Psalm 116: Text-syntactic structure

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This paper is an exemplary analysis van Psalm 116. It offers full text-syntactic and prosodic analyses and an elementary interpretation. The text-syntactic and prosodic analyses will show analytical procedures, methodical problems and reflections on the functions of syntax and versification. The elementary interpretation will show what an integrated analysis of classical Hebrew poetry has to offer

With the strophic analyses completed, this paper contains some meta-analytical reflections. The reader is supposed to consult *Psalm 116 Supplement*, as it offers the full text-syntactic and prosodic structures.

Parameters of the paragraph

A major part of our meta-analytical reflections should be the question whether there is any system in continuity and discontinuity within the paragraph and at the paragraph boundaries. We will study several parameters like clause type, subject and subordination, starting with a reflection on the theme and then inventorying and discussing the data.

Most subsequent clauses are connected by connectors or subordinators (つ, つ, つは , etc.), and/or by subordination (also marked direct speech), and/or by having parallel, close or sequential syntax. If there is no such connection, there could be a paragraph boundary.

Comments:

Particles like \(^1\) and \(^1\) connect whatever their nature is.

Parallel: clauses show a full syntactic parallelism.

Close: clauses show a partial syntactic parallelism.

Sequential: clauses show a syntactic sequence.

Non-subsequent clauses may also be connected in some of the described ways. The number of clauses intervening between a mother clause and a daughter clause in the same paragraph will be limited because of syntactic constraints and prosodic rules, but this does not give us a workable criterium. If the mother clause is located in a previous paragraph, there is, of course, a paragraph boundary right before the daughter clause.

Discursive turns are sometimes accompanied by strong deixis (imperative, question, vocative) and we find it, therefore, at the start of paragraphs. The same applies for macro-syntactic signals (הנת הלכן), הולה, לכן, הולה, לכן, הולה, לכן, הולה (שנת היים), and for new subject-participants (by

nominalization or by renominalization after several clauses). These data help us to identify paragraph boundaries.

We may expect that communicative turns coincide with discursive turns, but they do not always. Changes in the set of participants are not easy to interpret too.

Analysis

We made an inventory of the above parameters in Psalm 116 – see the end of this document – and will discuss the results here.

Psalm 116 has 37 clauses that have or could have a mother-daughter relation (so, exclusive of the first clause). We arranged them in six categories:

- 1. Continuity: subordination 9 clauses
- 2. Continuity: parallel or close syntax 14 cl.
- 3. Continuity: sequentiality 3 clauses
- 4. Continuity/Discontinuity: bridging subordinate clauses within a paragraph 2 clauses
- 5. Discontinuity: a syntactic break within a paragraph for non-syntactic reasons 2 cl.
- 6. Discontinuity: a syntactic break as paragraph boundary 7 clauses.

The conclusions are in **bold** and the clauses are numbered /#/.

The syntactic coherence of paragraphs is guaranteed by subordination and parallel or close syntax.

1-23

23 clauses are linked to the previous clause: 1.2, 2.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 7.2, 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 10.2, 10.3, 11.1, 11.2, 13.1, 13.2, 14, 16.2, 16.3, 17.2, and 18-19.

9 of them are subordinated to the previous clause: "\(\sigma\)-sub in 1.2, 2.1, 7.2, 8.1, 10.2, 16.2, and sub: direct speech in 4.2, 10.3, and 11.2.

The clause pairs with subordination may imply a verb-form switch and a subject switch, but those do not reduce text-coherence.

14 of them are parallel or close in syntax to the previous clause: *parallel* in 8.2, 8.3, 11.1, 16.3, *close* in 6.1, 13.1, 14, 18-19, *waw-parallel* in 3.2, 4.1, 5.2, 13.2, 17.2, and *waw-close* in 5.3.

The parallel clause pairs may be linear or chiastic parallel. The daughter clause may start with a *prosodic waw* or *B-colon marker* (but not in 5.2).¹ There is continuity of clause-constituents, verbform and subject-participant. We use the term *close* for clauses that show a slight difference in clause constituents, yet have, like the parallel clauses, also continuity of verb-form and subject-participant (5.3/6.1, 12/13.1, 13.2/14, and 17.2/18-19), and for the parallel of a nominal clause and a participle clause (5.2/5.3).

