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## THE EPIC COGNITIVE FRAME IN THE PSALMS. A CASE STUDY OF THE POLISH TRANSLATIONS WITH PSALM 137

### Abstract

The main aim of this article is an attempt to redefine the genre of Psalm 137 with the notion of the epic cognitive framework of the Psalms. Analysis of the prevailing aesthetic value (PAV) and cognitive frameworks in Compositional Slots Analysis (CSA) identifies two basic types: a lament and a great story of liberation, which was also a component of revenge. To define the aesthetic value and the cognitive framework author analyzed the composition of Psalm 137 and examined 14 examples and compared them with 15 English, 2 Swedish, and 1 Czech. In total, 32 texts were compared with the classic texts of the Psalms in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. During the analysis, a parameter of cultural archaism is used (PCA).

### Abstrakt

#### KOGNITYWNA RAMA EPICKA W PSALMACH. STUDIUM PRZYPADKU POLSKICH PRZEKŁADÓW PSALMU 137

Głównym celem artykułu jest próba ponownego zdefiniowania przynależności gatunkowej psalmu 137 przy użyciu pojęcia kognitywnej ramy epickiej psalmów. Analiza dominującej wartości estetycznej oraz ram kognitywnych pozwala zidentyfikować dwa podstawowe gatunki: lament oraz wielką opowieść o wyzwoleniu, której składnikiem jest także zemsta. Aby zdefiniować wartość estetyczną (PAV) oraz ramy kognitywne (CSA) autor analizuje kompozycyjne sloty psalmu 137. Przebadano 14 polskich przykładów i porównano je z 15 angielskimi, 2 szwedzkimi, 1 czeskim. W sumie porównano 32 teksty i odniesiono je do klasycznych tekstów psalmów po hebrajsku, grecku i łacinie. Podczas analizy użyto także pojęcia parametru archaiczności kulturowej.

### Key words

dominant aesthetic value ■ cognitive analysis of composite slots ■ epic lyrical text frame ■ cognitive domain ■ a parameter of cultural archaism

### Słowa kluczowe

dominująca wartość estetyczna ■ kognitywna analiza slotów kompozycyjnych ■ epicka rama tekstu lirycznego ■ domeny kognitywne ■ parametr kulturowej archaiczności

## 1. Psalms and the Lyric

Psalm has been always defined mainly by values connected with the lyric. We can guess that it was mainly because of the name of the 150 pieces of writing. The 150 pieces had been called by the 5th-century Septuagint Greek: *psaltērion* which contained ‘psalmoi’ that is ‘songs sung with a kind of harp’. ‘Psalmos’ is a striking (of musical strings), a psalm (from Greek ‘ψαλμός’, *psalmos*), a psalm, song of praise (in Hebrew ‘mizmor’). As we read in dictionaries: “*originally, a psalm was sung and accompanied by a plucked musical instrument (typically a harp), especially the OT Psalms*”.<sup>1</sup> It was *psalterion*, a musical instrument, which defined the genre. Rabbinic writings use a term “*Sefer Tehillim*”, a book with songs of praise. Praising and singing with a harp are the typical actions associated in culture with psalms.

It is quite easy to understand psalms as mainly lyrical also because, according to the modern view, the subgroups of psalms in the Bible could be divided by a dominant stylistic and emotional value. There are psalms in a mood of joyous celebration of thanksgiving and there are other which express lamentation, for instance. Of course, classification of psalms as in Herman Gunkel and Joachim Begrich is more complicated because it also uses themes as one criterion (for example royal psalms, psalms of the Sion etc.). Quite often people view of the psalms as connected with an aesthetic value of the sublime and even ancient Hebrew parallelisms are seen in this context<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, (Strong's Concordance), is a concordance of the King James Bible (KJV). Ed. by James Strong. 1890. I use in my research *The Bible Study App for Mac*, Version 5.4.3 (5.4.3.1), Olive Tree Bible Software, Spokane, WA, 2014. *King James Version with Strong's Numbers – KJV Strong's. For The Bible Study App*. Answers in Genesis / Online Bible. *Complete Word Study Bible – CWSB (4 Volume Set) For The Bible Study App*. Ed. Eugene E. Carpenter, Warren Baker and Spiros Zodhiates. AMG 2003.

<sup>2</sup> PUSTKOWSKI, Henryk: *Psalm*. In: *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich: nowe wydanie*. Ed. Grzegorz Gazda. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2012, s. 916–918. General characteristic of psalms I take from *The Bible as Literature*. Eds. John B. Gabel, Charles B. Wheeler, Anthony D. York, David Citino. 5th ed. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006; *The Literary Study Bible: ESV – English Standard Version*. Eds. Leland Ryken, Philip Graham Ryken, Crossway Bibles 2007; LONGMAN III, Tremper, GARLAND, David E.: *Expositor's Bible Commentary – Revised: 5-Volume New Testament Set*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012; *Word Biblical Commentary (WBC)* 60 Vols., General Eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, Vol. 21, ALLEN Leslie C., Eds. John D.W. Watts. Thomas Nelson, 2002, e-book.

Thus, Psalms are often described with a background of the lyric as understood from the ancient Greek times: Gr. ‘lyriké’, Eng. ‘Lyrical poetry’, Ger. ‘Lyrik’, French. ‘poésie lyrique’, Russ. ‘лирика’. As they are forming monologue discourse, we can oppose them with drama. As they are a direct representation of the inner world of a singer, we can counter them with the epic representing action and many heroes. One of the most important features of the psalms and the lyric as a literary kind is that they represent inner states of subjects – their minds: thoughts and emotions. However, if we think about the basic human action defining psalms and the lyric, it would be singing and dancing as meant by the ancient concept of ‘chorea’. It was a complex social and performative phenomenon combining music, dance and song.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the association of the psalms with the lyric is quite evident.

