'water' (or its construct forms מַיִמִּי *mēmē* or מֵי *mē* or מו *mō*; cf. Isa 25:10; Job 9:30). Elsewhere the poet has artfully employed lexemes that reverberate the word יָם *yām* 'sea'.¹¹ Other passages feature voiceless sibilants and gutturals that imitate the sound of rushing water. The abundant use of the poetic plural and enclitic *mem*, and the imitation of water sounds both constitute types of paronomasia. The former serves an appellative function, since it recalls the *words* for 'water' and 'sea'; the second possesses an onomatopoeic function.¹² The former can operate both aurally and visually, especially in the pre-Masoretic text, while the second works only aurally. The devices combine to create an accompanying "sound effect" for the poem's contents and wave-like structure that makes readers feel as if the text is drowning in references to water.

8 One early exception is J.P. van der Westhuizen, "Literary Device in Exodus 15:1–18 and Deut 32:1–43 as a Criterion for Determining Their Literary Standards," *Old Testament Society of South Africa* 17/18 (1974–1975), pp. 57–73, whose work I reference below.

9 As such, it fits well the penchant for paronomasia that our honoree has discovered throughout Exodus. See Gary A. Rendsburg, "Alliteration in the Exodus Narrative," in Chaim Cohen et al. (eds.), *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), pp. 83–100.

10 Compare the apposite observation of Wilfred G.E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984/1986), p. 236, who suggests that Isa 5:30 employs onomatopoeia to imitate the sound of the sea: וְהָיָה כְּלִי בַיָּם וְהָיָה כְּהִנְחֹם הַיָּם וְהָיָה כְּהִנְחֹם הַיָּם וְהָיָה כְּהִנְחֹם הַיָּם *wa-yinhôm 'ālāw bay-yôm ha-hū ka-nahāmaṭ yām* 'a roaring will resound over him on that day like the roaring of the sea'. Note the four-fold repetition of *mem* including in the word יָם *yām*, and the paronomastic evocation of 'sea' in the word יָם *yām*.

11 On the 'poetic plural', see Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 5th reprint of the 2nd edition (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2016), p. 161, §6ii.

12 See Scott B. Noegel, "Wordplay" in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2021), pp. 58–62, 97–110.

Opening the poem are the words: אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־נָאָה נָאָה סוּס וְרֹכֵב רָמָה בַּיָּם *ʾāširā la-YHWH kī gāʾō gāʾū sūs wā-rōkəḇō rāmā bay-yām* ‘Let me sing to Yahweh for he has triumphed gloriously. Horse and rider he has hurled into the sea’ (Exod 15:1). The reference to the יָם *yām* ‘sea’ establishes the poem’s setting, while the hurling of the horse and rider initiates the theme of drowning. Joining the setting to the theme is the syllable מָה *mā* in רָמָה *rāmā*, which subtly resounds the singular form of the word מַי *māy* ‘water’.¹³ Though the biblical term for water always occurs in the plural, cognate data makes it clear that the singular (and in some cases the plural) was conceived quite widely as comprising a *mem* and *yod* or *waw*, and usually with an *a*-vowel (cf. Ugaritic *my* [sg.], *mym* [pl.]; Akkadian *mū*; Egyptian *my* [sg.], *mw* [pl.]; Aramaic *māyyā*; Sabaic *mw(y)*; and Geʿez *māy*). While the verb רָמָה *rāmā* would normally not evoke the word ‘water’, the literary context here encourages it, as does the fact that it is followed immediately by יָם *yām*. Moreover, the voiceless sibilant and rhythm of the very first word of the poem, אֲשִׁירָה *ʾāširā* ‘let me sing’, resound the crashing of a wave. Again, the cohortative form typically would not suggest the sound of rushing water. It is the literary context in which we find it that suggests onomatopoeia.