Two of these clause pairs are disrupted by a change of communicative domain: 8.1 and 17.2, strangely so in a subordinate clause and a parallel one.

| # 10 | כי־יהוה גמל עליכי > כי חלצת נפשי ממות |
|------|---------------------------------------|
| # 22 | לך־אזבח זבח תודה > ובשם יהוה אקרא |

Such changes are not used as instruments of syntactic structure in this psalm. Compare the change in clauses 9 and 16.1, and the clause-internal (!) change in clause 18-19.

If it isn't about subordination, verb-form switch and/or subject switch within paragraphs point to sequentiality.

Sequential pairs are bound by *waw* (# 24) or strong repetitions (# 25). Reverse pairs may be unmarked (# 26 final).

The sequential clause pair in 6.2/6.3 has a QATAL-YIQTOL and a subject-object switch, and brings together situation and action.²

| # 25 | ומצרי שאול מצאוני > צו |
|------|------------------------|
|------|------------------------|

The 3.2/3.3 pair does not show the marks of continuity (a subordinate, sequential, parallel, or close daughter-clause), nor any mark of discontinuity (strong deixis, a macro-syntactic signal, a new subject-participant). There is a QATAL-YIQTOL and an object-subject (or even a subject-object/object-subject) switch. The clauses are secured as a pair by strong repetitions. The pair combines situation and experience.

אנה יהוה > פתחת למוסרי

In our strophic analysis, we linked clauses 16.1 and 16.4. This pair with two clauses intervening does not show any of the inventoried marks of continuity or discontinuity. The only reason to link these clauses is that the incomplete clause 16.1 with vocative אור מון של may be seen as the intro to clause 16.4 with subject 2^{sgm}.

This meta-analysis should be the occasion to correct our analysis and to link clause 16.4 to the previous clause 16.3.

| "עבדך בן־אמתך > פתחת למוסרי 26 final "עבדך בן | # 26 final | אני־עבדד בן־אמתד > פתחת למוסרי |
|---|------------|--------------------------------|
|---|------------|--------------------------------|

The result is certainly less artificial: subsequent clauses, an unmarked sequence³ and a subject-object switch.⁴

The corrected strophic hierarchy:

| יקר בעיני יהוה המותה לחסידיו | 15 |
|------------------------------|------|
| *נה יהוה | 16.1 |
| בי־אני עבדך ∟ | 16.2 |
| אני־עבדך ב'ן־אמתך | 16.3 |
| . פתחת למוסרי | 16.4 |

Parallel, close or sequential syntax may bridge several subordinate clauses (close: # 27; sequential: # 28).

| # 27 | שובי נפשי למנוחיכי > |
|------|------------------------------|
| | אתהלך לפני יהוה בארצות החיים |

The 7.1/9 clause pair with four subordinate clauses intervening does not show any of the inventoried marks of continuity or discontinuity, but the clauses are both volitive and the subjects are close (*my soul / I*: participant ME). The volitive clauses are parallel in grammatical mood.

בי־ישמע יהוה את־קולי תחנוני > ובימי אקרא 28

One clause pair is *waw-sequential* with one intervening clause: 1.2/2.2. It has verb-form continuity and an object-subject switch, and it combines action and reaction.⁵

If there is no subordinate, parallel, close, or sequential syntax, syntax is interrupted.

³ In Kalkman's *Concordance of Patterns in the Psalms*, the sequence [NOMINAL]clause > [ZERO-QATAL]clause with subject discontinuity, has number 1192, with the functional description: 'Discursive Mainline > Antecedent Info'. Among a lot of disputable material I found a nice parallel, Psalm 73,23:

ואני תמיד עמך > אחזת ביד־ימיני

Yet, I am always with you > you have taken my right hand.

Object', a not very accurate description. How to describe the syntactic function of the suffix of מוסרי? Maybe in deep structure.

⁵ Kalkman's *Concordance of Patterns in the Psalms* has seven clause pairs with [x-YIQTOL] > [waw-x-YIQTOL] and subject switch (number 692), but none of them is sequential.