## 2. Cognitive Frames of Psalm 137

One of the best examples of the lyric in psalms is Psalm 137. ESV Study Bible Notes defines it as a community lament<sup>4</sup>, and we could characterise it accordingly as very emotional and thus fulfilling the most crucial condition of being lyrical in contemporary understanding of the term. One may even claim that we can find one particular mood that can also be definitive. I would like to call it a Prevailing Aesthetic Value (PAV) – it is in this case melancholy and sadness caused by the exile of the nation of Juda in Babylon.

Psalm 137 (KJV)<sup>5</sup>

*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered – Zion.*

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WEBSTER, Brian L.: *The essential Bible companion to the Psalms: key insights for reading God's Word*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010, e-book; BRUEGGEMANN Walter – BELLINGER William H.: *Psalms*. Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014, e-book; BRUEGGEMANN, Walter: *Praying the Psalms. Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*. Second Edition. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007; e-book.

<sup>3</sup> PŁUCIENNIK, Jarosław – HÜBNER, Irena: *Liryka*. In: *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich: nowe wydanie*. Ed. Grzegorz Gazda. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2012, s. 528–531.

<sup>4</sup> *The Literary Study Bible: ESV – English Standard Version*. Eds. Leland Ryken – Philip Graham Ryken. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2007, e-book.

<sup>5</sup> *King James Version (KJV)* 1611. Public domain published in Olive Tree Bible Study App. Spokane, WA: by Olive Tree Bible Software, 2014.

*We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.  
For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song, and  
they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs  
of Zion.*

*How shall we sing – the Lord ‘s song in a strange land?*

*If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.*

*If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth;*

*if I prefer not – Jerusalem above my chief joy.*

*Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom – in the day of Jerusalem; who  
said, Raze it, raze it, even to the foundation thereof.*

*O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that  
rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.*

*Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth – thy little ones against the  
stones.*

### PAV in Psalms

It is a very interesting phenomenon that this psalm 137 is a prototypical example of the lyric genre but at the same time, some scholars claim that it stands outside of the genre of psalms. Some say that it is anti-psalm because it sings about the impossibility of singing. Robert Alter, however, a very interesting and knowledgeable scholar of the Psalms, is wrong while claiming that Psalm 137 is an anti-psalm.<sup>6</sup> We could argue the opposite: it is a prototypical psalm. But we should take into account that the definition of psalms by PAV = praise is one-sided and a-historical. There are many psalms that are just lamenting, and this particular Psalm 137 is not an exception in that respect. It is remarkably beautiful actualisation of the PAV of grief and mourning. It is interesting, now and here, to note that this melancholic PAV of Psalms is defining them in some cultures. In Czech or Slovak, for instance, we do not call Psalms “Sefer Tehillim” but using a word “Žalmy”. A native speaker of Czech and Slovak associates Psalms in his/her mother language with sadness and grief (I thank here Lenka Paučova for her native speaker and linguistic expertise). It also seems quite reasonable to argue that, from a post-modern perspective, it is also a prototypical lyric poem. It speaks in favour of expressing the

<sup>6</sup> ALTER, Robert: *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary*. New York, NY and London: Norton and Company, 2009 (first ed. 2007), e-book.

inexpressible, or representing the unrepresentable and this is a definition of the sublime.

A final argument in favour of the lyricism comes from popular culture. We can find a very typical prop of the lyric here, namely Hebrew **קִינּוֹר** “kinnôr” which Strong’s dictionary defines by “A masculine noun referring to a lyre or harp. It indicates a stringed instrument with a built-in acoustical chest or board (Gen. 4:21; 31:27). It was used for sacred (1 Sam. 10:5; 2 Sam. 6:5) or secular (Isa. 24:8) music (1 Sam. 16:16; Isa. 5:12). It was used in a figurative way of the Lord’s heart lamenting like a harp for Moab (Isa. 16:11)”. This prop of the lyric – an instrument – is very present in the second verse of the psalm. However, as a *pars pro toto*, it often represents psalms in general either as such or as a prop of King’s David depicted together with the instrument.

Psalm 137 is so typically associated with the lyric that it has many popular culture versions in songs. One of the curious examples of that is a song by a German disco band called Boney M.

### **Case Study of Simple PAV: Boney M and *By the rivers of Babylon***

*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down  
Ye-eah we wept, when we remembered Zion  
By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down  
Ye-eah we wept, when we remembered Zion  
When the wicked  
Carried us away in captivity  
Required from us a song  
Now how shall we sing the lord’s song in a strange land  
When the wicked  
Carried us away in captivity  
Requiring of us a song  
Now how shall we sing the lord’s song in a strange land  
Let the words of our mouth and the meditations of our heart  
Be acceptable in thy sight here tonight  
Let the words of our mouth and the meditation of our hearts  
Be acceptable in thy sight here tonight  
By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down  
Ye-eah we wept, when we remembered Zion  
By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down  
Ye-eah we wept, when we remembered Zion  
By the rivers of Babylon (dark tears of Babylon)  
There we sat down (you got to sing a song)*

*Ye-eah we wept, (sing a song of love)*  
*When we remember Zion (yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah)*  
*By the rivers of Babylon (rough bits of Babylon)*  
*There we sat down (you hear the people cry)*  
*Ye-eah we wept, (they need their God)*  
*When we remember Zion (ooh, have the power)<sup>7</sup>*

