Near Eastern Acrostics And Biblical Acrostics
Biblical Acrostics And Their Relationship To Other Ancient Near Eastern Acrostics
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Although acrostics form a relatively small part of the corpus of biblical poetry, they are one of the most distinctive features of biblical poetry. Aside from parallelism, which is the most important characteristic of biblical poetry, acrostics are one of the few significant techniques of biblical poetry which can be compared with the contemporary poetic techniques of other nations, since the meter of biblical poetry has defied convincing analysis in spite of many attempts and a wide variety of approaches.[1] The purpose of this paper is to compare the biblical acrostics with the acrostics of Israel's neighbors in the hopes of clarifying the purpose, origin, and relationship of Near Eastern acrostics.

The term "acrostic" literally means "the beginning of a line." It refers to a literary technique in which the writer uses the first letter, sign, or word of a series of poetic units to form a significant pattern or to spell out a message. The term "acrostic" may also refer to a literary work which employees this technique. The unit that begins with an acrostic sign may be a line, a couplet, a triplet or even a stanza or paragraph. The two major types of acrostics are sequence acrostics in which the acrostic signs fulfill a fixed sequence such as the order of the alphabet or numerical order and message acrostics in which the acrostic signs spell out a message. Although etymologically the term acrostic applies only to such sequences of signs which occur at the beginning of poetic units, in practice the term is also applied to poems which have such sequences in the middle or at the end of lines.

Since all the corpora in question are very small, we will examine each group of acrostics in turn, beginning with the biblical.

All of the biblical acrostics are alphabetic sequence acrostics. Psalms 111 and 112 are a pair of simple, complete alphabetic acrostics. Each line of these psalms begins with a successive letter of the alphabet, one line per letter through the twenty-two letters of the alphabet. Two brief lines representing two successive letters usually combine to form one thought unit, which could be called a double line or couplet. Both psalms are made up of eight such couplets and two triplets for a total of 22 lines. Psalm 111 is a praise of God's attributes. Its purpose is to teach the wisdom of following God. Psalm 112 responds to Psalm 111 by describing the blessing of the upright man who does follow the LORD. There are no indications of authorship for these psalms and no decisive indications of date of composition. Many biblical scholars suggest a post-exilic date, but there is no compelling evidence for this view.

In the Masoretic text Psalm 145 is missing a line to represent the letter nun. However, since the Septuagint and the Syriac, the Dead Sea manuscript 11QPs[a], and a manuscript of the Masoretic type all offer textual support for a nun line, we will classify this psalm with the simple, complete acrostics. Since the "lines" which represent each letter are long enough to be divided into two lines, it could be said that every other line of this poem begins with a successive letter of the alphabet, but for sake of simplicity we will treat this poem as one line per letter.

This is mentioned merely to indicate that the term "line" as applied to biblical poetry is a hazy term and may be used differently by different scholars. The heading of Psalm 145 classifies it as a psalm of praise and attributes it to David.

Proverbs 31:10-31 is another simple, complete acrostic, one line per letter. It is a poem praising a valuable and valued wife. It is not clear if this poem is attributed to the non-Israelite king Lemuel to whom the first part of Chapter 31 is attributed, or if it is an addendum to Proverbs.

Psalm 37 is a complete acrostic, but there are two lines for each letter, except for heth that has three. The ayin verse is irregular since the ayin word is preceded by the preposition lamed. Only the first line of each couplet begins with the appropriate sequential letter. This psalm is a didactic meditation that contrasts the righteous and the wicked. The heading attributes it to David.

Psalm 119 is an example of the most fully developed form of alphabetic acrostic, the repeating stanzaic acrostic. Each of the 22 letters of the alphabet is represented by an eight-line stanza. All eight lines of each stanza begin with the appropriate sequential letter. This psalm is a didactic meditation on the characteristics and blessings of God's law. Eight distinct terms for God's law appear repeatedly throughout the psalm. This may explain the eight-fold repetition of each letter in the psalm. However, although each line of the poem normally includes one of these eight names of the law, all eight names do not appear systematically in each eight-line stanza. Only six stanzas include all eight terms. No stanza contains less than six of the terms.

