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**THE STRUCTURAL AND NUMERICAL PERFECTION OF JOB 31**

Thesis: the long speech by Job which finishes the debate proper is strictly speaking ‘an account of my steps’. The poet pays tribute to his hero with iconic perfection: he shapes a chain of oaths of clearance and their variations through prosodic precision at various textual levels. Since there are four tricola in the speech instead of three, the 40 verses contain 84 rather than 83 cola. The total number of syllables in the unchanged original is 672. This yields an average of exactly 8, the central norm figure for the average number of syllables per colon in classical Hebrew poetry. The significance of the number 672 becomes clear when we factorise it: 7 x 8 x 12. The verses are grouped into seven stanzas and sixteen strophes (eight L and eight S).

In order to illustrate and confirm this thesis, two operations are necessary: correctly demarcating the strophes and stanzas, and a full and reasoned count of the number of pre-Masoretic syllables. I will start with a search for the higher textual units, but in anticipation of the result I offer the reader below an overview of the outcome in a diagram of the main textual levels. Here, as elsewhere, the capitals L (for Long) and S (for Short) indicate when a strophe contains three full verses or two. The stanzas are indicated by Roman numerals:

MT	section A		section B			section C	
	vv.1-12		vv.13-28			vv.29-40	
stanza	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
strophe #	1 + 2	3 + 4 + 5	6 + 7	8 + 9	10+11	12+13+14	15+16
L/S	L - L	S - S - S	L - L	S - L	S - L	S - S - S	L - L
verses	3 + 3	2 + 2 + 2	3 + 3	2 + 3	2 + 3	2 + 2 + 2	3 + 3
cola	6 + 6	5 + 4 + 5!	6 + 6	4 + 6	4 + 6	4 + 4 + 5	7 + 6

With its 32 half verses the central section is strictly bicolic; it contains 16 verses and is framed by sections A and C, containing 12 verses and 26 cola each. The odd numbers in the row with the cola numbers indicate the position of the tricola. The new tricolon will be found in the fifth strophe, not coincidentally towards the end of the first section.<sup>1</sup>

The poet wastes no time, so that Job in his very first colon points to the greatest pitfall in the relationships between the two sexes: debauchery and licentiousness (*zimmah*). As he is going to devote the long stanza II (three strophes) to this topic, his first verse is an anticipation. By means of a ‘covenant with my eyes’ Job has escaped the great and permanent danger of sexual temptation. The subject preys on his mind, because his second colon starts with *umah*, indicating an emotionally charged phrase: ‘How, then, should I look upon a maiden?’<sup>2</sup> Next, two verses follow which exhibit an important characteristic of strophe 1: their four clauses, which coincide with the cola, are all nominal. This is a big contrast with

the six cola of strophe 2, which are all verbal clauses. The second characteristic of the opening strophe is the introduction of a new character in every verse: in v.1 this is the hero himself, in v.2 it is God, and in v.3 the evildoers appear. The question Job asks in v.2 he immediately answers himself in v.3: the portion allotted to the unrighteous consists of calamity.<sup>3</sup> After his personal remarks in v.1, Job has now started, for the first and the last time in this chapter, to speak in general terms. This is the third characteristic of strophe 1, which again marks a great contrast with strophe 2.

In the second strophe (vv.4-6) the focus is exclusively on the relationship between God and his target Job. Verse 4 belongs to what follows, if only because the word pair 'my ways'/'my steps' seamlessly links up with 'I have walked'/'my foot' in v.5. Verse 5 is a first-person line in which Job denies that he has erred.<sup>4</sup> It is surrounded by four cola/clauses in which God is always the subject, and Job the object. Just as in v.5, all verbs are Qal imperfect forms. Not only do they form two word pairs, 'see/count' and 'weigh/recognise', but their meaning also reflects an ab-b'a' pattern. Counting and weighing (*spr* and *shql*) denote objective measuring, whereas seeing and recognizing (*r'h* and *yd'* 'to know') are about correct evaluation, and according to Job should result in the recognition of his integrity. Verse 6 is thus a challenge directed at God.<sup>5</sup> Because Job knows what the outcome will be -- in spite of his suffering, he is still extremely self-assured -- he demands the impartiality of objective weighing. The 'scales of righteousness' have a double meaning. The qualification *tsedeq* not only means that the scales are true, in compliance with the Torah rule, but also that the scales thus constitute the instrument which will inescapably and unambiguously reveal Job's own *tsedeq*.

Strophes 1 and 2 together form stanza I. Their relationship is based on formal and substantial characteristics. The speaker says 'Whereas my eyes have never stooped to spying and leering, God does nothing but spy on me in order to catch me committing sins'. This formidable contrast need not surprise the reader who remembers the bitter criticism of God's excessive attention, already voiced by Job in ch.10.<sup>6</sup> This disconcerting opposition is supported at the phonetic level. In order to keep the strophes together the poet has drawn the line '*al – mimma'al – 'awwal – po'ale 'awen – 'al*, words which all either directly refer to a negative concept or imply one; on an even higher level of virtuosity there is the circumstance that the pivotal lines (v.2 as axis of the first strophe, v.5 of the second) end on the alliterations *mim-meromim* and *mirma*. If we pursue this connection, we find it turns out badly for God: can he still distinguish clearly the difference between deceit and integrity from his elevated position? With dubious precision 'he counts all my steps, does he not?' the hero says. These two words, *ts'e'aday yispor*, are crucial to the design of the poem. Towards the end they are mirrored, and positioned in such a way that symmetry has been created as a supporting construction on four levels of the text. In v.37a we find *mispar ts'e'aday*. These words and their mirror image in v.4b constitute a chiasm which here represents a contrast (level a: word order). Their positions are, however, equally well calculated on the levels of cola, verses and strophes, as they occur in the fourth verses from the beginning and the end, in the eighth colon, and also occupy symmetrical positions in the second and 15th strophes: they are on the outside of these L-strophes.