It is striking that the performances of the song by the disco band were always associated with a dancing masculine member of the group, Bobby Farrell, a dancer from Aruba. They were not only singing with a kind of joy but also dancing it in a light disco rhythm. So the PAV was a little bit mixed with a disco rhythms but the most interesting phenomenon is that this particular version of the psalm dropped the last verse of it. Verse 9 reads in KJV: “Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth – thy little ones against the stones.” One can argue that the common perception of this verse underlines incompatibility with PAV of the whole psalm. We can associate this PAV with a cognitive frame incompatible with a cognitive frame of the last verse with PAV of anger and revenge. It is wrong to say, as *ESV Literary Study Bible Notes* does: “*The force of the poet’s previously stated feelings is so strong that the poem ends with an imprecation, or calling down of misfortune on one’s enemies*”<sup>8</sup>. This quote suggests that we have a result of the PAV of grief in PAV of anger and revenge. However, in my view, it is better to hypothesize that we encounter here a different cognitive frame that sticks to the genre of the epic rather than the lyric.

### 3. Verse 9 of the Psalm 137 and Compositional Slot Analysis (CSA)

This particular piece of poetry – neglected by Boney M.’s song – the last verse of the Psalm 137 – can be regarded as *experimentum crucis* of the genre analysis. It does not fit not only with the PAV of the first eight verses. It does neither comply with any image of the subtle sensitivity that is attached to the traditional representation of the lyric as the genre. What is represented here is a picture of revenge that refers to an event atrocious for the contemporary sensitivity.

<sup>7</sup> *Rivers Of Babylon*. Track #2 In: the album *Boney M.* by Farian, Frank/Reyam, George/Dowe, Brent/Mc Naughton, Trevor: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/rivers-of-babylon-lyrics-boney-m.html> access 03.06.15.

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit.

It is good to start with two Hebrew lexemes from the biblical dictionary (as defined by Strong in already referred edition) that are causing here the most trouble.

H5310. נָפַץ *nāpaṣ*: A verb meaning to shatter, to break, to smash. It describes the action of shattering or breaking something: pitchers (Judg. 7: 19; Jer. 22: 28; 48: 12); ashlar stones crushed, pulverized into powder (Isa. 27: 9); timber cut into logs for transport or put into rafts (1 Kgs. 5: 9 [23]); figuratively, of defeating the power of nations as pottery is broken (Ps. 2: 9; Jer. 50: 20–23); of breaking the political and military might of God's holy people (Dan. 12: 7); of slaying infants by crushing their skulls (Ps. 137: 9; Jer. 13: 14). Used of persons, the word can indicate their dispersal, scattering (Isa. 11: 12). A verb meaning to spread out, to disperse, to scatter. It is used in ways similar to I: It indicates the dispersal of peoples across the earth (Gen. 9: 19); of persons drifting away because of losing interest (1 Sam. 13: 11); of loading logs, dividing them onto rafts or possibly cutting timber into smaller pieces (1 Kgs. 5: 9 [23]).

H5768. עוֹלָלָה *‘ōlēl*, עוֹלָל *‘ōlāl*: A masculine noun meaning a child, an infant. It refers to offspring, sons and daughters, still quite young and holding the promise of descendants. The destruction of children was especially devastating to a people (2 Kgs. 8: 12; Lam. 2: 11, 20). A masculine noun meaning a child, an infant. The destruction of infants was especially heinous and devastating to a people (Ps. 137: 9; Jer. 6: 11; 9: 21 [20]; Lam. 1: 5; 2: 19; 4: 4; Joel 2: 16; Mic. 2: 9; Nah. 3: 10).

In a context of the verse 9 in many translations we can have different versions of the described event.

To give a reader a comprehensive view of the problems I quote below several select examples of the last verse of the Psalm 137.

Septuagint<sup>9</sup>

μακάριος ὃς κρατήσῃ καὶ ἐδαφίῃ τὰ νήπιά σου πρὸς τὴν πέτραν

<sup>9</sup> Text in *LXX (Septuaginta)* comes from the Kraft /Taylor/Wheeler Septuagint Morphology Database v. 3.02, based on Ed. Alfred Rahlfs: *Septuaginta id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979. Access by Olive Tree Bible Study App (in short: OTBSA). App cit.

Vulgate<sup>10</sup>

(136-9) beatus qui tenebit et adlidet parvulos tuos ad petram |(136-9) beatus qui tenebit et adlidet parvulos tuos ad petram |

NETS<sup>11</sup>

Happy shall he be who will grab your infants  
and dash them against the rock

Wycliffe<sup>12</sup>

He is blessid, that schal holde; and hurtle doun hise litle children at a stoon

NIV<sup>13</sup>

Happy is the one who seizes your infants  
and dashes them against the rocks

CJB<sup>14</sup>

A blessing on anyone who seizes your babies  
and smashes them against a rock

JPS Tanakh<sup>15</sup>

a blessing on him who seizes your babies  
and dashes them against the rocks

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<sup>10</sup> *Latin Vulgate for the Bible Study App*. In: OTBSA, public domain. App cit.

<sup>11</sup> *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under that Title* (in short NETS). Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009 (first edition 2007); a-book. In: OTBSA, app cit.

<sup>12</sup> *Wycliffe Bible* for the Bible Study App. Wesley Center Online: OTBSA. App. Cit.

<sup>13</sup> *New International Version* for the Bible Study App. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan OTBSA (first ed. 2002.); I used here also *NIV Pitt Minion Reference Edition*. Cambridge UK, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed., 2013.