Although Psalm 119 seems rambling and disorganized to many modern readers, there is a certain amount of progression of thought as the psalmist moves from a concern for God's law to his own distress, then back to God's law, then to distress at the wickedness of God's enemies and to a closing pledge of obedience. The psalm includes no distinct indications of date or authorship. It has often been classified as post-exilic, but it has many common characteristics with the psalms of the first two books of psalms, and it appears to be an elaboration of a portion of Psalm 19, which is attributed to David.

The book of Lamentations is a collection of acrostic poems, which is a unified composition rather than a random collection. Each poem could be appreciated separately, but like the movements of a symphony they are intended to complement each other and form a whole. The first poem is composed of triplets, except for the ayin verse which is a quatrain. Only the first line of each triplet begins with the acrostic letter. The second poem follows the same pattern, but it contains only triplets. The third poem is also made up of triplets, but in this case all three lines of the triplet begin with the appropriate sequential letter. This poem is the focal point of the book since its central section contains the high point of the book, the hope for Gods mercy in the midst of gloom and anguish. The fourth poem is made up of two-line units, of which only the first line begins with the sequence letter. The fifth poem is not an alphabetic acrostic, but retains the twenty-two-line form. The text offers no explanation for this switch, but since Chapter 5 is a closing prayer, the switch of style may be intended to close the lament with a more personal, less stylistic tone. The acrostic style reaches a high point in the third poem and then fades away. This disappearance of the acrostic style may be a subtle way of stating that the intensity of the poet's grief has exhausted his poetic powers.

Lamentations 1 through 4 are all complete alphabetic acrostics, but chapters 2 through 4 contain one unusual feature. Instead of the normal sequence of letters ayin-pe the sequence is pe-ayin. The Septuagint has this order also in Proverbs 31, and it is the apparent order in Psalm 9-10. It has been suggested (not entirely convincingly) that the line of thought of Psalm 34 follows best if it is corrected to the pe-ayin order. Because of this phenomenon it has been suggested that the pe-ayin order was an alternate order for the West Semitic alphabet. It is clear from lists of the alphabet found at Ugarit that the familiar order of the West Semitic alphabet was established already by the 14th Century B.C.E.[2] Although the Ugaritic cuneiform-style alphabet has 30 characters, rather than the 22 of the later Hebrew alphabet, the eight additional characters are inserted among the 22 characters, which occur in the same sequence in the Ugaritic lists as in the later Hebrew alphabet, including the sequence ayin-pe. Where does this leave us in our effort to explain the pe-ayin order? The situation took an interesting turn with the discovery of an ostracon at the archeological site of Izbet Sartah in the hills near Aphek in Israel. The site has been conjecturally identified with biblical Ebenezer. Although the stratum to which the ostracon belongs is somewhat uncertain because it was found in a pit, the site was short-lived and the text can quite confidently be dated to the 12th Century B.C.E. on the basis of the archeological and paleographic evidence.[3] One line of this ostracon is a sequential writing of the alphabet in the pe-ayin order. The rest of the text appears to be random practice of the alphabet, although attempts have been made to find Anatolian or Aegean languages or West Semitic names in this portion of the text.[4] This text strengthens the plausibility of the claim that the pe-ayin order was an acceptable alternate order for the alphabet. The only

reason to be cautious about this conclusion is that the lzbet Sartah ostracon is a practice text that contains a number of obvious errors. It is therefore possible that the pe-ayin order is one of these blunders. At any rate, it is significant to our inquiry into acrostics that in what has all the earmarks of being a small Israelite agricultural village of the l2th Century B.C.E. the alphabet was being practiced in a sequence which also occurs in some biblical acrostics.