For the prosodic waw or B-colon marker see Van Grol, Syntagma, 61-103.

² Kalkman's *Concordance of Patterns in the Psalms* has seven clause pairs in which a clause with QATAL is followed by a [waw-x-YIQTOL]clause, and in which there is no subject continuity. Number 702. Two of these pairs are not a pair (Pss 105,21a/22b; 116,2a/b). One of them has subject continuity in deep structure (Ps 37,23a/b). Three pairs may be compared with Ps 116,6.2/6.3: Pss 63,8a/b (o-s switch); 71,17a/b (so-os switch); 148,6b/c (s¹-s² switch), but they combine action and reaction instead of situation and action.

Syntactic breaks usually coincide with paragraph boundaries, and mark discursive turns.

Each of the seven paragraphs (exclusive of the first one!) starts with a clause that has no (substantial) connection with the previous paragraph. We will discuss them below.

Syntactic breaks may occur within the paragraph for non-syntactic reasons (## 28, 29).

| # 29 | שמר פתאים יהוה > דלותי |
|------|------------------------|

The 6.1/6.2 pair is certainly discontinuous. The usual marks of continuity are absent, and there is a subject-participant (ME) which was present in clause 4.1 for the last time, and which is not mentioned in other syntactic roles during four intervening clauses.⁶ Of course, there is only a short interruption, because the next clause has again the subject-participant of these four clauses (YHWH). One could argue that there is actually a non-subsequent pair 6.1/6.3. Clause 6.2 has only the function of a circumstantial clause, bound to the main clause 6.3 (see above).

Nevertheless, there is an interruption, deliberately. (1) The [QATAL]clause switches attention to 'antecedent info'. (2) The link between the description of YHWH in 5.1-6.1 and the situation of participant ME in 6.2 is the suggestive sequence of three 'objects' of Gods help:

| מרחם | נו |
|--------|-------|
| שמר | פתאים |
| יהושיע | דלותי |

By describing himself as a loser, the protagonist associates himself with this community of 'the simple'.

| # 30 | אנה יהוה | < מותה לחסידיו | יקר בעיני יהוה ה |
|------|----------|----------------|------------------|
|------|----------|----------------|------------------|

The 15/16.1 pair is certainly discontinuous. The usual marks of continuity are absent, and there is a domain change with strong deixis in clause 16.1. The repetition of הוה and the phonemic play אנה guarantee that there is some inner-strophic continuity.

Again, the interruption is deliberate. (1) The domain change with deixis changes a general statement to emotive speech. (2) Although the semantic point is not given with the incomplete clause 16.1, the next clause shows that the protagonist associates himself with the broader

community of 'the faithful' in clause 15, especially with their death.

| of his faithful | לחסידיו | the death | המותה |
|-----------------|---------|----------------------|--------|
| your servant | עבדך | | |
| | • | the fetters of Death | למוסרי |

The two pairs show that discontinuity is used to associate participant ME with a broader religious community, in an implicit way, by just placing them in subsequent clauses and creating some disruption.

Syntactic breaks imply that clauses lack a mother clause, and that the syntactic hierarchy is in peril.

We will discuss here how the initial clauses of the paragraphs cope with syntactic breaks.

Although the subject-participant of clause 10.1 (ME) is also present in the previous clause, the clause types differ and the usual marks of continuity are absent. The syntactic break makes us to look for a mother clause elsewhere. Clause 1.1 has the same clause type and this peculiar set of participants, just ME.

| # 31 | את־קולי תחנוני > | כי־ישמע יהוה | אהבתי |
|------|------------------|--------------|--------|
| | אני עניתי מאד | כי אדבר | האמנתי |

The 1.1-2/10.1-3 pair has strong syntactic and semantic parallels, and bridges with three intervening paragraphs half the text.

The nature of this connection differs substantially from the connection of adjacent clauses by parallel syntax. It is a complex repetition of syntax, lexemes and semantics and as such capable of bridging half the text. Otherwise, it looks like a normal pair functioning in the syntactic hierarchy. It is, but we will conclude below that this it not the whole story.