<sup>14</sup> *Complete Jewish Bible: An English Version of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and B'Rit Hadashah (New Testament)*. Ed. and transl. David H. Stern. Clarksville, Maryland USA and Jerusalem, Izrael: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998. In: OTBSA

<sup>15</sup> *The Jewish Bible: Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures – The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text: Torah \* Nevi'im \* Kethuvim*. Philadelphia, USA and Jerusalem, Izrael: Jewish Publication Society, 1985. In: OTBSA.



ESV<sup>16</sup>

Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones  
and dashes them against the rock

ASV<sup>17</sup>

Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones Against the rock

NLT<sup>18</sup>

Happy is the one who takes your babies  
and smashes them against the rocks

BBE<sup>19</sup>

Happy is the man who takes your little ones, crushing them against the  
rocks

ISV<sup>20</sup>

How blessed will be the one who seizes your young children  
and pulverizes them against the cliff

Message<sup>21</sup>

Yes, a reward to the one who grabs your babies  
and smashes their heads on the rocks!

I have studied 14 Polish translations of the Psalm 137 and analysed their Compositional Slots relating to two classical Hebrew words from Masoretic Text and Greek and Latin versions (4 traditional classical texts). I prefer to write about “slots” not lexemes because the main problem

<sup>16</sup> *English Standard Version* as in The ESV Study Bible. Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway Bibles, 2008 (with ESV 2007). In: OTBSA.

<sup>17</sup> *American Standard Version – ASV*. For The Bible Study App. Olive Tree: 2014. (1st print ed. 1901). In: OTBSA.

<sup>18</sup> *Holy Bible. New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Foundation: Carol Stream, Illinois, USA, 1996, 2004, 2015. In: OTBSA. Available also: [www.tyndale.com](http://www.tyndale.com).

<sup>19</sup> *Bible in Basic English* For The Bible Study App. Transl. S. H. Hooke. London: the Orthological Institute, 1941 and 1949. In: OTBSA.

<sup>20</sup> *International Standard Version*. ISV: NT plus Psalms and Proverbs For The Bible Study App. Davidson Press, 1996. According The Holy Bible: ISV. 2.0. In: OTBSA. Also available [isv.org](http://isv.org).

<sup>21</sup> *The Message* For The Bible Study App. Ed. and transl. Eugene Peterson. NavPress In: OTBSA. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Ed. Eugene Peterson. NavPress, 2002.

is not lexicographical, it is a genre and compositional analysis problem. I compared the Polish translations with 15 English versions, 2 Swedish ones and one Czech, so I have compared all together 32 texts. The results of the analysis reveal quite interesting phenomena tied to the cognitive frames of the psalm.

### Classical Texts (4)

| MT – Hebrew                 | Septuagint (III BC, 2008) | Vulgate (IV CE)  | Buchanan <sup>22</sup> (XVI CE)          |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|--|
| 1. נָפְצוּ nāpaš            | 1. ἐδάφιεν                | 1. adlidet       | 1. tenero ... cerebro (ang. soft brains) |
| 2. לָלַע 'ôlāl, לָלַע 'ôlāl | 2. τὰ νήπιά               | 2. parvulos tuos | 2. consperget (ang. bespatter)           |

### English Translations (15)

| Wycliffe (1382–1395)   | KJV (1611)         | BayPB (1640)               |
|------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. hurtle doun         | 1. dasheth         | 1. thy little ones         |
| 2. hise litle children | 2. thy little ones | 2. doth into pieces breake |

| ESV (2001 [Tyndale 1526]) | ASV (1901)         | BBE (1941, 1949)    |
|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. little ones            | 1. dasheth         | 1. your little ones |
| 2. dashes them            | 2. thy little ones | 2. crushing them    |

| CJB (1998)      | NIV (1978, 2010) | NLT (1996, 2004 and 2007) |
|-----------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. babies       | 1. infants       | 1. babies                 |
| 2. smashes them | 2. dashes them   | 2. smashes them           |

<sup>22</sup> I use here the most authoritative edition BUCHANAN, George: *Poetic Paraphrase of the Psalms of David*. Ed. and transl. Roger P. H. Green. Genève: Librairie Droz S. A. 11, rue Massot 2011.

|                                |                   |                           |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| ISV (2003)                     | JPS Tanakh (1985) | NRSV (1990) <sup>23</sup> |
| 1. your young children         | 1. babies         | 1. your little ones       |
| 2. pulverizes them             | 2. dashes them    | 2. dash them              |
|                                |                   |                           |
| GNB <sup>24</sup> (1976, 2001) | NETS (2007, 2009) | Message (1993, 2002)      |
| 1. your babies                 | 1. infants        | 1. your babies            |
| 2. smash them                  | 2. dash them      | 2. smashes their heads    |

### Auxiliary Translations (3)

#### Swedish Translations (2)

|                              |                                   |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Swedish (1917) <sup>25</sup> | Svenska Folk (1998) <sup>26</sup> |
| 1. späda barn                | 1. späda barn                     |
| 2. krossa dem                | 2. krossar dem                    |

#### Czech Translation (1)<sup>27</sup>

|                          |
|--------------------------|
| ČEP (2007) <sup>27</sup> |
| 1. tvá nemluvnata        |
| 2. roztrhášti            |

<sup>23</sup> *New Revised Standard Version – NRSV For The Bible Study App*. National Council of the Churches of Christ, 1990 (revision of 1952 ed.). In: OTBSA. I use also *Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version Containing the Old and the New Testament*, New York: Hendrickson Publishers in Conjunction with Oxford University Press, 2007 (3rd print ed.).