The poet then proclaims עֲזִי וְזִמְרַת יְהוָה לִישׁוּעָה זֶה אֵלִי וְאֶנְהוּ אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי *ʾozzī wā-zimrāt Yāh wa-yhī lī l-īšūʾā zē ʾēlī wā-ʾanwēhū ʾēlōhē ʾābī wā-ʾrōmāmenhū* ‘Yah is my strength and song/power.¹⁴ He is become my deliverance. This is my God and I will elevate him; the God of my father, and I will exalt him’ (15:2). Here again we hear water in the poet’s clever use of אֶרְמָמֶנְהוּ *ʾrōmāmenhū* ‘I will exalt him’ (i.e., מֵמֵמֵי *mēmē*), a *polet* form of the root רוּם *r-w-m*.¹⁵ The addition of the archaic suffix pronoun only adds to the alliterative effect by drawing out the *e*-vowel following the second *mem*. Also demonstrating the poet’s literary talent is that the second half of the verse contains a repetition of five words starting with אֵשׁ.¹⁶ Given the context of surging waves, it is difficult not to hear in this rhythmic repetition and the expression לִישׁוּעָה *l-īšūʾā* ‘deliverance’ the sound of rushing wind and water.

13 William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 511, characterizes this as a case of ‘vocalic assonance’. Some of the cases of paronomasia were observed by Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 37–38.

14 The meaning of זִמְרַת *zimrāt* depends on whether one reads it as PS **d-m-r* ‘strength’ or PS **z-m-r* ‘song’. We may classify it as a case of unidirectional polysemy. See Noegel, “Word-play” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 173.

15 Both verbs in this passage also suggest the building or establishing of habitations. See Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, pp. 514–515.

16 Observed by Brenner, *The Song of the Sea: Ex. 15:1–21*, p. 28.

The suggestion of water appears again in the next line: יְמִינְךָ יְהוָה נֹאדָרִי בַכֹּחַ *yāmīnkā YHWH ne'dārī bak-koah yāmīnkā YHWH tir'aš 'ōyēb* 'Your right hand, O Yahweh, is glorious in power, your right hand, O Yahweh, crushes (the) enemy' (15:6). Twice יְמִינְךָ *yāmīnkā* 'your right hand' echoes the word יָם *yām*.

The following passage reads: וּבְרֹב גְּאוֹנְךָ תַּהַרְס קַמִּיךָ תִּשְׁלַח חֲרֹנְךָ יֹאכְלֵמוּ בִקֶּשׁ *u-b-rōb gə'ōnkā tahārōs qāmekā təšallah ḥārōnkā yōklēmō kaq-qaš* 'In your great majesty you trample your foes, you send forth your fury, it consumes them like straw' (15:7).²² Again we hear water, this time in the noun קַמִּיךָ *qāmekā* 'your foes' (cf. מֵי *mē*) and the poetic plural suffix in יֹאכְלֵמוּ *yōklēmō* 'it consumes them'. In addition, the poet has reproduced the sounds of crashing water by employing the voiceless sibilants ס *s* and שׁ *š*, in תַּהַרְס *tahārōs* 'you trample', תִּשְׁלַח *təšallah* 'you send forth', and קֶשׁ *qaš* 'straw'; the voiceless guttural fricative ה *h* in תַּהַרְס *tahārōs*; voiceless guttural ח *ḥ* in תִּשְׁלַח *təšallah ḥārōnkā* 'you send forth your fury'; and the voiceless palatal fricative כ *k* in קַמִּיךָ *qāmekā* 'your foes', חֲרֹנְךָ *ḥārōnkā* 'your fury', יֹאכְלֵמוּ *yōklēmō* 'it consumes them', and בִּקֶּשׁ *kaq-qaš* 'like straw'.

The device continues in 15:8: וּבְרוּחַ אֶפְיֶךָ נִעְרְמוּ מֵיִם נִצְבּוּ כְמוֹ-יָד נִזְלִים קִפְאוּ תַּהֲמַת *u-b-ruah 'appekā ne'ermū mayim nišṣəbū kāmō nēd nōzəlīm qāp'ū təhō-mōt bə-leḥ yām* 'At the blast of your nostrils, the waters piled up. The floods stood like a heap of streams. The deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.' Supporting the direct references to מֵיִם *mayim* and יָם *yām* is the verb נִעְרְמוּ *ne'ermū* 'piled up', this time exploiting the final radical of the root עֲרַם *-r-m* in the 3 pl. *niphal* form instead of a poetic plural suffix. Note also the preposition with enclitic *mem* כְּמוֹ *kāmō* 'like', and the *pluralis intensivus* form תַּהֲמַת *təhō-mōt* 'deeps', which again allows the poet to use the consonant with an *o*-vowel (cf. מוֹ *mō*). The masculine plural with *mem* in the watery lexeme נִזְלִים *nōzəlīm* 'streams' amplifies the alliterative effect.²³ Moreover, the masculine plural naturally contains the word יָם *yām* 'sea'.