Volitive and interrogative clauses like 7.1 and 12 create discursive breaks. In [IMPERATIVE, VOCATIVE] clause 7.1 the clause type, the communicative domain, and the set of participants change, while the subject-participant is new or at least renominalized (MY SOUL). The syntactic break in clause 12 is not so strong, but the clause type and the set of participants change. Both clauses have a lot in common.

| * | כי־יהוה גמל עליכי | שובי נפשי למנוחיכי |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| * | כל-תגמולוהי עלי | מה־אשיב ליהוה |

Clauses 7.1-2 and 12 seem to function in the same way. A pair with a complex repetition of (deep)

The community is mentioned in clause 5.3, US.

syntax, lexemes and semantics and as such capable of bridging a lot of text, in this case one intervening paragraph.

But clauses 7.1-2 and 12 cannot be a mother/daughter pair in the syntactic hierarchy, because the 1.1-2/10.1-3 pair blocks clause 12 to reach 7.1-2, or the other way around of course.

The only way to save the syntactic hierarchy is to link clause 7 to 1 and 12 to 10.

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אהבתי כי־ישמע יהוה
אהבתי כי־ישמע יהוה
| .. שובי נפשי למנוחיכי / כי־יהוה גמל עליכי
האמנתי כי אדבר
| .. מה־אשיב ליהוה / כל-תגמולוהי עלי
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In the strophic analysis, we argued that 7.1 is a daughter clause of 1.1, both being a first person clause with a present time perspective, and up in the syntactic hierarchy, which fits a deictic clause like 7.1.⁷ And the same applies to the 10.1/12 pair.⁸ But saving the syntactic hierarchy implies sacrificing the strong parallel of clauses 7.1-2 and 12, or, maybe better, the hierarchical importance of this pair.

The only way to value both repetition clusters, 1.1-2/10.1-3 and 7.1-2/12, in the same way, is to sacrifice the syntactic hierarchy and to recognize the paradigmatic nature of the structure they form, a four-part, linear-parallel structure: A.B//A.B.

| A | אהבתי כי־ישמע יהוה | 1a |
|----|--|-----|
| В | שובי נפשי למנוחיכי כי־יהוה גמל עליכי | 7 |
| A' | האמנתי כי אדבר | 10a |
| B' | מה־אשיב ליהוה כל־תגמולוהי עלי | 12 |

The four clauses function within the prosodic structure and mark the four sub-stanza's.

We may conclude that the text combines the syntactic structure with the prosodic one. In the syntactic structure, the 1.1-2/10.1-3 pair is the top-level and the 1.1/7.1 and 10.1/12 pairs function one level down. The top-level pair is strong but the syntactic connections in the other pairs are rather weak. Moreover, the strong 7.1/12 parallel has no syntactic function. In the prosodic structure, the four clauses function on the same level with a linear-parallel pattern: 1.7//10.12, A.B//A.B, in which both strong repetition clusters fully cooperate.

Clause 17.1 does not show the usual marks of continuity. The syntactic break is bridged by the 14/17.1 pair with its close syntax.

```
* נדרי ליהוה אשלם נגדה־נא לכל־עמו
לך־אזבח זבח תודה >
```

This pair looks like a pair adjacent clauses within a paragraph, but it functions on strophe level and is not even a pair.

```
כוס־ישועות אשא
ובשם יהוה אקרא
נדרי ליהוה אשלם נגדה־נא לכל־עמו
>
לך־אזבח זבח תודה
ובשם יהוה אקרא
נדרי ליהוה אשלם נגדה־נא לכל־עמו
```

The pair is part of a three to three parallel with [(waw-)x-YIQTOL]clauses, of which two clauses are repeated in full.

It is advisable to maintain the 14/17.1 pair and save the syntactic hierarchy, but it is good to known that something else is going on at the same time. The linear link is part of a strong repetition cluster, connecting two paragraphs in a paradigmatic way.

Strophe 15-16 is stuck in the middle between strophe 12-14 and 17-19. Clause 15 shows a new subject-participant (DEATH) and has no substantial link with the previous clause – the name Title is repeated, but it is in almost every clause in the context. The syntactic hierarchy requires a link, and it has to be between clauses 14 and 15, but, in fact, clause 15 has no mother clause at all.