<sup>24</sup> *Good News Bible with Concordance*. Glasgow: The Bible Societies/ Harper-Collins, 1994.

<sup>25</sup> *Bibeln*. Örebro: Bokförlaget Libris, 1994. (*Svenska Bibelsällskapets varsamma språkliga revision av 1917 års översättning av Gamla testamentet och Bibelkommissionens översättning av nya testamentet*). I use also an app for iOS *Bibel* (Swedish Bible) by PalReader, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> *Bibeln. Bibelkommissionens översättning*, Örebro: Bokförlaget Libris, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> *Bible. Písmo Svaté Starého a Nového Zákona (včetně deuterokanonických knih). Český ekumenický překlad*. Praha: Česká Biblická Společnost, 2007.

#### 4. Compositional Slots Analysis (CSA) in Polish and English Translations of the Psalm 137 and Parameter of Cultural Archaism (PCA)

In my corpus of 14 texts of Polish translations and paraphrases of the Psalms, I have chosen to compare individual places in the last verse of the Psalm 137, which I call compositional slots (CSs). What I present here is not a lexical comparison but compositional slots analysis (CSA) that takes into account not just lexical items. It also analyses grammatical tenses and stylistic devices like, for instance, diminutives in Polish or emphasis in English.

| Lubel (1558) <sup>28</sup>  | Bb (1563) <sup>29</sup> | Koch (1579) <sup>30</sup> |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. twe corki i młodzi-<br>uchne synaczki ... nie-<br>boraczki                           | 1. potłucze             | 1. roztrąci               |
| 2. zetrze, zniszczy á<br>już wniwecz obroci ...<br>a krew ich ... wyleje tak<br>obficie | 2. dziateczki twe       | 2. twe nieszczęsne syny   |

<sup>28</sup> LUBELCZYK, Jakub: *Psalterz o kancjonał z melodiami drukowany w 1558*. Ed. Janusz S. Gruchała i Piotr Poźniak. Kraków: Musica Iagiellonica, 2010. The poetic paraphrases are accompanied by the detailed commentaries and glosses by Lubelczyk. This edition has also English versions of the introduction and other useful material.

<sup>29</sup> *Biblia brzeska 1563*. Clifton, NJ i Kraków: Kalwin Publishing i Collegium Collumbinum, 2003. I consulted also a copy from 1563 with illustrations held at the Cambridge University Library in Cambridge.

<sup>30</sup> KOCHANOWSKI, Jan: *Psalterz Dawidów*. Oprac. i wstęp Katarzyna Meller, Kraków: TAIWPN Universitas, 1997. The texts are also available at <http://literat.ug.edu.pl/jkpsalm/138.htm>

|                                |                         |                           |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Wuj (1594, 1599) <sup>31</sup> | Bg (1632) <sup>32</sup> | Karp (1786) <sup>33</sup> |
| 1. roztrąci                    | 1. roztrąci             | 1. roztrąci               |
| 2. dzieci twe                  | 2. dziatki twe          | 2. twe nieszczęsne syny   |

|                           |                            |                            |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Cylk (1883) <sup>34</sup> | Staff (1937) <sup>35</sup> | Brand (1968) <sup>36</sup> |
| 1. roztrąci               | 1. twe dziatki             | 1. twoje dzieci            |
| 2. dzieci twe             | 2. roztrzaska je           | 2. roztrzaska              |

|                                 |                            |                        |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1000 (1965, 1971) <sup>37</sup> | Warsz (1981) <sup>38</sup> | M (1981) <sup>39</sup> |
| 1. rozbije                      | 1. roztrzaska              | 1. roztrąci            |

<sup>31</sup> *Psalterz Dawidów w przekładzie ks. Jakuba Wujka z 1594 roku*. Transkrypcja i wstęp, komentarze ks. doc. dr hab. Janusz Frankowski. Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1993. I use also *Biblia to jest Księgi Starego i Nowego Testamentu* z łacińskiego na język polski przełożone przez ks. dra Jakóba Wujka, przedruk z 1599. Lipsk: W. Drugulin, 1898.

<sup>32</sup> *Biblia to jest całe Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu*: z hebrajskiego i greckiego języka na polski pilnie i wiernie przetłumaczone. Warszawa: Brytyjskie i Zagraniczne Towarzystwo Biblijne, 1975. It is common to call the translation Gdansk Bible: Biblia Gdańska, hence Bg. I use also *Biblia Gdańska w systemie Stronga. Stary Testament oraz Wykaz wyrazów i zwrotów polskich w ST Biblii Gdańskiej*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo “Na Straży”, 2004. Digital editions available at <http://www.biblia-online.pl> and in an app for iOS called Biblia (Polish Bible Collection) by PalReader.

<sup>33</sup> *Psalterz w przekładzie Franciszka Karpińskiego*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza “Vocatio”, 2011.

<sup>34</sup> *Psalmi*. Tłum. Izaak Cylkow. Reprint z egz. Michała Galasa. Kraków, Budapeszt: Austeria, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> *Księga Psalmów*. Przeł. z łac. Leopold Staff. Toruń: “Dabar, 1994.

<sup>36</sup> *Psalterz*. Przeł. z hebr. Roman Brandstaetter. Przedm. C. Thomas Merton, tłum. Celina Stoińska. Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1970, 2nd ed.

<sup>37</sup> *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu: w przekładzie z języków oryginalnych*. Oprac. Zespół Biblistów Polskich z inicjatywy Benedyktynów Tynieckich. Eds. Augustyn Jankowski, Lech Stachowiak, Kazimierz Romaniuk; tł. książ Władysław Borowski et al.]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Pallottinum, 1971. Edition 2. cor. This is so called Millenium translation, hence I shortened the title as 1000. This version is available in a digital form too at <http://biblia.deon.pl>.