This correspondence alone manages to foil a text transposition which has been popular with a fair number of interpreters.<sup>7</sup> The rustic language of strophe 16 was considered not really elevated enough to serve as a conclusion to such an ambitious text, so that vv.38-40 were moved forward, often to a position just behind v.34, but in any case preceding the passage

about the document proving Job's innocence (vv.35-37, my strophe 15). From now on, this kind of surgery should be taboo.<sup>8</sup>

The connection between vv. 4b and 37a is the relationship between the penultimate and the first-but-one strophe. In strophe 2 Job finds that God apparently sees fit to 'number all my steps', although Job has nothing to hide and has complete trust in the result of a fair weighing: his total innocence. By reversing the two sensitive words Job makes clear that he is not happy to have God constantly hard on his heels. So, he pre-emptively offers God's counting and weighing by offering his own full (ac)count (*mispar*) of his life, and what is more, in a binding, written form, a *sefer* (v.35c). He proudly declares that such a document deserves a place on his shoulders, and that to him it has the same value as a crown or a laurel wreath. 'Like a prince [*nagid* -- there may even be sacral connotations] I will approach Him, and offer him the full report (*mispar*) / present Him with the account, 'aggidenu.'<sup>9</sup>

The oaths of clearance, which are so characteristic of Job 31, are phrased all four times as official self-denunciations; they name a crime in the conditional clause, and the appropriate punishment in the main clause. This happens twice in quick succession in vv.7-10, with each of the two negative oaths coinciding with a strophe (units 3 + 4). Strophe 5 adds a legal and ethical-religious evaluation in vv.11-12, thus rounding off both stanza II and section A.

Because of the phrases 'my step has turned aside from the way' and 'any spot [which] has cleaved to my hands', v. 7 seems a bit nebulous, but appearances are deceptive. Through the key words 'walk', 'my eyes', 'my feet' (*'asshuray*) and 'my course' (*drk*), unit 3 (the first S-strophe) is closely linked to v.4, and by employing a considerable number of physical terms elaborates further on the problem posed in v.1. 'My heart has gone (*hlk*, cf. v.5) after my eyes', v.7b even offers as a theoretical possibility. This echo of v.1a, the continued use of physical terms, and the bad example of David in 2 Samuel 11 make us realise that in fact the speaker is referring to the subject of sexual temptation, and that the 'sow' and 'sprout' of v.8 should already be interpreted in a sexual sense.

Verse 9 immediately takes away the last traces of doubt on this score. 'Looking attentively' has now become 'lying in wait' (*'rb*), and the 'heart has been enticed' (*pth*, a word play which takes us to the neighbour's door, *ptch*). What is more, the strophes are kept together by a threefold 'other': the person whose sexual satisfaction is the punishment for the errant husband.

Another repetition at the end of v.12 ensures that vv.11-12, as commentary and as strophe 5, belong to the two self-denunciations in vv.7f. and 9f. The verb *shrsh*, which appears in the Pual as the last word of strophe 3, has now in a brilliant variation become a Piel, again as the concluding word of a strophe; this is strophe 5, at the same time the end of stanza II and section A. In both cases, the verb has a privative meaning, 'to root out'. This repetition is supported in the A-colon, where both times (i.e. in vv.8a and 12a) the verb 'to eat' appears.

We have now reached the point where a correction is required which will give the poem 84 instead of 83 cola. Until now, v.12a has always been translated as the half verse: 'It is a fire burning down to Abaddon,' in unquestioning acceptance of tradition. This rendering, however, obscures the original two clauses: one nominal, one verbal. The first three words = syllables of v.12 deserve a position as the C-colon of v.11, which would then read as follows:

*Ki hi' zimma* / *w<sup>e</sup>hu' 'awon p<sup>e</sup>lili* / *ki hi' 'esh*

Surely, this is debauchery / it is a criminal offence / surely, this is a fire.

This arrangement yields a balanced tricolon consisting of three very short nominal clauses. 'They show the tight structure and poise of three personal pronouns, *hi' – hu' – hi'*, the symmetry of two feminine singular predicates framing the long masculine form indicating the judges, the regularity of 3 + 3 + 3 words, and the balance of two long i-vowels in each colon.<sup>10</sup>

Restoring v.11 as a tricolon is not only a prosodic ploy; it has syntactic and semantic consequences as well. 'Fire' is still a metaphor, and the chiasm *hi' zimmah – 'esh hi'* demonstrates that the image refers to the bad sin of *zimmah*. However, although v.12 still has a feminine singular verb, it no longer contains fire; the subject has changed. The power that 'consumes unto destruction' (Abaddon, which in view of 28:22a is still a figure of mythical proportions) is no longer a nice continuation of the fire metaphor! The subject of both v.12a and v.12b is now literally sexual transgression, *zimmah*. In this way, the speaker reveals that he is even more serious than when he uses 'consume' in a figurative sense. It is licentiousness which really destroys man utterly.

Stanza II, the first stanza to contain three strophes, ends starkly not only because its final words denote destruction and uprooting, but also because of the judgement about the 'offence relating to judges'. The full weight of this term becomes clear when we meet it again in v.28, again as the conclusion of a stanza (the fifth) and at the same time closing the long middle section B. In v.28, Job also explains another implication of the term: the denial of the only true God. There is hardly anything worse than that in the world of the hero, his friends, and the poet...