The plausibility of the pe-ayin order is strengthened by the discovery at Kuntillet Ajrud in the Negev of an incomplete alphabetic list from the 8th century B. C. E. that contains the pe-ayin order.[5]

The other significant departure from alphabetic sequence in the biblical acrostics occurs in Psalms 25 and 34, each of which has an extra pe line at the end. It has been suggested that this pe simply replaces the vav which is missing from the alphabetic pattern in 25:5 and 34:6 with a related bilabial, or that the pe line is intended to end the psalm on a positive note.[6] However, I believe that the literary intention is more subtle than that. The extra pe seems to be placed at the end with the intention of enhancing the acrostic pattern by hinting at the word aleph which is the first letter of the alphabet and also means "learn." Proverbs 22:25 is an example of the occurrence of this verb.[7] The vav line may be chosen for omission since there are few Hebrew words that begin with vav. Interestingly, pe and vav are corresponding letters in *atbash*, the form of Hebrew cryptography in which the first letter of the alphabet represents the last, and so on throughout the alphabet.

In Psalm 25 the first line begins with aleph. With the omission of vav and qoph from the acrostic pattern and the addition of the extra pe, lamed becomes the middle letter of the acrostic pattern.[8] Lamed is preceded and followed by 10 acrostic letters. Aleph, lamed, and pe thus form the initial, middle, and final letters of the acrostic pattern, spelling the word aleph. Psalm 25 has the character of a personal prayer to which the final pe verse adds a corporate conclusion. It is attributed to David.

In Psalm 34 the pattern is more problematic. The vav line is again omitted, but qoph is retained. Therefore, lamed is the middle of the acrostic only if the final pe is not counted. Perhaps the solution is that the poet thought it more important to retain the 22-line pattern than to get the lamed into the exact middle. (In Psalm 25 the 22-line pattern was retained by adding a second resh line to compensate for the missing qoph. It thus appears that retaining the right number of lines was also significant in acrostic poems.) Ceresko has also noted that if the vowel letters are omitted, the aleph line begins with aleph, has lamed in the approximate middle, and ends in pe. If this interpretation is valid, the aleph acrostic is spelled out both vertically and horizontally along the perimeter of the poem.[9] It may be coincidental, but in both psalms the extra pe is the initial letter of the Hebrew word "redeem." Psalm 34 has the nature of a personal confession offered for a didactic purpose. It is attributed to David in a heading that includes a historical note.

The theory that the final *pe* is intended to create the acrostic word אלפ is more convincing than the "happy ending theory" of Buttenweiser because Psalm 25 already has a positive ending without the last line. The acrostic explanation is preferred to Johnstone's missing vav theory because it better explains the complex pattern of omission and addition in Psalm 25, which involves more that the disappearance of vav.

I believe that the aleph-lamed-pe acrostics in Psalms 25 and 34 are the only spelled-out acrostics in biblical poetry, and even these are rather subtle. Many attempts have been made to discover other message acrostics in biblical poetry, but none of them are convincing, and they will not be discussed here. Bibliographic references to such attempts are given in the final bibliography under the heading "Spelled-out Acrostics."

Considerable study has also been given to non-alphabetic, "line-count acrostics" like Lamentations 5. These studies are noted in the bibliography under the heading Line-count Acrostics. They will not be discussed here other than to note that although there are a number of biblical poems with 22, 23, or 44 lines, it is difficult to know whether or not this is coincidental, unless the poem in question is part of a larger acrostic structure as Lamentations 5.

The Old Testament also contains a number of "broken acrostics" or fragments of acrostics. Most notable is the combined psalm, Psalm 9-10, which is treated as one psalm by the Septuagint. Psalm 9 contains a fairly regular sequence of couplets from aleph to kaph (the first half of the alphabet) with only the dalet missing. Psalm 10 contains a much more broken sequence from lamed to tav, from which the mem, nun, and samek are

missing and the ayin verse has an irregular number of lines. If pe and ayin are represented, they are in the pe-ayin order. Together these two psalms describe God the judge and the wicked man who is subject to his judgment. Psalm 9 is attributed to David.

Nahum 1:2-8 may preserve another fragment of an acrostic from aleph to tav, but it is broken in a number of places, and the number of lines for each letter is irregular. It is doubtful if this can really be called an acrostic.

Acrostics continued to be popular in Hellenistic Judaism and in later Jewish and Christian hymns. They are well represented in the extra-canonical psalms found at Qumran. Post-biblical acrostics often are more elaborate than their biblical prototypes and include spelled-out acrostics as well as alphabetic sequence acrostics. References to these acrostics are found in the bibliography under the heading "Post-biblical Acrostics."