<sup>38</sup> *Biblia to jest Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu*. Nowy przekład z hebr. i grec. oprac. przez Komisję Przekładu Pisma Świętego. Warszawa: Towarzystwo Biblijne w Polsce, 1994. 20th Edition. Digital editions available at <http://www.biblia-online.pl> and in an app for iOS called Biblia (Polish Bible Collection) by PalReader.

<sup>39</sup> *Księga Psalmów. Tłumaczył z hebrajskiego Czesław Miłosz*. Paris: Éditions du Dialogue, 1981. Also MIŁOSZ, Czesław: *Księga Psalmów*. In: idem: *Księgi biblijne*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2014.

|                 |                     |                 |
|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| 2. twoje dzieci | 2. niemowlęta twoje | 2. twoje dzieci |
|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------|

|                               |                           |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Warsz-pr (1997) <sup>40</sup> | Ekum (2008) <sup>41</sup> |
| 1. roztrzaska                 | 1. roztrzaska             |
| 2. twoje dzieci               | 2. twoje dzieci           |

In my CSA of these Polish texts, I try to identify the dominant cognitive frame to characterize further other possible frames that can be evoked in the interpretation of the Psalm 137 and its cultural complexity. The dominant cognitive architecture is not the only one, every word can refer us to many frames, but what I try to identify in my cognitive analysis is Focalized Referential Cognitive Frame (FRCF). In my hypothesis, in this particular case of CSA of Psalm 137, there are 3 FRCF 1) social – S, 2) bodily – B, and 3) expressive – E.

Social FRCF is activated by expressions about social relations, they are the most abstract lexical items. For instance, if we say “a child” it is a neutral lexical item referring mainly to social and cultural position of the object involved. If we say “little ones”, the slot refers us to the social domain too. But we can also find here a reference to the bodily domain (B) because the focus of our attention is on the scale of the body. And if any expressive linguistic device is present, such as Polish diminutives the CS is referring to the expressive domain or FRCF. Of course, expressive domain (e-FRCF) is quite often connected with the body. However, it is a distinct area, as a face is separate from the rest of our body.

When any given in CS expression refers to any FRCF a value of FRCF is increased by 1.

| FRCF | Lubel PCA = 15 | Bb PCA = 3 | Koch PCA = 3 |
|------|----------------|------------|--------------|
| S    | 3              | 1          | 1            |
| B    | 7              | 1          | 1            |
| E    | 5              | 1          | 1            |

<sup>40</sup> *Biblia Warszawsko-Praska*. Digital edition in an app for iOS called Biblia (Polish Bible Collection) by PalReader, also available at <http://www.biblia-online.pl>.

<sup>41</sup> *Pismo Święte Starego Testamentu. T. 3. Księgi dydaktyczne: przekład ekumeniczny z języków oryginalnych*. Transl. Marek Ambroży et al.; Eds. Mirosław Kiedzik and Krzysztof Bardski, Andrzej Kondracki, Krzysztof Mielcarek. Warszawa: Towarzystwo Biblijne w Polsce, 2008.

The most striking example of my CSA is in Lubel, which is very sophisticated and developed because it is an early poetic paraphrase of Psalms for singing in the church.

So the CSA instead of 2 basic elements in two slots can point out to 15 different devices, quite often synthetic in the Polish language, and impossible to translate into the analytic languages like English.

Lubel FRCF:

S = corki, synaczki, zniszczy

B = młodziuchne, synaczki, zetrze, wniwecz obróci, krew, wyleje, obficie

E = nieboraczki, synaczki, młodziuchne, wniwecz obróci, wyleje tak obficie

| FRCF | Wuj PCA = 2 | Bg PCA = 3 | Karp PCA = 4 |
|------|-------------|------------|--------------|
| S    | 1           | 1          | 1            |
| B    | 1           | 1          | 1            |
| E    | 0           | 1          | 2            |

Karp FRCF

S = syny

B = roztrąci

E = nieszczęsne, syny

| FRCF | Cylk PCA = 2 | Staff PCA = 5 | Brand PCA = 2 |
|------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| S    | 1            | 1             | 1             |
| B    | 1            | 2             | 1             |
| E    | 0            | 2             | 0             |

