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Observations on Syntax
and Meter in Lamentations

The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch, by Francis I. Andersen,[1] is an exceptionally significant step forward in Hebrew syntax. Andersen reaches important new conclusions concerning word order in verbless clauses, showing that varieties of word order are associated with differences in the semantic relation between subject and predicate, in the relation of a clause to other clauses, and so on. The study is commendably explicit and thorough; all the verbless clauses in the Pentateuch are studied and classified.

Andersen's monograph is therefore a good basis for comparative study of syntax. The present investigation is devoted to the book of Lamentations, a work which may claim interest because it is datable within rather narrow limits, in the view of most scholars, and because it is very widely acknowledged to be poetry and to exhibit a particular meter, labelled "Qinah meter" by Budde, in its first four chapters. In the first part of this paper, the verbless clauses in Lamentations are compared with those of the Pentateuch as classified by Andersen in his recent monograph. In the second part, the order of postverbal elements in verbal clauses are compared with the patterns of order in Genesis, as classified by Andersen in an unpublished work.[2] The intention is to find answers to these questions: Are there differences in the syntax of this poetic work as compared with a large body of mostly prose material? If the poetic text departs from the norm, does it do so in conformity with a particular metrical or rhythmic pattern?

Verbless Clauses in Lamentations

The present writer has attempted to follow Andersen's model as closely as possible in separating "verbless clauses" from other types. Sentences with quasi verbal elements such as *yēš* and *'ôd* have not been included.[3] In addition, some strings that are possibly verbless clauses have been omitted as being too dubious textually to permit analysis. These are 1: 12a (*lô* . . . *derek*); 2: 4ab (*niṣṣāb y'mînô*). 4: 13 is understood as joined to 4: 14; in any case, it is not a verbless clause, since it does not apparently contain any predication. In 3: 19 and 3: 26, certain emendations would yield verbless clauses, but other solutions to the textual problems might also be proposed; so these examples have not been included. In the following cases, where there is no textual problem, strings have been omitted as not constituting clauses, since they do not seem to contain a subject and predicate: 2: 15c (*k'lîlat yôpî māśôś l'kôl hā'āreṣ*); 3: 23 (*ḥadāšîm labb'qārîm*); 4: 15 (*ṭāmē'*).

Two related problems arise in poetic lines where parallelism is present. First, in parallelism, a verb may be expressed in the first colon and omitted from the second. The second colon is then formally "verbless," but is not so in sense, since the verbal predicate must be understood also in the second colon; or else the whole line is to be read as a single verbal clause of unusual structure. On this basis, 5: 2 (*bāttēnû l'nokrîm*) and 1: 20 (*babbayit kam-māwet*) have been omitted; the latter is also suspect textually. 5: 3 (*'im-môtēnû k'almānôt*) is problematic: should one supply a form of *hāyāh* as in the first colon? This example has been included as a verbless clause here. The second problem arises where a poetic line can be interpreted either as one verbless clause with a compound element or as two separate clauses, assuming ellipsis of some element or elements in the second. The three lines of this sort have all been interpreted here as containing two verbless clauses.

There are thirty-one verbless clauses in Lamentations. Almost all agree with the rules as stated by Andersen. The following exemplify his rule 1, that the order is S(ubject)-P(redicate) in clauses of identification, where both S and P are definite: 2: 15c; 2: 16c; 3: 1; 3: 24; 3: 63. In 3: 24 (*ḥelqi Yhwh*), however, it is difficult to be certain as to which is subject and which is predicate.

Rule 3, that the order is P-S in a clause of classification, where P is indefinite relative to S, is exemplified in 1: 22ca; 2: 13c; 3: 10 (twice); 3: 25 (twice); 4: 7b. Rule 5, that the order is S-P when the predicate is a participle, is exemplified in 1: 4 (four times); 1: 11 (twice). Five other verbless clauses in Lamentations are of the sort where P is a prepositional phrase, for which no rules as to normal order are framed by Andersen (see pp. 49–50 of his monograph): 1: 9a; 2: 9b; 3: 62; 5: 3; 5: 16.[4]

One example is clearly abnormal (though not unparalleled in Andersen's corpus), a case where a participial predicate precedes the subject: 1: 21a (*kî ne''nāḥāh 'ānî*). Possible explanations for such abnormal ordering are given by Andersen on page 48 of his book.