Summary of Biblical Acrostics

Before we proceed to a consideration of other Near Eastern acrostics, we will summarize the general characteristics of biblical acrostics to facilitate a comparison of the biblical acrostics with other Near Eastern acrostics. We have noted that biblical acrostics are all alphabetical sequence acrostics, but the sequence is moderated in two cases to convey a subtle acrostic message. The biblical acrostic is a literary form, not a genre, since a number of different genres occur in acrostic form, and every genre which occurs in acrostic form also occurs in non-acrostic form. However, although praise and petition occur in biblical acrostics, most acrostics have a didactic flavor. This didactic tone seems to be a common emphasis of biblical acrostics.

Although it has often been suggested that mnemonic aid was a major purpose for acrostics, this does not seem to be the predominant purpose of biblical acrostics. They do not have the character of basic primer-like exercises as some non-biblical acrostics do. Sometimes the alphabetic sequence is broken by more important stylistic considerations such as the aleph-lamed-pe pattern of Psalms 25 and 34. Some acrostics such as Lamentations 2 through 4 follow an alternate order of the alphabet. The most developed acrostic, Psalm 119, could hardly have been intended for easy memorization. All of these factors militate against a mnemonic use as a prime consideration in the development of the acrostic form. There is no evidence for a magical or occult purpose of any of the biblical acrostics. It appears that the most important purpose of biblical acrostics is simply stylistic. Often acrostics are intended to convey an impression of comprehensiveness. This seems most apparent in Psalm 119, Lamentations, and Proverbs 3 1, all of which try to cover their subjects from A to Z. There is no evidence in the acrostics themselves to establish the common opinion that A biblical acrostics are a post-exilic, imported form.[10] Incidentally, since the acrostic form produces primarily a visual effect, the acrostic form is an argument against the claim that the psalms were composed primarily for oral circulation.

With these preliminary impressions in mind, we will now turn to the acrostics of other nations to compare them with the biblical acrostics and to see what light they may shed on the purpose or origin of biblical acrostics.

Ugaritic Acrostics

An attempt has been made to relate the beginning of biblical acrostics to the so-called "quasi acrostic" repetitive pattern that is common in Ugaritic poetry. Watson cites many examples of successive lines of Ugaritic poetry which begin with the same word (anaphora) and many passages in which several successive lines begin with the same letter (quasi acrostics). He claims that there is a clear line of development from parallelism to anaphora to quasi acrostics to full alphabetic acrostics to line-count acrostics in which the 22-line pattern is retained but the acrostic has disappeared. This is an unconvincing explanation of the derivation of alphabetic acrostics. Ugaritic alliteration or anaphora is primarily a repetitive style that appeals to the ear. It does not have the sequential pattern that is the essence of the alphabetic acrostic, nor is its main appeal to the eye as is the case with biblical acrostic. Repetition of the same sound or letter which is the essence of the Ugaritic quasi acrostics is not essential to biblical acrostics and appears in only a few examples, such as Lamentations 3 and Psalm 119. The true acrostics of other nations provide much better parallels to biblical acrostics than the quasi acrostics of Ugaritic.

Akkadian Acrostics

Akkadian acrostics are message acrostics in which the initial syllables or signs of the horizontal acrostic lines spell out a message when read vertically. Seven complete or partial acrostic texts are known from Akkadian literature.

The first is *The Dialogue of Saggil-kinam-ubbib*, which is often called "The Babylonian Theodicy."[12] Although it is not fully preserved, it apparently consisted of 27 eleven-line stanzas. Each of the 11 lines of a given stanza begins with the same sign. The stanzas are separated by horizontal lines, but there is no other indication of the acrostic. The initial signs spell out the message, *a-na-ku sa-ag-gi-il ki-[i-na-am ub]-bi-ib ma-áš—ma-šu ka-ri-bu ša i-li ú šar-ri,* " I Saggil-kinam-ubbib, the exorcist, am a worshipper of god and king." The acrostic message thus appears to be a defense against any charge of impiety that right be raised by the dialogue's views on human suffering. Copies range from Neo-Assyrian to Seleucid times, but a date of composition near 1000 B.C. E. is likely.[13]