The strategic placement of the grave term 'a criminal offence' is only one of the devices used to mark off section B as the broad centre. Here we have three stanzas of two strophes each. Strophes 6 and 7 (vv.13-15 and 16-18) are both long and form a pair (i.e. stanza III) in two ways. First, they clearly open in a parallel way, with '*im 'em'as* in v.13a and '*im 'emna*' in v.16a, after which the speaker clearly states that he has always been concerned about the interests of the weakest members of society. What is even more striking, however, is Job's use of vocabulary referring to womb, youth and parents to underscore his argument. This occurs in verses 15 and 18, so that the endings of the strophes also demonstrate a strong parallelism (on strophe level).

In strophe 6, Job shows himself concerned about manservant and maid.<sup>11</sup> In v.14 God is present, as a higher authority demanding an account of one's actions, and in v.15 Job tells us the overwhelming reason why he cannot neglect slaves: they, too, originate from the womb and have been fashioned there by the Creator. This is his revolutionary message of fundamental equality. In strophe 7 Job demonstrates his care of widows and orphans. In vv.7a and 9a, the humble '*im* was undoubtedly a conditional conjunction because it was dependent on formal oaths. Here, in vv.13a and 16a, we encounter two very different uses of this amazingly flexible particle. It may be translated as a negation (because of the negative oath), or it may reflect its function as an interrogative. The two options are very close together in this case; the difference between 'Did I deny the poor their needs?' and the negative 'I certainly did not neglect the poor their needs' is minimal. The same applies further down, to vv.19, 24, 26, 29 and 33.<sup>12</sup>

Stanza IV (vv.19-23) consists of a short and a long strophe, both containing '*im* as strophe marker. The subjects here are the naked man who was clothed, and the orphan whose weakness has never been abused by Job 'in the gate'. Physical terms provide the balance

between both units: 'loins' and 'fleece of sheep' are varied by 'my shoulder' and 'my arm'.<sup>13</sup> Strophe 9 is weighted down, however, by v.23, which provides a religious ground for Job's correct behaviour and uses words (El and 'ed) that clearly refer back to the first strophe. Job dreads the fate of the unrighteous.

Stanza V also consists of a short and a long strophe, vv.24f. and 26-28 (= strophes 11 + 12). The mention of the deity in v.23 was a preparation for Job's discussion here of two forms of worship: first that of Mammon, then that of the most powerful celestial bodies. In an exact parallel with the ending of stanza IV, the second strophe is here also weighted down by an extra verse, v.28, and again God appears as a weighing judge. The reverse side of worshipping the sun is denying the true God, which is equal to 'a criminal offence'. The phrase which concluded section A here concludes section B, as well as its own strophe and stanza.

Surveying the broad centre I notice that there is one aspect which provides a good balance between its three stanzas. In each of the three parts God is expressly introduced as the decisive criterion or authority: in v.14, the axis of strophe 6, in v.23, which concludes stanza IV and links the centre of the poem to the opening, and here in v.28b, which repeats *mimma'al* from v.2a and places God directly opposite the Abaddon of v.12a.

There is a second link between the end of section B and stanza II. In v.27 we again read about temptation ('my heart has been secretly enticed'), followed by 'hand' and 'mouth'. Both the idea of 'secretly' and the choice of *wyft lby* refer back to strophe 4, v.9a in the centre of stanza II. This should make us pause to think. The kiss in v.27b (probably a cultic or ritual gesture) adds an erotic undercurrent to the centre of strophe 11, which is confirmed by the correspondence with strophe 2. Idolatry equals sexual licentiousness -- not an unusual thought in the Hebrew Bible.

From the middle of the central section, i.e. starting from stanza IV (itself the central unit of seven), an alternating pattern originates which takes us into the third section:

<i>'im 'er'eh</i>	opens IV and strophe 8
<i>'im 'esmach + mats<sup>e</sup>'a</i>	in V, strophe 10
<i>'im 'er'eh</i>	in V, opens strophe 11
<i>'im 'esmach + m<sup>e</sup>tsa'o</i>	opens VI and strophe 12

The man who has made a covenant with his eyes sharply condemns both this type of seeing and certain forms of pleasure -- materialism and gloating.

Arriving at section C (vv.29-40) we first encounter stanza VI, which consists of three S-strophes only, vv.29f, 31f and 33f = strophes 12, 13 and 14. Thus, stanza VI is the exact counterpart of stanza II in the overall structure.

Verse 21 already showed us Job in relation to the community, when he refused to harm the orphan by manipulating the men in the gate. Now we find that stanza VI is exclusively devoted to his contact with the community. Strophes 12 and 13 derive both their correspondence and their differences from the contrast between friend and enemy, and strophe 14 is about the confrontation with 'the masses'. All three units again contain the versatile *'im* as strophe marker; it can be translated either by a negation or by an interrogative particle.

In strophe 12 Job distances himself from any pleasure in his enemies' misfortune, and in strophe 13 he notes that he has never failed in his duties as a host.<sup>14</sup> In this way, the door he

never wanted to spy on (*ptch*, v.9 in stanza II) is placed opposite the door in stanza VI which he always kept open for the traveller (dlt + *ptch* in v.32b). The last sentence of the stanza increases the effect by showing that Job would not dare to leave his own door (again *petach*, v.34c!) for shame and guilt, 'if (v.33) I would hide my transgression like Adam, bury my wrongdoing in my bosom.'<sup>15</sup>

The root *ptch* provides not only the last word of strophe 13, but also that of strophe 14. Thus, it functions as a strophic epiphora, and clarifies the correspondence between the two units as much as their contrast. The open-door policy on the part of the good host is sharply opposed to the self-inflicted isolation, because of guilt and shame, on the part of the person who shuts himself off from the others. As a stylistic device, this epiphora is the counterpart of the root *shrsh* that was the last word of strophes 3 and 5. Thus, we have found another factor contributing to the balance between stanzas II and VI.