One other verbless clause calls for special comment: 1: 18 (*ṣaddîq hû' Yhwh*). This might be taken as a sentence of classification, with normal order (P-S): "He, Yahweh, is righteous." But if so, one must take *hû'* to be the subject, and *Yhwh* as in apposition to *hû'*. The only parallel for such an unusual apposition seems to be Ezek 33: 8, and it is neither exactly the same as the present case nor beyond question textually. An alternate analysis would be to take *ṣaddîq* as the subject, resumed by the pleonastic pronoun *hû'*. On this line, one would also have to assume that *ṣaddîq*, though without the article, is definite, since it is almost equally unparalleled for an indefinite subject to be resumed by a pleonastic pronoun.[5] The line would mean: "The righteous one [in this issue] is Yahweh, because I [the other party] defied his command." Perhaps Lamentations at this point preserves older poetic practice, in which the definite article is seldom used; note that *ṣaddîq* is the first word in a stanza that must begin with *ṣādê*. A rather close parallel is Is 9: 14: *zāqēn ûn'śû' pānîm hû' hārô'š w'nābî' môreh šeqer hû' hazzānāb,* "[The] elder and [the] honored man is the head / And [the] prophet who teaches falsehood is the tail." If this latter analysis of Lam 1: 18 is correct, the clause fits Andersen's rule 2, according to which a pleonastic pronoun comes before the predicate in a clause of identification.

To sum up, Andersen's description proves to fit word order in the verbless clauses of Lamentations very well. There is no evidence that the author or authors practiced any greater freedom than did the writers of the Pentateuch. Though the body of clauses for comparison is small, it does contain examples of all the principal rules in Andersen's study.

The Order of Sentence Elements Following the Verb in Lamentations

In many verbal sentences in Hebrew, two or more sentence elements follow the verb. These may be an independent pronoun serving as subject, a nominal subject, a nominal direct object, and so on. In a portion of his unpublished work *Studies in Hebrew Syntax*, Andersen has tabulated the order of these sentence elements relative to each other, and gives a matrix showing the order normally followed.[6] Only a small percentage of sentences depart from this normal order. It is to be hoped that Andersen will soon publish a study of the Hebrew verbal sentence; in advance of that, the present writer will cite certain of the data from Andersen's work for comparative

purposes, since there is no similar body of tabulated data available and since, as the reader will readily see, the evidence cited is factual and not dependent on any particular theory as to Hebrew syntax.

In Genesis, where a verb is followed by both a nominal subject (NSubj) and a prepositional phrase modifying the verb (PrPh), the nominal subject precedes. This is true in 115 of the 122 examples in the book. Where a verb is followed by a nominal direct object (DObj) and a prepositional phrase, the direct object precedes. The pattern is followed in ninety-two of 103 sentences in Genesis.

In Lamentations there are thirty-two verbal sentences with a nominal subject and a prepositional phrase following the verb. In twenty-one of these, the order is the one normally found in Genesis: V-NSubj-PrPh.[7] In eleven, the order is the opposite: V-PrPh-NSubj.[8] Though several of the sentences are rather difficult and hence uncertain, the general picture is clear: a much higher proportion of sentences—about one-third of the total —show abnormal order than is true in Genesis.

A similar picture is presented in the second case. There are twenty-six verbal sentences in Lamentations in which both a nominal direct object and a prepositional phrase follow the verb. In fifteen cases, the order is that normally found in Genesis: V-DObj-PrPh.[9] In eleven cases, the abnormal order occurs: V-PrPh-DObj.[10] Though the order of other sorts of postverbal elements might also be tabulated, the number of examples in Lamentations seems too small to permit any conclusions. The above two types are the most common, and occur sufficiently often to show a marked contrast to the situation in Genesis.