The second exemplar is the *Prayer of Nabu-ushebshi*. The acrostic character of this piece was not yet recognized when it was published by Lambert in the Speiser Festschrift.[14] The acrostic was first recognized by Sweet in 1969.[15] It is not surprising that the acrostic was not immediately recognized since each acrostic sign occurs in only one line, there is no indentation to indicate the acrostic, and half of the acrostic message is actually a "telostic" since it occurs at the end of the lines, not the beginning. The clue to the acrostic is provided by the colophons that read, "The beginning and the ending of the writing are to be read twice," that is, horizontally as part of the prayer and vertically as an acrostic. The text consists of two prayers, one to Marduk for offspring and one to Nabu for life. The two acro-telostics as restored by Sweet read, *ša na-bu-ú ú-še-eb-ši a-ši-pi re-e-šu mu-,šá-pu-ú bé-lu-ti-ka*, "Of Nabu-ushebshi the exorcist, the servant who proclaims your supremacy," and š*a na-bu-ú ú-še-eb-ši [a-ši-pi/pu re-e-šu mut-né-nu-ú pa-lih-ka*, "Of Nabu-ushebshi the exorcist, the servant given to prayer who worships you." Thus both acrostics supplement the prayer by making a claim about the devotion of the suppliant. The inclusion of the suppliant's name in the acrostics does not appear to have mystical or occult connotations since his name was already included in the prayers. This acrostic is probably a first millennium composition.

A complication in reading Akkadian acrostics is the many different values which individual Akkadian signs may have. In the first acrostic above, a single Akkadian sign may be used for slightly different sounds such as *bu* and *pu*, but it is not used to represent such strikingly different sounds as *git* or *sir*, other values which the same sign may have. In the second text above, according to Sweet's restorations, a single sign may be used for such diverse values as *ú* when read in one direction and *šam* when read in the other. Another sign is read as both *tú* and *lih*.

The third Akkadian acrostic is a prayer to Marduk from Ashurbanipal (669-627 B.C.E.).[16] The prayer consists of 30 prose sections which are separated by horizontal lines, and the acrostic signs are highlighted by reverse indentation, The acrostic signs appear only at the beginning of each section, not at the beginning of each line. The acrostic is complete enough that it can be restored as *a-na-ku aš-šur-[ba-an]-ap-li šá il-su-ka bu-ul-li-ta-[ni]-ma ma-ru-du-uk da-li-li-ka lu-ud-lul*, "I am Ashurbanipal who calls on you. Give me life, Marduk, I will glorify you." Thus this acrostic like the first two adds a message about the suppliant which enhances the prayer.

The fourth acrostic is a hymn associated with Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.E.). In this case the acrostic adds nothing about the suppliant but contains a cryptic reference to Nabu, his namesake god.[17] The prayer consists of four 10 or 11 line stanzas. Every line of a stanza begins with the acrostic sign of that stanza. The acrostic signs are indicated by reverse indentation in most lines. The four signs are *d [na]-bu-ú*, the god determinative and the name of the god invoked.

The fifth text is two fragments of a prayer to Marduk, which appears to date from about the time of Ashurbanipal.[18] The prayer consists of five-line stanzas, each line of which begins with the same sign. Stanzas are separated by horizontal lines, but there is no indentation. The only part of the acrostic that can be recovered

reads ... *-na ar-ba ... zi-kir-šu*. The suggested restoration is *i-na ar-ba kibrāti lušarrihu zi-kir-šu*, "in the four quarters of the earth let me praise his name."

The sixth exemplar is a prayer to Nabu. It is another form of acro-telostic since each line begins and ends with the same sign.[19] It consists of four-line stanzas, separated by horizontal lines. There is no indentation to highlight the acrostic signs. The text is only partly preserved, but the acrostic is reconstructed as *ú-ša-al-du-du ma-ru-uš-tu*, "it shall cause him to pity the troubled." Again the acrostic message supplements the prayer.