The speaker is now ready to pronounce a last, deeply felt but unfulfillable wish (strophe 15, = vv.35-37), and his last formal self-denunciation (strophe 16, = vv.38-40). These two units each have three verses and as a pair of L-strophes splendidly balance the pair in stanza I. The close correspondence had already been established by way of the precise placement and reversal of *spr* and 'my steps'.

In section A, the two tricola roughly functioned as inclusion of stanza II; these were verses 7 and 11. The other two tricola are found in a corresponding position in the last part of Job's speech. These are verses 34 and 35, which means that they are adjacent, but also that they have been placed on either side of a stanza boundary: v.34 closes VI, v.35 opens VII.

Job exchanges the mutilated shoulder (which according to v.22c would have been his punishment if ...), for the proud shoulder on which he would like to carry the evidence of his complete innocence. Unfortunately, this strophe is also in the counterfactual mode. This is especially significant and painful since Job has already proved himself to be a master of counterfactual modulations in his first speech, the passionate complaint in ch.3 which precedes the actual debate.<sup>16</sup> Almost 30 chapters further on the hero has hardly progressed at all, because God does not answer, i.e. cannot be persuaded to account for His own behaviour. The reverse side of this uncomfortable truth, however, is that after almost 30 chapters Job has not lost one jot of his conviction that he is innocent. God's attorney general, called *satan* in ch.1, is going to suffer an overwhelming defeat. God had placed a bet: Job cannot be crushed. The power of the simple syllable '*im*' is in reverse proportion to the length of the word. Job concludes his long speech with a strophe that for the last time coincides with a formal self-denunciation, and by virtue of its three verses is an L-strophe. Being a gentleman-farmer, he switches his attention to the soil beneath his feet, and imagines the ground (the '*adama*' from which the '*adam*' was taken and which, according to Genesis 3, he should till and preserve) calling out for justice to be done, as it did in Genesis 4 after Cain's capital crime. This would happen if Job had profited from the land or its owner without payment -- a basic transgression in an agrarian society. The main clause containing the punishment, the very last verse, is full of alliterations, which it shares with v.39 (listen to the barrage of *chets* and *taws*), and graphically talks of thorns and stinkweed.

How many sins has Job mentioned in his formidable enumeration? Habel offers an excellent list on p.429 of his commentary (1985) and counts eleven, but he stops at vv.34; this is a pity, because the fourth oath of clearance really should be included, also because it performs a function which is always important from a poetical point of view: providing closure for the literary unit. Hence, there are twelve sins, which neatly corresponds to the twelve strophes

marked by the flexible and influential particle 'im. What is more, the twelve sins are exactly covered by the units starting with 'im.<sup>17</sup> In stanzas II through V the particle occurs twice.<sup>18</sup> Stanza VI opens all of its three strophes with the conjunction/interrogative particle/negation, and finally there is the last strophe in VII which archetypically returns to earth.<sup>19</sup>

Is it really a coincidence that the total number of sins and strophic units starting with 'im should be the sacred number twelve? It is now time to consider the numerical dimension. Job has interpreted God as the great counter who monitors all his ways, and has decided to preempt the outcome by first offering his own complete account (*mispar*: count and account) of his steps. Does this mean that there is a connection between the choice of *spr*, which as we have seen has twice been placed strategically in the eighth half verse from the boundary, and the numerical perfection of the poem?

Below I present the concrete figures for the poem. My thesis regarding the numerical precision of Job's final speech can only become transparent and verifiable for the reader if I follow the hero's example and present the results of my count in full. I have counted the original, i.e. pre-Masoretic syllables, according to a method which takes into account the historical development of the Hebrew language and the phonetic shifts which occurred within it. This procedure is derived from the work of David Noel Freedman, but has been fine-tuned further by myself. See for a full account of the technique the introductory chapter of my *Major Poems*, vol. II.<sup>20</sup>

I have used the same notation for the figures of Job 31 as in *Major Poems*. The Hebrew text is in impeccable condition, so that I have not had to change one syllable.<sup>21</sup>