Andersen's tabulation for Genesis showed that verbal sentences with more than two postverbal sentence elements follow the same pattern as those with two, though there was a somewhat higher proportion of sentences with abnormal order (345 of 409 exhibited normal patterns). In Lamentations, only seven of twenty-four sentences of this sort show "normal" order, while seventeen are abnormal.[11] In Genesis, the nominal subject ordinarily precedes the nominal direct object, and the latter precedes any adverbial prepositional phrase which is present. Most of the sentences from Lamentations which are classified here as abnormal show some departure from this pattern.

One hypothesis which suggests itself almost inevitably is that these syntactic abnormalities in Lamentations have to do with meter. The whole book is poetry, and ever since K. Budde's "Das hebräische Klagelied" (1882),[12] most scholars have recognized that the dominant metrical form in Lamentations chapters 1–4 is a line in which the second of two parallel cola is shorter than the first, whether one prefers to call this a Qinah verse,

a "fiver" (Fünfer),[13] or a "brachycatalectic" line of some sort.[14] Though not all the lines are of this type, many are. Even though the norms of this kind of verse have not been defined with any great precision, it may be possible to determine whether or not some clear relation between meter and syntax exists. Specifically, we may ask whether the poet adopts abnormal order only or primarily when the meter demands it—that is, to achieve the unbalanced line characteristic of chapters 1–4.

This seems not to be so. Of the eleven cases of the abnormal order V-PrPh-NSubj, five[15] constitute only a single poetic colon, not a whole line, and therefore the Qinah meter seems unaffected even if the elements are reversed. Thus, for example, 2: 9a, *ṭābᵉʿû bāʾāreṣ šᵉʿāreyhā* seems to work just as well if we make it **ṭābᵉʿû šᵉʿāreyhā bāʾāreṣ*. In four other examples (1: 6a; 2: 20c; 2: 22b; 3: 31), which cover a whole poetic line, metrical relations do not seem to be disturbed if we change to normal prose order, thus 2: 20c: *ʾim yēhārēg bᵉmiqdaš ʾᵃdōnāy kōhēn wᵉnābîʾ* goes well as **ʾim yēhārēg kōhēn wᵉnābîʾ bᵉmiqdaš ʾᵃdōnāy*. Only in two cases of eleven would the normal prose order seem difficult from the standpoint of Qinah meter: 1: 1b and 1: 16b.

Similarly, eight of the eleven cases of the unusual order V-PrPh-DObj would seem metrically acceptable if the normal prose order were restored. Five of them comprise only a single colon (2: 4c; 2: 6a [textually very uncertain]; 3: 16; 3: 29; 3: 53), and the others (2: 5c; 2: 6c; 2: 7b) would still give a Qinah verse if the postverbal elements were transposed. Only 2: 2b; 3: 13; and perhaps 2: 3a seem rather difficult metrically if transposed.[16]

It is of course possible that greater refinement of our metrical conceptions would show a correlation between metrical form and the order of postverbal sentence elements, but the evidence gathered here does not show any apparent relation. Though we must conclude that the author or authors were freer in this aspect of syntax than were the writers of Genesis, we cannot readily explain their practice as related to meter. One factor can be singled out, however, as involved in a good many cases of abnormal ordering. This is the tendency, already noted by Andersen with reference to Genesis,[17] to put markedly long elements last, regardless of syntactic function. Compound elements also tend to stand last.

Of the twenty-two examples of abnormal order cited above, the following nine sentences illustrate this tendency: 1: 1b; 1: 16b; 2: 2b; 2: 3a; 2: 5c; 2: 6c; 2: 7b; 2: 20c; 3: 13. A preference for putting long or compound postverbal elements last in the sentence is especially noticeable in sentences with three or more postverbal elements. Note, for instance, 2: 1b: *hišlîk miššāmayim ʾereṣ tipʾeret yiśrāʾēl*, where the long direct object is put last. Compare 2: 6b: *šikkaḥ Yhwh bᵉṣiyyôn môʿēd wᵉšabbāt*. The compound

direct object is last, whereas in normal prose order the prepositional phrase *beṣiyyôn* would be last. In a similar way, this tendency is observable in 2: 1a; 2: 3b; 2: 10c; 2: 15a; 2: 16a; 2: 18b; 2: 19b; 2: 21a; 3: 44; 3: 46; 3: 55; 4: 10b. Though judgment in this sort of question is inevitably somewhat subjective, it does seem that this type of patterning emphasizes the caesura in these lines, and also yields a second colon which is sufficiently long to fit the common metrical pattern of the poems. This seems especially clear in the four cases of V-PrPh-DObj-NSubj (2: 10c; 2: 15a; 2: 16a; 3: 46), where placing the subject last strongly emphasizes the division of the line into cola.