Even the words placed into the enemy's mouth contain the device: אָמַר אוֹיֵב *'amar 'ōyēb 'erdōp 'aššīg* 'The enemy said, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will despoil. My appetite will have its fill of them.

22 On Exod 15:6–7a as a case of staircase parallelism, see Cohen, "Studies in Early Israelite Poetry I," pp. 13–17. Fokkelman, *Major Poems of the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 43, 45, also notes the alliterative repetition of the consonant *nun* and a chiasm of terms involving water that links the passage to v. 10.

23 Van der Westhuizen, "Literary Device in Exodus 15:1–18," p. 58, notes the paronomastic use of the repeated consonant *nun* in this passage.

I will unsheathe my sword. My hand will disinherit them” (15:9). Once again the poetic plurals in תִּמְלֵא־מֹו *timlā’ēmō* ‘will have its fill of them’ and תֹּרִישְׁמֹו *tōrīšēmō* ‘disinherit them’ resound water, find support in the repeated *mem* and *a*-vowel in the verbs אָמַר *āmar* and מָלָא *mālā*. One also hears the rushing of water in the sibilants in אָשִׁיג *ʾasšīg* ‘I will pursue’ שָׁלַל *šālāl* ‘spoil’, נַפְשִׁי *napšī* ‘my appetite’, and תֹּרִישְׁמֹו *tōrīšēmō* ‘disinherit them’. To these I add the voiceless guttural ח *ḥ* in אַחַלֵּק *ʾaḥallēq* ‘I will overtake’ and חֶרְבִּי *ḥarbī* ‘my sword’. Moreover, the poet has again employed a repetition of five words starting with א ’, this time in the first half of the verse, to create the rhythm of ebb and flow.²⁴

The poet then continues by recalling: נִשְׁפְּתָ בְרוּחַךְ בְּסָמֹו יָם צָלְלוּ בְּעוֹפְרֶת בָּמִים יְדִי *nāšpātā bə-rūḥākā kissāmō yām šālālū ka-’ōperet bə-mayim ʾaddīrim* ‘You made your wind blow, the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters’ (15:10). The words יָם *yām* and מַיִם *mayim* are direct references that the poet enhances by using the poetic plural found on בְּסָמֹו *kissāmō* ‘covered them’ and the masculine plural ending on יְדִי *ʾaddīrim* ‘mighty’. Here too the masculine plural naturally references יָם *yām* ‘sea’. Moreover, J.P. van der Westhuizen has argued that the phrase נִשְׁפְּתָ בְרוּחַךְ *nāšpātā bə-rūḥākā* ‘you made your wind blow’ imitates the sound of blowing wind, while the second half of the verse mimics the sound of “the dropping and sinking of a heavy body into water”.²⁵ To his keen observations I add that the first stich echoes the onrush of water by way of the ח *ḥ* and שׁ *š*, as found in the previous passage. The verse also offers anagrammatic paronomasia between the roots נִשַׁף *n-š-p* ‘blow’ and נַפֵּשׁ *n-p-š* ‘appetite’ (15:9).²⁶ The latter is enhanced in the later Masoretic stichometry, which places נַפְשִׁי *napšī* and נִשְׁפְּתָ *nāšpātā* as the sole words to the right and left of the central stich, as follows:

נַפְשִׁי אָרִיק חֶרְבִּי תֹרִישְׁמֹו יְדִי נִשְׁפְּתָ
napšī ʾarīq ḥarbī tōrīšēmō yādī nāšpātā

Overwhelmed by Yahweh’s power, the poet then rhetorically asks: מִי־כַמֹּכָה בָּאֵלִים מִי כַמֹּכָה נֶאֱדָר בְּקֹדֶשׁ נִרְאָה תְהִלָּת עֲשֵׂה פֶלֶא *mī kāmōkā bā-ēlīm mī kāmōkā ne’dār baq-qōḏeš nōrā tēhillōt ʾōsē pēle* ‘Who is like you among the gods, Yahweh? Who is like you in holiness, awesome in praiseworthy actions, per-

24 Brenner, *The Song of the Sea*, p. 28. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 524, posits that the alliterative effect “conveys terror”.