The seventh acrostic, if it is one, is a fragment preserved only in one stanza.[20] Naturally nothing can be said about the nature of the acrostic.

There is some evidence for the importance of number patterns or line counts in Akkadian poetry. A hymn to the goddess Ishtar has 15 stanzas, a number that may point to 15 as the symbolic number of Ishtar. A hymn to Shaniash has 200 lines, which is ten times twenty, his number.[21] However, nothing in this poetry closely parallels the biblical pattern of 22-line poems, which is based on the number of items in the established acrostic sequence, rather than on a number with cryptic meaning.

From this catalog it can be seen that there is a significant difference between biblical and Akkadian acrostics. All known Akkadian acrostics are **meaning acrostics** that spell out messages. There may be a magical purpose to some of these, but the purpose could just as well be stylistic. If one accepts the statements of the biblical text and the conclusion of recent biblical scholarship that pre-exilic dates for Israel's poems are the rule not the exception," [22] the Akkadian acrostics are contemporary with biblical acrostics or more recent. There is no clear evidence that any of them antedate the earliest biblical psalmody. There is no clear evidence to support significant Akkadian influence on biblical acrostics.

Egyptian Acrostics

The final source of acrostics is Egyptian literature. Several second millennium Egyptian poems begin each stanza of a section of a longer poem with the same line.[23] Each stanza of a subsequent section of the poem then begins with a different first line. These could be called "first line acrostics," but these poems provide only a remote parallel to biblical acrostics since their purpose is predominately repetition, rather than sequence or meaning.

There are, however, a few Egyptian poems that provide a much closer parallel to biblical acrostics since they are based on a set sequence. Most notable is a hymn to Amon from *Leiden Papyrus 1350*.[24] This poem is made up of numbered units or chapters. Chapters 5 through 800 are extant. Each unit of the poem begins and ends with a word play on the phonetic value of the number of that unit. An equivalent would be an English poem in which line I began with "won," line 2 with "to" or "too," line 4 with "for," line 8 with "ate," etc. For example, in the Amon hymn, chapter 6 begins and ends with the Egyptian word for "district," which is a homonym with the Egyptian word for "six." This pattern is followed throughout the poem. However, the wordplay is not always repeated at the end of every chapter. Some of the puns are rather strained. Furthermore, after the first ten chapters, units are numbered by 10s up to 100 and by 100s after that. This text forms a closer parallel to biblical acrostics since like them it is based on following a set sequence. The difference is that in this case the sequence is set by numbers, not an alphabet. This format seems to have the same stylistic motive suggested for the biblical acrostic, namely, depicting completeness. However, this Egyptian style is also based on a love of puns, a feature absent from the biblical acrostics. It may also partake of the cryptic motivation that seems to be part of Akkadian acrostics. Most significantly this composition dates from the 19th Dynasty (13th century B.C.E.) and thus antedates biblical acrostics.

A second Egyptian poem in a similar style is a collection of seven love songs called "The Stroll."[25] The stanzas alternate male and female speakers and seem to be a connected narrative. All of the stanzas except the first are also numbered. Stanzas one and seven begin and end with the words "one" and "seven." The other five stanzas begin and end with a word play on the appropriate number. For example, stanza two begins and ends with *sn* which means either "two" or "brother." This poem is from the 20th Dynasty.

Egyptian literature of the 19th through 22nd Dynasties also uses message acrostics like those that occur in Akkadian. For example, the tomb inscription of Neb-wenenef from the time of Ramses II is written in

horizontal columns. However, it is divided by two vertical lines. When the signs between these lines are read vertically, they form an acrostic, or I suppose we should say a mesostic, since the message is in the middle of lines. Like the Akkadian acrostics this mesostic supplements the prayer of the suppliant, who in this case is already deceased. Several other texts from this period contain hymns in the horizontal columns and epithets of persons in the vertical columns. The most striking text of this sort is written on a checkerboard pattern. All the columns can be read both vertically and horizontally. A heading alerts the reader to the bi-directional reading. Since Egyptian signs can be used as sounds, logograms, or determinatives, the various signs are often used in different functions and meanings in the vertical and horizontal columns.[26]

 Thus we see that Egyptian literature used both sequence and message acrostics shortly before the appearance of biblical acrostics. Biblical commentaries frequently refer to the Akkadian material in their discussions of the biblical acrostics, but I found no mention of the similarity of biblical and Egyptian acrostics in any discussion other than in the sources that discuss the Egyptian materials. For both stylistic and chronological reasons it appears that the Egyptian materials are more suitable for comparison with the biblical acrostics than Ugaritic "quasi acrostics" or Akkadian message acrostics, at least if a possible source or influence is being discussed.