Staff

S = dziatki

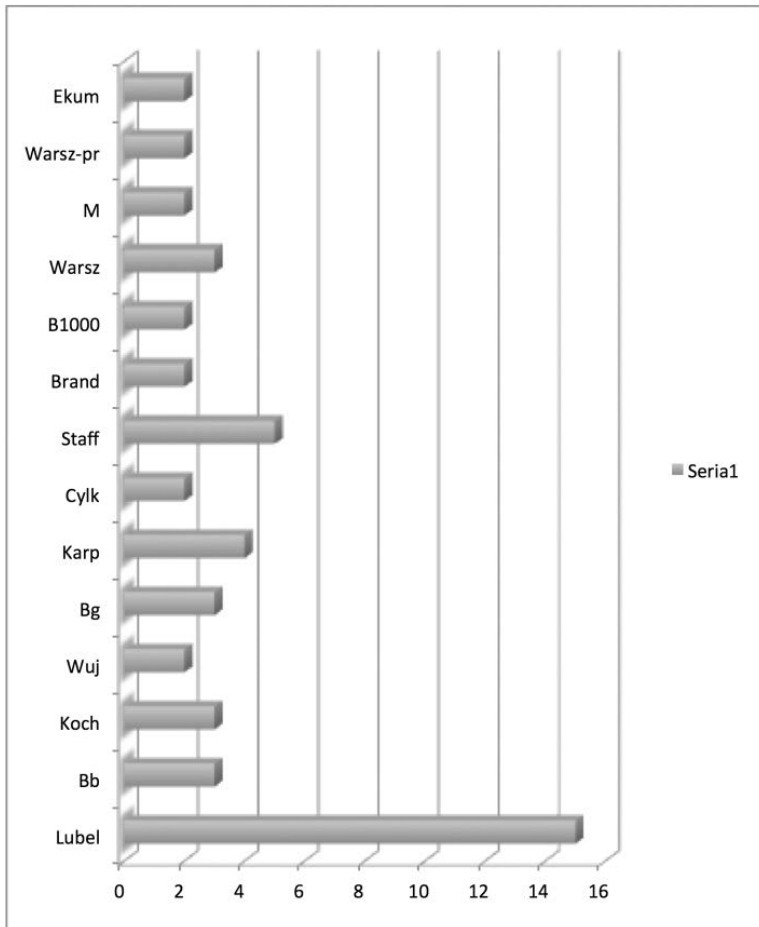
B = roztrzaska, je

E = dziatki, je

| FRCF | B1000 PCA = 2 | Warsz PCA = 3 | M PCA = 2 |
|------|---------------|---------------|-----------|
| S    | 2             | 1             | 1         |
| B    | 0             | 2             | 1         |
| E    | 0             | 0             | 0         |

| FRCF | Warsz-Pr PCA = 2 | Ekum PCA = 2 |
|------|------------------|--------------|
| S    | 1                | 1            |
| B    | 1                | 1            |
| E    | 0                | 0            |

To interpret the data further I sum up all the numbers, and this gives us a parameter that I call a PCA: parameter of cultural archaism.



Tab. 1 Parameter of cultural archaism (PCA) of the Polish translations of the Psalm 137 since 1558 till 2008



If the  $PCA > 2$  it is easy to infer that the authors of the renderings were not afraid of using many sensual elements and drastic imagery. The reasons for that can be various, and it is not my task to interpret this. However, if we focus on PCA in English translations, it is obvious that this PCA of the texts vary to a lesser degree than in Polish versions because of the nature of the languages.

We can see that the most traditional English reformed translation KJV has PCA equal 5 because it uses

S = little ones

B = little ones, ones, dashes

E = dashes (simple present tense)

But the most striking is that BayPB has even more  $PCA = 7$

S = little ones

B = into pieces, braeke, little, little ones

E = doth, doth (simple present tense)

We have to realise that in this particular case an expression ‘little ones’ is a synthetic construction. It refers to social status of children but at the same time it displays the body of the objects and, at the same time, the bodily saliency of the “ones”. And emphatic ‘doth’ stresses the expressive value of the referred action.

| FRCF | Wycliffe PCA = 3 | KJV PCA = 5 | BayPB <sup>42</sup> PCA = 7 |
|------|------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| S    | 1                | 1           | 1                           |
| B    | 2                | 3           | 4                           |
| E    | 0                | 1           | 1                           |

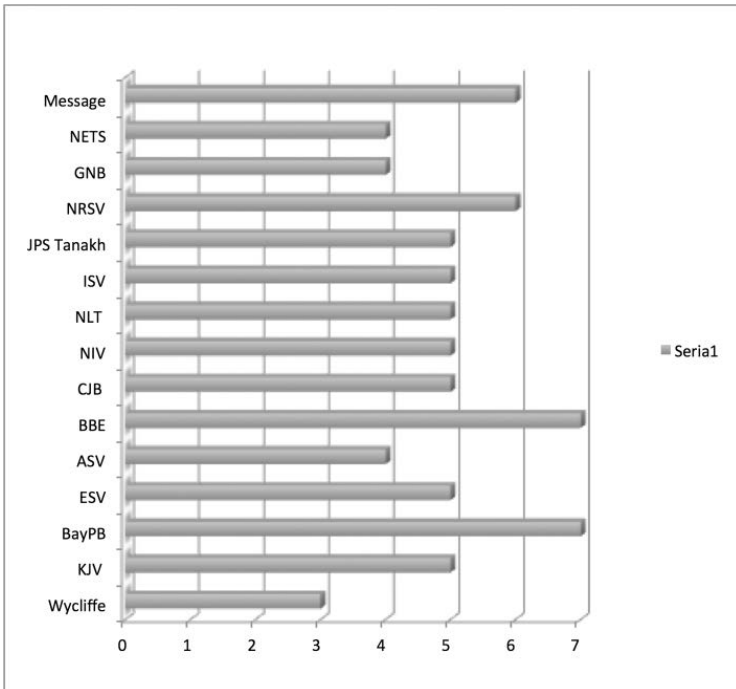
| FRCF | ESV PCA = 5 | ASV PCA = 4 | BBE PCA = 7 |
|------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| S    | 1           | 1           | 1           |
| B    | 4           | 3           | 4           |
| V    | 0           | 0           | 2           |

<sup>42</sup> MACCULLOCH, Diarmaid: *The Bay Psalm Book: A Facsimile*. New York and Oxford: Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, 2015.

| FRCF | CJB PCA = 5 | NIV PCA = 5 | NLT PCA = 5 |
|------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| S    | 1           | 1           | 1           |
| B    | 3           | 3           | 3           |
| E    | 1           | 1           | 1           |

| FRCF | ISV PCA = 5 | JPS Tanakh PCA = 5 | NRSV PCA = 6 |
|------|-------------|--------------------|--------------|
| S    | 1           | 1                  | 1            |
| B    | 3           | 3                  | 4            |
| E    | 1           | 1                  | 1            |

| FRCF | GNB PCA = 4 | NETS PCA = 4 | Message PCA = 6 |
|------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|
| S    | 1           | 1            | 1               |
| B    | 3           | 3            | 4               |
| E    | 0           | 0            | 1               |