Job 31	L	L	S+	S	S+	L	L	S	L
	46	45	42	33	30	52	52	35	50
	S	L	S	S	S+	L+	L		
	32	42	35	32	41	57	48		

strophe	verse			
1	1	2.3.3 / 2.3.1.3	8 + 9 = 17	<b>46</b>
	2	2.1.2.2 / 3.2.4	7 + 9 = 16	
	3	2.1.3 / 2.4.1	6 + 7 = 13	
2	4	2.1.2.3 / 2.3.2	8 + 7 = 15	<b>45</b>
	5	1.3.1.1 / 2.1.2.2	6 + 7 = 13	
	6	4.4.1 / 3.2.3	9 + 8 = 17	
3	7	1.2.3.2.2/3.2.2.2/4.2.1	10+9+7 = 26	<b>42</b>
	8	3.3.2 / 4.4	8 + 8 = 16	
4	9	1.2.2.1.2 / 2.1.2.3	8 + 8 = 16	<b>33</b>
	10	2.3.2 / 4.3.3	7+10 = 17	
5	11ab12a	1.1.2 / 2.2.3 / 1.1.1	4+7+3 = 14	<b>30</b>
	12bc	1.3.2 / 3.4.3	6+10 = 16	
6	13	1.2.2.2 / 4.3.3	7+10 = 17	<b>52</b>
	14	2.2.1.2.1 / 2.2.14	8 + 9 = 17	
	15	2.2.3.3 / 4.2.2	10+8 = 18	
7	16	1.2.2.2 / 3.3.3	7 + 9 = 16	<b>52</b>
	17	3.2.3 / 2.2.2.3	8 + 9 = 17	
	18	1.4.4.2 / 3.2.3	11+8 = 19	
8	19	1.2.2.3.2 / 2.2.3	10+7 = 17	<b>35</b>
	20	1.1.4.3 / 3.3.3	9 + 9 = 18	
9	21	1.4.1.2.2 / 1.2.2.3	10+8 = 18	<b>50</b>
	22	3.3.2 / 4.3.3	8+10 = 18	
	23	1.1.2.1.1 / 5.1.2	6 + 8 = 14	
10	24	1.2.2.2 / 3.3.3	7 + 9 = 16	<b>32</b>
	25	1.2.1.1.2 / 2.2.3.2	7 + 9 = 16	
11	26	1.2.1.1.2 / 3.2.2	7 + 7 = 14	<b>42</b>
	27	2.2.2 / 3.2.2	6 + 7 = 13	
	28	1.1.2.3 / 1.3.2.2	7 + 8 = 15	

12	29	1.2.2.3 / 5.1.3.1	8+10 = 18	
	30	2.3.3.2 / 2.3.2	10+7 = 17	<b>35</b>
13	31	1.1.3.2.2 / 1.2.4.1.2	9+10 = 19	
	32	2.1.2.1 / 3.2.2	6 + 7 = 13	<b>32</b>
14	33	1.3.3.3 / 2.3.3	10+8 = 18	
	34	1.2.2.2/ 2.3.4 /3.1.2.1	7+9+7 = 23	<b>41</b>
15	35	1.2.1.2.1/1.2.2.3/2.2.1.2	7+8+7 = 22	
	36	1.1.1.2.4 / 4.3.1	9 + 8 = 17	<b>57</b>
	37	2.3.4 / 2.2.5	9 + 9 = 18	
16	38	1.2.3.2 / 2.4.3	8 + 9 = 17	
	39	1.2.3.2.1 / 2.4.3	9 + 9 = 18	<b>48</b>
	40	1.2.2.1 / 2.3.2	6 + 7 = 13	

i.e. 672 syllables in 84 cola; average 8.00

These figures require the following comments:

The colometric structure of the poem is straightforward. That vv. 7, 34 and 35 are tricola is generally recognised; the remaining verses are printed as bicola in the approximately 30 commentaries and translations in five languages I have consulted. This usually results in a total of 83, sometimes 82 cola, since everybody follows the Masoretic arrangement of the words at the boundary between vv. 11 and 12.

What can we learn from this avalanche of figures? Columns 3-5 of the table are the most relevant, as they give the syllable totals for cola, verses and strophes. The overall picture is fairly serene; the vast majority of cola contain between 6 and 10 syllables, with 74 of the 84 even in the range of 7-10 syllables. Most verses have 16-19 syllables.

Section B shows the greatest regularity. Strophe 6 is noticeable because of the flat 17-17-18 series for the verses. The totals for nearby strophes 7 and 9 are hardly different. Adding these figures yields 50 + 52 + 52 syllables for strophes 9 + 6 + 7, = 154 in all, which is one point more than 9 x 17. This observation may be expanded: the total number of syllables for section B is 263. If we divide this by the number of poetic lines (16) we arrive at an average of very nearly 17. This is a popular figure, as there are ten verses which actually score 17.

Strophe 2 is a clear variation on 3 x 15. Strophe 11 is a variation on 3 x 14. Strophe 10 is symmetrical at two levels, as both verses score 7 + 9 and thus obviously both have a total of 16 syllables. Strophes 8 and 12 mirror each other, 17 + 18 and 18 + 17. Strophe 13 is another variation on the double 16. The final strophe is the most striking in this respect: it is a variation on 3 x 16, and itself is strophe no. 16.

This duplicate of the norm figure 8 raises the question how many cola themselves consist of exactly eight syllables. There are exactly 20 of these, together responsible for 160 syllables.

Four of the five six-verse stanzas show the level series 104 - 105 - 105 - 108 syllables; these are stanzas III - II - VII - VI. Stanzas IV and V consist of five verses and thus have lower totals, 85 and 74 syllables, respectively. Stanza I does have six verses but these are rather short, so that this stanza performs a kind of mediating function with its 91 syllables.

The number 672 at first does not seem very meaningful. However, as soon as we have established that there are 84 cola instead of 82 or 83, the large total offers surprising insights. The figure 84 is the result of the repair to the boundary of vv.11 and 12, which made the new v.11 an exclusively nominal tricolon of 3 + 3 + 3 words.<sup>22</sup> The division 672 : 84 now yields a precise 8.<sup>23</sup>

In Job 31 the total numbers of verses (5 x 8) and strophes (2 x 8) are no coincidence. The 16 strophes form two groups: eight S-strophes and eight L-strophes. Each of these two groups also yield the figure 8.00, when we divide the total number of syllables by the number of cola:

- the 49 (!) cola of the L-strophes add up to 392 syllables, and
- the syllable total for the 35 cola of the S-strophes is 280, a figure which is not only 8 x 35, but also 40 x 7 -- two sacred numbers.