 It may well be that each of the three forms of acrostic arose indigenously within its own culture, as creative writers in each culture developed literary forms which were suitable for use with their own form of writing. If the developers of the biblical acrostic derived the idea from an outside source, on the basis of the present evidence it would seem that Egypt was the most likely source. The first psalmist to use the acrostic form or the first writer to use this form in Northwest Semitic literature could have gotten the basic idea of a structured sequential poem from the Egyptian numerical sequence acrostics which were current in the late second millennium and adapted it to his own alphabetic form of writing, which provided a simpler, finite sequence which could be used as a structuring device for poetic compositions. Whether the idea of alphabetic acrostics arose independently in a Northwest Semitic culture or whether it was an apt modification of an Egyptian literary form, it would appear that students of biblical acrostics would do well to devote more attention to the study and evaluation of the Egyptian parallels than has been done in the past.

ENDNOTES

1. See Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, pp. 82-114 for an overview on meter.
2. Hallo, *JBL* 77 (1958), p. 324-338. Segert, *Grammar of Ugaritic*, p 23).
3. Dernsky and Kochavi, *Tel Aviv 4* (1977), p. 1-27.
4. Dotan, *Tel Aviv 8* (198 1) p. 160-172.
Meshel, *Kuntillet Ajrud*. Figure 11. BAR 5-2 (1979), p. 27.
I was unable to locate a full publication of this text for study.
6. Johnstone, Kadmos 17 6978), p. 166.
Buttenwieser, *The Psalms*, p. 840.
7. Ceresko first suggested this interpretation, but he and I differ in details. *VT 35* (1985), p. 99-104.
8. This analysis ignores the irregular beginning of the beth verse.
9. Ceresko, VT 35, p. 101
10. Hillers, *Lamentations*. p. xxiv-xxvi. Munch, *ZDMG* 90, p. 703.
Buttenwieser, *The Psalms*, passim,
11. Watson, *OF12* (1980), p. 445-447 and *UF 14* (1982), p. 265-277.
12. Craig, *ABRT* 1, p. 4445 Strong, *PSBA* 17, p. 142-151.
13. Lambert, *EMEAS*, p. 63 ff.
14. Lambert, Speiser Festschrift. (Hello, ed.), p. 130.
15. Sweet, *Or*. 38. p. 459-460.
16. Craig, *ABRTI*, p. 29-31.
17. Strong, *PBA* 20. p. 154-162.

18. Pinches, *BWW*, p, 15-16.
19. Strong, *PBA* 1, p. 13 1. "
20. Strong, *PSBA* 17, p. 137-141.
20. Craig, *ABRT* 1, p. 53.
21. Watson, *RA* 741 (1980), p, 91
 Lambert, *RA* 75 (1980), p. 96, dissents from this analysis.
22. Gerstenberger, *The Hebrew Bible*, p. 432.
23. Lichtheim, *Egyptian Literature* I, p. 11, 18-20, 153-169, 198-203.
 Simpson, *Literature of Egypt*, p. 205, 210, 279, 285.
24. Zandee, *De Hymnen Aan Amon*,_esp. p. 129-130.
 Gardiner, *ZAS 42*, (1905), p. 1242.
 Goodwin was the first to suggest the key to this poem in a letter to the editor in *Z4S 2*(1864) p. 38.
25. Fox, *Song of Songs* p. 52-66, 393-399.
 Gardiner, *Chester Beatty*. p. 27-38, P1. 22-26. 26
26. Zandee, *Egyptian Crossword*, p. 5 -6 discusses all these texts. Clere, *Chronique d'Egypte 25*. p. 35-58.

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