Clause 3.1 shows a new subject-participant (DEATH) and has no substantial link with the previous clauses – participant ME is present, but he is in every clause up to now. Keeping the hierarchy up, one should associate the [QATAL]clause with [DATAL]clause 2.1, and connect the paragraph with its mother clause 1.2, because 2.1 is too low in the hierarchy, but, in fact, clause 3.1 has no mother clause at all.

Clause 5.1 shows a new subject-participant (YHWH) and a new clause-type, and has no substantial links with the previous clauses – participant YHWH is, of course, present in many clauses. We could trace back clause 5.1 to clause 1.2, having the same subject-participant, but that is all, and again the conclusion has to be that this clause has no mother clause at all.

⁷ See Psalm 116,7-9: Syntax and Versification, § In search of the mother clause.

See Psalm 116,12-14: Syntax and Versification, § Textsyntactic structure.

Conclusions

Our description of syntactic continuity and discontinuity in Psalm 116 may be of consequence for future analyses. One should expect most clauses to pair up with the previous clause by parallel or close, subordinate or sequential syntax – sometimes there are one or more intervening clauses. If they don't, the syntactic break may mark a thematic play within the paragraph, accompanied by paradigmatic devices. In most cases, the syntactic break will mark a paragraph boundary. Although most mother/daughter pairs can be argued for at interparagraph level, the syntactic hierarchy becomes thin, and strong paradigmatic devices may take over.

Inventory of paragraph parameters in Psalm 116

| clause | clause type | connection | discon. | | comdom | setpar | miscellanea |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|------------|-------------------|----------|--------|-----------------|
| 1.1 אהבתי | [QATAL] | | N | ME | M > ? | M | |
| 1.2 כי־ישמע יהוה את־קולי תחנוני | [¹⊐-YIQTOL-SUBJECT] | sub - כי | Y | YHWH3 | | MY | |
| 2.1 בי־המה אזנו לי | ['□-QATAL] | sub - כי | Y | Y3 | | MY | |
| 2.2 ובימי אקרא | [waw-SPEC-YIQTOL] | waw - seq | N | М | | M | |
| * | | | | | | | |
| 3.1 אפפוני חבלי־מות | [QATAL-SUBJECT] | | Γ | DEATH | | MD | |
| ומצרי שאול מצאוני מצרי שאול | [waw-SUBJECT-QATAL] | waw - par | Ω | DEATH | | MD | |
| שרה ויגון אמצא 3.3 | [COMPL-YIQTOL] | | N | М | | M(D) | REPETITIONS 3.2 |
| ובשם־יהוה אקרא בשם־יהוה אקרא | [waw-COMPL-YIQTOL] | waw - par | N | М | | MY | |
| נפשי 👃 ו אנה יהוה מלטה נפשי 👃 4.2 | [INTERJ-VOC, IMPERATIVE] | sub: dir.sp. | [DEIXIS] [| [Y2] | [M>Y] | [MY] | |
| * | | | | | | | |
| 5.1 ∟ חנון יהוה | [NOMPR-SUBJECT] | | Y | үнwн3 | | Y | |
| וצדיק 1.5.2 | [waw-NOMPR-ELLIPSIS] | waw - par | Y | Y3 | | Y | |
| נו ואלהינו מרחם ∟ ואלהינו | [waw-SUBJECT-PARTICIPLE] | waw - clo | Y | Y3 | | Y[U] | |
| שמר פתאים יהוה 6.1 | [PARTICIPLE-COMPL-SUBJECT] | clo | Y | Y3 | | Y[U] | |
| # רלותי (6.2 | [QATAL] | | N | М | | M | SEMANTICS 6.1 |
| ולי יהושיע 📙 📙 6.3 | [waw-COMPL-YIQTOL] | waw -seq | Y | Y3 | | MY | |
| * | | | | | | | |
| 7.1 שובי נפשי למנוחיכי | [IMPERATIVE, VOC,] | | DEIXIS N | M ^{SOUL} | M > M | M | |
| 7.2 כי־יהוה גמל עליכי | ['⊐-SUBJECT-QATAL] | sub - כי | Y | Y3 | | MY | |
| 8.1 ג כי חלצת נפשי ממות | ['⊐-QATAL] | sub - כי | Y | Y2 | M > Y | MY | |
| את־עיני מן־דמעה 8.2 | [ELLIPSIS] | par | Y | Y2 | <u>-</u> | MY | |
| 8.3 את־רגלי מדחי | [ELLIPSIS] | par | Y | Y2 | | MY | |
| 9 אתהלך לפני יהוה בארצות החיים | [COHORTATIVE (ZERO-YIQTOL)] | | N | М | M > ? | MY | par 7.1 |