The fact that each of these two groups in itself also produces the norm figure 8 is by no means a necessary consequence of the fact that the poem as a whole yields this figure. The syllable totals for the S and L series might well have added up to 672 without each of these groups scoring the perfect integer. This is regularly the case in the group of 85 Psalms (the subject of MP II); often an exact average of 7, 8 or 9 is found for a song in its totality, but not for its separate sections.

The figure 84 itself can be factorised as 7 x 12. Thus, the total number of syllables in Job's final speech, 672, is the product of two sacred numbers plus the central norm figure of Hebrew poetry: 7 x 8 x 12.

The number of stanzas fits this pattern: there are seven. This yields an average per stanza of 12 cola and 96 syllables; this last figure of course equals 8 x 12. The last stanza is the seventh, and contains 49 words, i.e. the square of the sacred number. I interpret this as one of the many signals that the poet takes Job seriously as a 'counter': the verse Job speaks about the *mispar* of his steps comes in that very seventh stanza. More specifically: it comes in the penultimate strophe, a textual unit which is the only strophe to have seven cola. I refer to the passage about the document proving innocence (the *sefer*) and the crown Job has earned.

In biblical poetry it is normal for a verse to contain cola of three or four words. The following data for Job 31, however, are not really normal:

- there are 40 cola containing three words, 40 x 3 is 120
- there are 30 cola containing four words 30 x 4 also makes 120.

If after all this we open the concordance, we find that the verb *spr* occurs eight times in the poetry of Job, and the noun *mispar* twelve times.<sup>24</sup> I would hardly dare to maintain that this is a coincidence. What is more, the characteristic introductory phrase for a wish clause, *mi yitten*, is also used eight times by the hero. Also, the word 'fire' appears eight times, as do the verbs  $\sqrt{ryb}$  and  $\sqrt{z/ts} 'q$ , both significant words from the conclusion of Job 31.<sup>25</sup>

The numerical perfection of Job 31 is no surprise. Job was also the speaker who concluded the first round (chs.4-14) of the debate with the formidable lecture consisting of three poems, chs.12-14. The diagram of the proportions of this speech (MP II, p. 380) shows that the three textual levels of cola, words and syllables are in complete accord.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Job 12-14 should be mentioned also because this text, too, contains a passage in which the hero speaks about the God who counts his steps: 14:16. This is the only other verse in Job which has both *spr* + 'my steps'. The correct interpretation is tricky,<sup>27</sup> but is helped considerably if we remember the precision with which the poet has employed the root *spr*, and see this verse as a

station on the long road towards the final of the debate, with its climax of the account of Job's blameless life recorded in writing. Thus, I translate 14:16 as follows: 'Then You would count my steps, but You would not watch my sin.' Job expresses this trust precisely because he knows that counting and weighing lead to only one outcome: his own innocence.<sup>28</sup>

This great prosodic structure, these many forms of numerical perfection express the respect the poet feels for the struggle and the virtue of his hero. This precision is a complex iconic sign -- or rather, a complete system of signs -- of the completeness and thoroughness with which Job has clarified and measured his innocence. *C'est la force des choses dites qui meut l'écrivain*, the philosopher and hermeneuticist Paul Ricoeur wrote. And he is right: the dimensions of Job's purity have deeply moved the poet, and have resulted in the numerical perfection of Job 31.

## NOTES

1) The three tricola that everybody has spotted are vv.7 (start of II), 34 and 35 (on either side of the blank line separating stanzas VI and VII).

2) This is why it is better not to present the two cola as a single construction, as is done by Fohrer, Pope, NEB, Habel, JPS, De Wilde and BJ (by making v.1b an object clause). The Hitpolel of  $\sqrt{byn}$  means 'to look at something with more attention than usual', as is clearly demonstrated in 1 Kings 3, where the plaintiff (the prostitute whose baby is switched for another by her colleague during the night) uses it to describe her discovery the next morning that the dead baby is not her child, v.21. For *htbwnn* see further Job 30:20, 32:12, 37:14 and 38:18.

3) Thus, the *h<sup>a</sup>lo*' that opens v.3 has a totally different function than the *h<sup>a</sup>lo*' in v.4. This has been misinterpreted by Fohrer, Strauss, Terrien, JPS, Hartley, Good, De Wilde and Van der Lugt (most of these authors have a blank line after v.4); they thought the anaphora proved that vv.3-4 form an S-strophe.

4) Verse 5 is the first verse that contains '*im*'. Translating this by 'if', implying that v.5 is a conditional protasis and v.6 its apodosis, is not recommended, as it is inconsistent with logic. I fully concur with Gordis' similar argument (p. 345). Saying 'If I have committed a crime X, X' will be my punishment', at least keeps open the possibility that one did commit X (cf. Terrien's translation, p.208.) Job does not say that, because he knows he is without sin. The non-logic of the compound sentence now becomes clear: 'If I have erred, God will weigh me and recognise my integrity.' Conclusion: '*im* should here, and also in some places further down, be interpreted as a negation.

The semantic ab-b'a' pattern is a second, and strong, signal that vv.5-6 are not a compound syntactic unit requiring enjambment. Thus, the mirroring of the verbal predicates of vv. 4 and 6 prevents the translation of the first '*im*' by 'if'.

5) Thus correctly Habel, who also observed the division into smaller units (vv.1-3 and vv.4-6), and the correspondence between stanzas I and VII.

6) The centre of the 49 (seven times seven) cola of Job 10 is colon 25: v.12a, with the unique word pair *chayyim wachesed*, which everybody mistakenly translates by sanctimonious phrases. In MP II I have shown that v.12 is the height of sarcasm on Job's part. 'Leering' in ch.10 is *shmr*, both in v.14a (generally accepted) and in v.12b. A striking parallel (including *shmr*) for 31:4b and 37a is 14:16, containing *shmr + ts'dy*.