25 Van der Westhuizen, “Literary Device in Exodus 15:1–18,” p. 59.

26 Noted by Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 526. On anagrammatic paronomasia, see Noegel, “Word-play” in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 273–277.

forming wonders?' (15:11). Here the allusion to water occurs in the repetition of the interrogative pronoun *מי* *mī* (cf. *מי* *mē*) and the repeated preposition with enclitic *mem* in *כִּמְכָּה* *kāmōkā*. Abetting the alliterative effect is the masculine plural ending in *אלִים* *ʾēlīm* 'gods'.

The abbreviated next verse continues with the device: *נָטִיתָ יְמִינְךָ תִּבְלָעֵמֹו אָרֶץ* *nāṭītā yāminkā tiblā'ēmō ʾāreṣ* 'You extended your right hand. The underworld swallowed them' (15:12).²⁷ Here we hear 'sea' in *יְמִינְךָ* *yāminkā* 'your right hand' and 'water' in the poetic plural on *תִּבְלָעֵמֹו* *tiblā'ēmō* 'it swallowed them'.

Beginning in the next verse, the poet turns his attention to Yahweh's guidance and the fear of the nations who learn about Yahweh's wonders. Nevertheless, despite the movement away from the Reed Sea, we still hear an echo of *ים* *yām* in *עַם* *'am* 'people' (15:13) and *שָׁמְעוּ עַמִּים* *šām'ū ammīm* 'the people heard' (15:14).²⁸

The survey of reactions among the nations then continues: *אֶזְנֵה לָוִי אֶלֹוֵפִי אֶזְנֵה לָוִי אֶלֹוֵפִי אֶזְנֵה לָוִי אֶלֹוֵפִי* *ʾāz niḥālū ʾallūpē ʾēdōm ʾēl mō'āb yōḥāzēmō rā'ad nāmōgū kōl yōšbē kənā'an* 'Now the tribes of Edom are dismayed, the clans of Moab, trembling seizes them. All the dwellers of Canaan despair' (15:15). One hears 'water' (cf. *מֹו* *mō*) in the name *מֹוֹאָב* *mō'āb* 'Moab', the poetic suffix form on *יֹאחֲזֵמוֹ* *yōḥāzēmō* 'seizes them', and the verb *נִמְגָּו* *nāmōgū* 'they despair'. These obtain additional support from the *mem* in *אֶדֹוִם* *ʾēdōm*.

The description of the nations then concludes: *תִּפְּלוּ עֲלֵיהֶם אֵימָתָהּ וּפָחַד בְּגִדְלָהּ יְהוָה עֲמָךְ עַד־יַעֲבֹר עֲסֹו קִנִּיתָ* *tippōl ʾālēhem ʾemātā wā-ṣāḥad bi-ḡdōl zərō'ākā yiddāmū kā-āben ʾad ya'ābōr ammākā YHWH ʾad ya'ābōr ʾam zū qānītā* 'Terror and dread descend upon them. By means of the might of your arm they are still as stone. Until your people cross over, O Yahweh. Until your people cross over whom you have ransomed' (15:16). We hear subtle references to water here in the verb *יִדְּמוּ* *yiddāmū* 'they are still', while the two-fold reference to *עַם* *'am* 'people' again in this context resounds *ים* *yām* 'sea'. The noun *אֵימָתָהּ* *ʾemātā* 'terror' echoes both 'water' (cf. *מַי* *māy*) and visually contains the word 'sea' (*יַמְתָּהּ* *yamtā*). Though the prepositional phrase *עֲלֵיהֶם* *ʾālēhem* 'upon them' stands out for not containing the archaic suffix *מֹו* *mō* found so often on verbs in the poem, it does contain a *m*, and thus it enhances the alliterative effect.

27 On *אָרֶץ* *'ereṣ* as 'underworld', see Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, pp. 529–530.

28 Van der Lugt, "The Wave-like Motion of the Song of the Sea," p. 56, notes that this strophe (ll. 11–13) contains 26 words, the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton. Thus, the reference to Yahweh's guidance in the last verse fits the *gematria* of the strophe. On *gematria* (more specifically, isopsephy), see Noegel, "Wordplay" in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 211–215.