Notes

[1] *JBL* Monograph Series, Vol. XIV (New York and Nashville, 1970).

[2] "Studies in Hebrew Syntax," unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1960. I am grateful to Professor Andersen for permitting me to make reference to this work.

[3] Andersen, *Hebrew Verbless Clause*, p. 23, para. 10, does not include *'ayyēh*, "where?" in the list of quasi verbals, or in the list of interrogatives he gives elsewhere. On the basis of form, it presumably belongs with the quasi verbals; hence Lam 2: 12ab is not included here.

[4] The proper classification of *'ôy*, "Woe!" is uncertain to me. On the basis of Prov 23: 29, where it is clearly a nominal, I have understood it to be the noun subject of a verbless clause in 5: 16.

[5] In Prov 10: 18 and 28: 24, however, a formally indefinite subject is resumed by *hû'*.

[6] See *Studies in Hebrew Syntax*, Table V, pp. 308–11.

[7] 1: 3a; 1: 5a; 1: 6b; 1: 10a; 1: 12c; 1: 17a; 1: 20b; 1: 22a; 2: 5a; 3: 18; 3: 39; 3: 48; 3: 50; 3: 54; 4: 1b; 4: 6a; 4: 7a; 4: 8b; 4: 9a; 4: 14a; 4: 19a.

[8] 1: 1b; 1: 6a; 1: 16b; 2: 9a; 2: 11a; 2: 20c; 2: 22b; 3: 17; 3: 31; 4: 8a; 5: 15.

[9] 1: 13a; 2: 1c; 2: 4a; 2: 8b; 2: 9c; 2: 10c; 2: 15b; 3: 1; 3: 9; 3: 27; 3: 56; 4: 11b; 4: 18a; 5: 9; 5: 21.

[10] 2: 2b; 2: 3a; 2: 4c; 2: 5c; 2: 6a; 2: 6c; 2: 7b; 3: 13; 3: 16; 3: 29; 3: 53.

[11] Normal: 1: 11b; 1: 14c; 1: 15b; 1: 17c; 2: 19c; 3: 41; 4: 4a. Abnormal: 1: 15a; 2: 1a; 2: 1b; 2: 3b; 2: 6b; 2: 10c; 2: 15a; 2: 16a; 2: 18b; 2: 19b; 2: 21a; 2: 22a; 3: 44; 3: 46; 3: 52; 4: 10b; 4: 17a.

[12] *ZAW* 2, 1–52.

[13] E. Sievers' term, *Metrische Studien I: Studien zur hebräischen Metrik*, Erster Teil (Leipzig, 1901), pp. 116, 120–23.

[14] So already J. Ley, *Grundzüge des Rhythmus, des Vers- und Strophenbaues in der hebräischen Poesie* (Halle, 1875), pp. 51–53. He also used the term "elegiac pentameter." Similarly, G. Hölscher, "Elemente arabischer, syrischer und hebräischer Metrik," *BZAW* 34 (1920), 98–101; and S. Mowinckel, "Zum Problem der hebräischen Metrik," *Festschrift für Alfred Bertholet* (Tübingen, 1950), pp. 391–93.

[15] 2: 9a; 2: 11a; 3: 17 (textually uncertain); 4: 8a; 5: 15.

[16] Sentences with normal order include some that apparently must have this order to fit the meter—e.g., 1: 3a,—and (more commonly) some that could just as well have had the reverse order—e.g., 3: 18.

[17] *Studies in Hebrew Syntax*, pp. 373–79; 400–401.