7) This switch has been defended and/or executed by Budde, Gordis, Dhorme, Kissane, Pope, Fohrer, NEB, Strauss, Hartley.

8) Habel and Van der Lugt have correctly seen the chiasm, drawn their conclusions, and rejected the transposition; Terrien also resists it.

9) The word play on  $\sqrt{ngd}$  and the 'I' as the subject of the verb indicate that *k<sup>e</sup>mo nagid* refers to Job rather than God; thus we may strike 'to' in the JPS rendering 'Offer it as *to* a commander.'

10) 'This' refers back to the preceding, i.e. the sexual transgression which has now been discussed. It is the subject of all three cola, but adapts its gender to the predicate, which is 2x feminine, and 1x (the middle one) masculine. This is not unusual, see JM § 150m and GK § 145n, n. 3. This also follows the Qere.

The difference between the s<sup>e</sup>mikut <sup>ca</sup>*won p<sup>e</sup>lilim* in v.11b and <sup>c</sup>*awon p<sup>e</sup>lili* with attributive adjective (v.28b) is minimal; no intervention is necessary in either case. Thanks are due to my friend and student Aart Schippers (Amsterdam) who provided the last push I needed for the restoration of the tricolon v.11.

11) Verse 13 does not have 5 + 2 words as the Masoretes' atnach suggests, but 4 + 3 words with enjambment. This division is proved correct by the chiasm of two word pairs: 'the cause of my manservant' / 'my maidservant and their complaint'.

12) 'Im occurs twice more as a conditional conjunction, when it opens a formal self-curse in vv.21 and 38 (very effective in a final strophe, another reason not to move it). The combination 'im lo' (v.20a and 31a) is a reversal of the meaning, and may be translated both by 'did they not ...' and by the assurance 'they certainly did...'. In v.19a + 20a, the JPS has the double negative 'I never saw an unclad wretch (..), whose loins did not bless me', which works very well. Another effective rendering would be: 'Did I ever see an unclad wretch (..) *without* his loins blessing me?'

13) I note an anagram in strophe 9: the arm ('ezro<sup>ca</sup>) and <sup>c</sup>*ezrati*; here and elsewhere these words have related meanings. In v.23, a translation by 'majesty' or a synonym of s<sup>e</sup>'et is not forceful enough (contra Delitzsch, Dhorme, NBG, KBS3, BJ, Fohrer, Terrien, Habel, De Wilde, Hartley). What is meant here is 'flaring up angrily' (the 'Auffahren' given by HAL), so that the JPS rendering 'threat' is better already (cf. Pope's 'terror'). Good suggests 'partiality', an attractive option. Cf. also 41:17. Tur-Sinai and Gordis have here altered the punctuation.

14) Verse 31b is the subject of various misunderstandings. Translating it as a wish (as for instance Habel does, who opts for a Qal 1st pers. plur. of  $\sqrt{sb^c}$ ) does not suit the context: 'May we never be sated with his flesh', and is difficult to understand. I follow Driver & Gray (in ICC) who read a Niphal 3 masc. sing. perfect *in pausa*. The context points to generous hospitality on Job's part: 'Indeed, the men of my clan always said: was there ever anybody not sated by his meat (= the meat he offered)?' The answer to this rhetorical question is negative: Job always regaled his guests with large quantities of excellent food.

15) I suspect 'adam may here be considered ambiguous: it refers to the story of Paradise, and Adam's and Eve's hiding, but is also used as a term for mankind in general.

16) For a detailed account, see the structural and prosodic analysis in Chapter V of my *Major Poems in the Hebrew Bible*, vol. I (Assen 1998).

Note that *mi yitten + ktb + spr* has been used once before this, in 19:23f, where we may be surprised to find mentioned (in v. 24) a rock incised with lead, recording Job's true character.

17) There are 17 instances of *'im* in all. Are we then justified in asserting twelve strophes and twelve sins? We are, if we consider for a moment which five can be left out on good grounds. The *'im* in v.5 is isolated, it is in the middle of a strophe and is a negation; next, there is the combination *'im lo'* in v.20a, which indicates an assurance, but only as a continuation of *'im lo'* in 19a which does mark a strophe; this case is comparable to that of *'im* in v.36, also in the middle of a strophic unit. The *'im* in vv. 15a and 39a only continue *'im* in vv. 24a and 38a.

18) This catalogue should not be subjected to western demands for logical, scholarly argument. For instance, sins 1 and 2 overlap (= are identical), as do the sins in strophes 4, 5 and 6.

19) Strophe 12 offers proof that the automatic translation of *'im* by 'if' is incorrect. After the *'im*-clause 29a what follows is not a true apodosis, but a parataxis (with v.30); the usual negation *lo'* of v.30 reveals that *'im* in 29a only serves as a non-conjunction, i.e. as a negation or interrogative particle.

With respect to the translation of the conjunction I will draw two consequences from my analysis of strophe and stanza structure. The first of these is that *'im* is so flexible that the correct translation should be analysed and weighed per strophe. Distinguishing strophes and stanzas implies the requirement to respect the various functions of the conjunction.