Connection: sub = subordination; par = parallel; clo = close; seq = sequential; dir.sp. = direct speech; unm = unmarked

Disconnection: subject-participants, in full when (re)nominalized, shaded when remarkable

Communicative domain: speaker > address

Set of participants: abbreviated, U = us; secondary/inactive participants are bracketed

| clause | clause type | connection | discon. | | comdom | setpar | Miscellanea |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------|----------|--------|--------|-------------|
| | | | | | | | |
| 10.1 האמנתי | [QATAL] | | | M | M > ? | M | par 1.1 |
| 10.2 כי אדבר | ['⊐-YIQTOL] | sub - כי | | M | | M | |
| 10.3 אני עניתי מאד | [SUBJECT-QATAL] | sub: dir.sp. | | [ME] | | M | |
| 11.1 אני אמרתי בחפזי | [SUBJECT-QATAL] | par | | [ME] | | M | |
| 11.2 כל־האדם כזב | [SUBJECT-PARTICIPLE] | sub: dir.sp. | | [[ADAM]] | | [A] | |
| * | | | | | | | |
| 12 מה־אשיב ליהוה כל־תגמולוהי עלי | [מה] (Iotoly-מה | | QUESTION | M | | MY | |
| וועות אשא בוס־ישועות אשא בוס־ישועות | [COMPL-YIQTOL] | | | M | | M | |
| 13.2 ובשם יהוה אקרא | [waw-COMPL-YIQTOL] | waw - par | | M | | MY | |
| 14 נדרי ליהוה אשלם נגדה־נא״ | [COMPL-COMPL-YIQTOL] | clo | | M | | MY[U] | |
| * | | | | | | | |
| 15 יקר בעיני יהוה המותה ״ | [NOMPR-SUBJECT] | | | DEATH | | YD[U] | |
| 16.1 * אנה יהוה | [INTERJ-VOC] | | DEIXIS | | M > Y | Y | |
| 16.2 בי־אני עבדך | ["□-SUBJECT- NOMPR] | sub - כי | | M | | мү2 | |
| "16.3 אני־עבדך בן | [SUBJECT- NOMPR] | par | | M | | MY2[U] | |
| 16.4 פתחת למוסרי | [QATAL] | see below | | Y2 | | MY | see below |
| | | | | | | | |
| 17.1 לך־אזבח זבח תודה | [COMPL-YIQTOL] | | | M | | MY2 | par 13.1-14 |
| 17.2 ובשם יהוה אקרא | [waw-COMPL-YIQTOL] | waw - par | | M | M > ? | MY | |
| -18 נדרי ליהוה אשלם נגדה־נא ": + | [COMPL-COMPL-YIQTOL] | clo | | M | | MY[U] | |
| + בחצרות בית יהוה + | | | | | | Y | |
| + בתוככי ירושלם | | | | | M > U | [U2] | |

correction

| יקר בעיני יהוה המותה ״ | 15 | [NOMPR-SUBJECT] | | | DEATH | | YD[U] | |
|------------------------|------|---------------------|----------|--------|-------|-------|--------|--|
| ∗∟ אנה יהוה | 16.1 | [INTERJ-VOC] | | DEIXIS | | M > Y | Y | |
| בי־אני עבדך ∟ | 16.2 | [¹⊐-SUBJECT- NOMPR] | sub - כי | | M | | мү2 | |
| אני־עבדך בן־״ | 16.3 | [SUBJECT- NOMPR] | par | | M | | MY2[U] | |
| ג פתחת למוסרי | 16.4 | [QATAL] | unm-sub | | Y2 | | MY | |