The poem's penultimate line promises to place the people on their holy mountain: תַּבְּאֵמוֹ וְתַטְעֵמוֹ בְּהַר נַחֲלָתְךָ מְכוֹן לְשִׁבְתְּךָ פְּעֻלָּתְךָ יְהוָה מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדִנִּי בּוֹנֵנוּ יְיָיִךְ *tabī'ēmō wə-tittā'ēmō bə-har naḥlātākā mākōn la-šibtākā pā'altā YHWH miqdāš 'āḏōnāy kōnānū yāḏekā* 'You will bring them and you will plant them in your hereditary mountain, the place you made to dwell in, O Yahweh, the sanctuary, O Yahweh, which your hands established' (15:17). The poet again employs the poetic suffixes in תַּבְּאֵמוֹ *tabī'ēmō* 'you will bring them' and וְתַטְעֵמוֹ *wə-tittā'ēmō* 'and you will plant them', and the noun מְכוֹן *mākōn* 'place' (cf. מָי *māy*) to evoke water. Moreover, while נַחֲלָתְךָ *naḥlāt* can only mean 'your hereditary (mountain)' here, it also suggests נַחֲלָת *naḥlat* 'stream'.²⁹

Concluding the Song of the Sea is the poet's praise: יְהוָה יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד *YHWH yimlōk la-ōlām wā-əd* 'Yahweh will reign forever and ever' (15:18). Though the final statement is highly formulaic, it still constitutes paronomasia on יָם *yām* 'sea'. Note especially the first syllable in יִמְלֹךְ *yimlōk* 'will reign' and the last syllable in עֹלָם *ōlām* 'forever'.³⁰

The combined evidence demonstrates that the poet has matched the work's artistry of structure and content with a sophisticated use of sound. If the device occurred in just a few passages, one might write it off as coincidence, but it appears in every verse. In fact, not a single line in the entire poem is devoid of a *n m*.

It has long been observed that the poem's numerous poetic verbal plural forms are a deliberate and artificial contrivance.³¹ Of the 23 appearances of the suffix -מוֹ *-mō* in the Hebrew Bible, nine of them appear in this poem. Brian Russell argues that the suffixes offer strong evidence for the archaic nature of the text.³² Brenner offers a contrary opinion. Dating the Song of the Sea to the post-exilic period, he remarks: "Moreover, the multiple occurrences of this ending has nothing to do with dating: it is a matter of literary style."³³ However, Brenner

29 The two readings would be distinguished in speech as the first represents PS **n-h-l* and the second **n-x-l*.

30 Jewish tradition, in particular Ibn Ezra, sees Exod 15:19 as the last line of the poem. If this is the case, then I note that each stich of the passage ends with a water reference: בַּיָּם *bay-yām* 'in the sea', מֵי הַיָּם *mē hay-yām* 'waters of the sea', and הַיָּם *hay-yām* 'the sea'. The repeated ש *š* in בְּפָרָשָׁיו *bə-pārāšāw* 'his horsemen', וַיָּשֶׁב *way-yāšeb* 'and he returned', and בַּיָּבֵשׁ *bay-yabāšā* 'on dry land', also suggests the sound of crashing waves. Moreover, as discussed above, the Masoretic division of the line structurally recreates the division of the sea.

31 See already E. Kautzsch (ed.), *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A.E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), p. 258: "That they are consciously and artificially used is shown by the evidently intentional accumulation of them."

32 Russell, *The Song of the Sea*, pp. 59–64.

33 Brenner, *The Song of the Sea*, p. 34.

does not comment on what the suffix contributes in terms of style. What the evidence amassed here demonstrates is that regardless of whether the poetic suffixes represent true archaisms, the poet has exploited them to invoke the roiling waters of the sea.³⁴

I suggest we consider the frequent use of the enclitic *mem* in a similar light. Chaim Cohen has shown that the enclitic *mem* has three functions in biblical texts: 1) to separate a construct from its dependent genitive; 2) to offer variation when passages are repeated; and 3) in order to serve the needs of polysemy (e.g., Isa 5:11; Hos 14:3).³⁵ To his list we now may add a fourth function: to serve the needs of paronomasia with appellative and onomatopoeic functions. The numerous allusions to water and the sea match the observation of William Propp concerning the poem's clever use of verbs:

(The poem) features many verbs connoting elevation and depression, rising and falling ... Egypt descends—literally from shore to Sea to underworld, metaphorically from glory to ignominy—while Israel ascends—from slavery, Egypt and Sea to secure habitation on Yahweh's mountain. The more imaginative reader might feel the up and down of the Sea's waves.³⁶

A final comment is in order. The paronomastic devices examined here belong more generally to a poetic strategy of clustering found throughout the poem.³⁷ Not only does the song contain clusters of verbal repetitions, as noted by van der Lugt,³⁸ but its abundant use of the poetic suffix and enclitic *mem* comprises a cluster. Thus, the paronomastic devices here provide additional evidence for the phenomenon of clustering as found with a variety of other literary devices.³⁹

34 The recollection of the splitting of the Reed Sea in Ps 78:13 also follows references to יָם *yām* and מַיִם *mayim* with an enclitic *mem* on a preposition (כְּמוֹ *kāmō*): בָּקַע יָם וַיַּעֲבִירֵם (בָּמוֹ) *bāqā' yām way-ya'ābīrēm way-yašṣēḥ mayim kāmō nēd* 'He split the sea and made them pass through it. He made the waters stand like a heap.' Assisting the alliterative effect is the plural suffix on וַיַּעֲבִירֵם *way-ya'ābīrēm*.

35 Chaim Cohen, "The Enclitic-*mem* in Biblical Hebrew: Its Existence and Initial Discovery," in Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, Shalom M. Paul (eds.), *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), pp. 231–260.

36 Propp, *Exodus* 1–18, p. 510.

37 For additional cases of appellative paronomasia involving the Sea of Reeds that take us beyond the poem, see Scott B. Noegel, "From Rebellion and Death to Victory: On Appellative Paronomasia in Numbers 20–21," in *Advances in Ancient Biblical and Near Eastern Research* (forthcoming, 2023).

38 Van der Lugt, "The Wave-like Motion of the Song of the Sea," p. 57.

39 See polysemy clusters, body part clusters, numerical clusters, and geminate clusters in Noegel, "Wordplay" in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 195–207, 268–269, 286–295, 310–311.

Hebraists have long recognized the Song of the Sea as a literary masterpiece. However, they primarily have pointed to the poem's elaborate structure, use of special types of parallelism, and its dramatic similes and metaphors.⁴⁰ This study finds that the poet has equipped the song with an equally sophisticated soundscape that similarly evokes the seething sea, stich by stich.

⁴⁰ On the poem's sophisticated use of imagery to heighten emotional intensity, see Pamela Barmash, "Through the Kaleidoscope of Literary Imagery in Exodus 15: Poetics and Historiography in Service to Religious Exuberance," *Hebrew Studies* 58 (2017), pp. 145–172.



This volume honors the extraordinary scholarship of Prof. Gary A. Rendsburg, whose work and friendship have influenced so many in the last five decades. Twenty-five prominent scholars from the

United States, Europe, Israel, and Australia have contributed significant original studies in three of Rendsburg's areas of interest and expertise: Hebrew language, Hebrew Bible, and Hebrew manuscripts. These linguistic, philological, literary, epigraphic, and historical approaches to the study of Hebrew and its textual traditions serve as a worthy tribute to such an accomplished scholar, and also as an illustration how all of these approaches can complement one another in the fields of Hebrew and Biblical Studies.

Contributors are Debra Scoggins Ballentine, Vincent D. Beiler, Adele Berlin, Christian M.M. Brady, Steven E. Fassberg, Edward L. Greenstein, C.G. Häberl, James K. Hoffmeier, Geoffrey Khan, Aaron Koller, Craig E. Morrison, Scott B. Noegel, Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, Benjamin M. Outhwaite, Frank H. Polak, Elizabeth Robar, Aaron D. Rubin, William M. Schniedewind, Stefan Schorch, Benjamin D. Sommer, Jeffrey H. Tigay, H.G.M. Williamson, Azzan Yadin-Israel, Ian Young, and Ziony Zevit.

Vincent D. Beiler, Ph.D. candidate at the University of Cambridge, researches Masoretic Bibles of the 10th–12th centuries C.E., combining palaeography, codicology, Masorah, and the study of colophons to establish relationships between codices.

Aaron D. Rubin, Ph.D. (2004) Harvard University, is Ann and Jay Davis Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Georgia. He has published widely on Hebrew, the Semitic languages, and Jewish languages.

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