There is a reverse side to this, which takes us to the second consequence. Various commentaries and translations present the impressive chain of *'im*-clauses, which seemingly starts at 5a, but only really gets under way at v.7a, by sticking to 'if' as the only translation (thus NEB, Terrien, Pope, De Wilde, NBG, Hartley, Good). The intention is admirable, the execution less so; for in this way we get a never-ending series of clauses which makes the reader gasp for breath and provides entirely the wrong impression of the poem, i.e. the idea that this text is nothing but a long and especially amorphous enumeration. At first, this strategy is relatively harmless, since after the *'im*-clauses of vv.7a and 9a the reader is given a main clause, and thus the opportunity to pause for breath after the full stop. After this, however, things start to get out of hand: as from v.13a, one conditional wave after the other hits us; we yearn for an outcome (i.e. a main clause) -- but alas. A second unpleasant by-product of this deliberate monotony is the fact that readers are forced to read verses such as 14, 15 or 18 as parentheses, as they are waiting for a solution in the shape of a decisive main clause in which a punishment is formulated -- it does not come. Only after v.21 do we get a breather for the first time, thanks to the main clause v.22. Translating *'im* exclusively by 'if' feels artificial, and moreover reveals that until recently biblical scholarship had little or no notion of poetics, or the artful exploitation of structures of different sizes. Gordis' criticism (p. 544) is quite right.

20) *Major Poems II* contains the syllable counts and structural analyses of 85 Psalms and Job 4-14. In this book I argue that the poets of the Psalter often used the norm figure 8, and sometimes 7 and 9, in order to control colon length in combination with strophe and stanza structure. The books of Job and Proverbs are exclusively geared to the central norm figure 8. Volumes III (dealing with the remaining 65 Psalms) and IV (about Job 15-41) are in preparation.

21) I read *wattachas* in v.5b as a Qal imperfect of  $\sqrt{chsy}$  II (a secondary form of *chus*). I do not change *'orach* in v.32b into the participle *'ore<sup>a</sup>ch* either; it may be translated literally, as JPS does, by 'the road', or it may be read (as I prefer) as a metonymy of 'traveller', in the same way as *rgl* in 28:4b.

Job 28:4 is often divided incorrectly. This tricolon has 4 + 4 + 2 words, and 6 + 9 + 5 syllables; this will become clear when we note the three verbal predicates and the triple *min*.

22) The restored C-colon of v.11 contains only three syllables. This is a rare phenomenon, occurring in the Psalter only in 26:1d, 42:3b, 55:13b, 84:3d, 99:3b and 5c, 100:4c (exceptionally, an A-colon), and 122:4b. What is important in these cases and here in Job 31:11c is that the 3-point colon should contain or constitute a predicate, and hence a full clause.

23) Eight is also the norm figure for colon length in Proverbs and Job. Job 11 proves to have an average of exactly 8 (see MP II). My count of the entire book of Job (i.e. the poetry), on the basis of a text which needs only rare and minimal changes, yields 1004 verses, 2089 cola and 16620 syllables; this results in an average number of syllables per colon of 7.95 for the entire book, closely approaching the normative 8. Pieter van der Lugt counts 1002 verses and 2085 cola in Job. According to my most recent data, the average number of syllables per colon in the Psalter is  $45.725 : 5712 = 8.005$ . (In MP II the division is  $45.733 : 5713$ ; in Vol. III, however, I delete one colon from Ps.80, v.16b, as dittography.)

24) The verb *spr* in 12:8, 14:16, 15:17, 28:27, 31:4, 37:20, 38:37 and 39:2. The noun *mspr* in 3:6, 5:9, 9:10, 14:5, 15:20, 16:22, 21:21 and 33, 25:3, 31:37, 36:26 and 38:21.

25) The question *mi yitten* in 6:8, 13:5, 14:4 and 13, 19:23, 23:3 and 31:31, 35.

The verb *ryb* appears in 9:3, 10:2, 13:8, 19, 23:6, 31:13, 33:13 and 40:2. There are four occurrences of the noun, so that this stem appears twelve times in Job. The verb *z/s<sup>c</sup>q* is in 16:18 19:7, 27:9, 31:38, 34:28 (*bis*) and 35:9,12. Fire, *'esh*, in 1:16, 18:5, 15:34, 18:5, 22:20, 28:5. 31:12 and 41:11, eight occurrences as well.

26) Counts based on these fine measures all point to 13:15a as the exact centre of this long speech. Not coincidentally, this verse contains Job's most far-reaching statement about his pursuer. 'Look, He is about to kill me; I will not! I only want to defend my conduct in his face.' This translation, found in Clines, Habel, JPS (which incidentally follows the Qere in 15a, 'I may have no hope'), is already 80 years old: it is found in Driver & Gray. It replaces the traditional sanctimonious and mistaken rendering, found, among others, in RSV.

Job 12-14 contains 560 words, which I rephrase as 10 x 7 x 8. The three norm figures for colon length, i.e. 7-8-9, here constitute the central values of the distribution, as they do in many other chapters of the book of Job, by governing 120 (!) of the 158 cola, and covering 955 of the 1256 syllables. The figure 7 appears in 40 (!) cola, 8 in 45 cola, and 9 in 35 cola. (The top part of my diagram in MP II, p.380, contains an error; Job 13 has 28 instead of 24 verses; fortunately this does not affect the diagram, as this is concerned with the smaller units.)

27) The choice is between present or (hoped-for) future for *ki<sup>c</sup>atta*, and whether or not to employ retrograde double duty with the negation. In very rare instances this is permitted, but it is very improbable here. The JPS does translate: 'Then You would not count my steps, or keep watch over my sin.' I myself prefer the NBG rendering: 'Then You would not find any sin in me, even if You counted my steps'. Gordis, Habel, De Wilde, Clines also follow this line; cf. also Good and BJ.

28) A poignant aspect, however, is that vv. 14:15-17 are also in the counterfactual mode. Note how v.17b confirms the point made by 16b.