Tab. 2. Parameter of Cultural Archaism of 15 select English translations of the vers 9 in Psalm 137 from 1382 to 2007

From the comparison of Polish and English translations of the Psalm 137, one can infer that, in English translations, a grammatical device suggesting present tense is almost a standard. In the Polish examples, the dominant grammatical tense is the future tense. Anyway, the most striking translations in English would be BayBP, BBE, NRSV and Message which is not very surprising because they are supposed to be the most common, the most essential and the least elegant. One of the most striking fact is that we have also  $PCA = 5$  as the standard value which is quite high especially if we take into account that  $PCA$  of KJV is equal to 5 and it has been the most influential English translation ever.

As far as Polish translations are concerned, it is no wonder that  $PCA > 2$  is strong among the translations and paraphrases from the Reformation period: Lubel, Bb, Koch, Bg, always Protestant either formally or spiritually.

Later poetical translations of Karp and Staff are also understandable because they are poetical, so to speak. And it is striking that Warsz also has  $PCA = 3$  and it is the most prevailing Protestant contemporary translation in Poland.

To summarize: my main claim so far is that translations of verse 9 of Psalm 137 vary in one particular respect which I call  $PCA$ . My additional claim is that the reason for the difference is the relationship of the translations to the epic as a genre. In other words, in translations which  $PCA > 2$ , the engagement of psalms as genre with the epic is more visible than in other translations. I do claim that psalms are relating themselves both to the lyric and to the epic.

## 5. The Epic Characteristics of the Psalms

From the beginning of my article, I have argued that psalms are mainly lyrical as a genre, that even they are lyrical through and through, especially that Psalm 137 is such. I would not like to argue now that they are epic in the same way as they are lyrical. However, we should bear in mind that there is a story about the mythological author of the psalms which is quite relevant also in relationship to some elements in the literary form of the psalms. The story goes that: “*DAVID ... [Heb dāwīd (דָּוִד)]. Israel's second and greatest king, David rose to power from humble circumstances and amid many difficulties; he captured Jerusalem, established it as his capital, unified the nation, and built an empire that stretched from Egypt to Mesopotamia during a 40-year reign, ca. 1010–970 b. c. e. He was*

*a man of many talents – a shepherd, musician, poet, warrior, politician, administrator – but he is most prominent as the king par excellence, as the standard for all later kings, and as a messianic symbol.*<sup>43</sup> Davidic means also epic because it is a long story and a narrative, which affirms the society of the main hero. King David is a hero, par excellence, who has a lot of common traits with superheroes and with warriors and their ethos. King David is a legendary hero, and he is a hero which did many great legendary deeds. The scenarios from his life form one of the basic cognitive frames of the psalms as the genre. It is impossible to understand psalms without understanding so-called royal psalms like Psalm 2, 45 and 110. But this is the only superficial truth about the epic character of the psalm. Because there are many places that refer to either the Babylonian exile or to Exodus as an act of liberation from slavery. The scenarios form a grand narrative about the liberation of a nation, and the scenarios very often refer to the liberation and salvation of an individual. The fundamental character of the release (salvation) is quite physical. Even the Christian mode of reading psalms in the light of Jesus Christ and his story of salvation makes sense only when referring to the archetypal story of liberation presented in Exodus.

I would not like to sound as if I argued that Psalms are epic in the primary sense of Gilgamesh or Iliad. But without epic grand narrative of liberation of the nation of Israel Psalms cannot be read with proper understanding.

I agree with a claim by John N. Oswalt who writes:

”Thus, the Septuagint did us something of a disservice in separating books of history from books of prophecy, because it allowed us to imagine that historical experience and prophecy really can be separated in Israel.

So also the poetic books, as part of the canon, are a reflection on Israel’s life with the God of the fathers, who was revealed to them in their historical experience as Yahweh. Why do Israel’s psalms, which at their lowest level overlap Canaanite expressions at their highest level rise from that point to something radically different from anything else in ancient Near Eastern hymnic literature? What explanation would the Israelites give? Surely they would say to us, “Ah, this is the Yahweh who has revealed himself to us in our historic experience.” By no means would they say to us, “Well, we have a certain genius for doing praise

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<sup>43</sup> *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Ed. David Noel Freedman. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 1992. In: OTBSA.

in fresh ways.” It is Israel’s unique experiences in time and space that accounts for the book of Psalms.”<sup>44</sup>

I also agree with Northrop Frye who wrote about an U structure of a development of narrative in the Bible. And this U structure repeats a structure of liberation, which is primary individual and secondary can be applied to a nation. He claims that the best examples of psalms in this respect are Psalms 126 and 137 and the royal psalms. And in Psalm 81 we have very explicit reference to Exodus and the crucial part: “Hear, O my people, and I will testify unto thee: O Israel, if thou wilt hearken unto me;/ There shall no strange god be in thee; neither shalt thou worship any strange god./ I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt [...]” According to Frye, the narrative structure of the entire Bible, with Old and New Testament, is a myth on liberation. I cannot refuse this claim.<sup>45</sup>

In the light of this particular general claim, I would like to repeat what I have already summarised at the end of the previous section of this article: my central claim is that translations of verse 9 of Psalm 137 vary in one particular respect. And this I call PCA. My additional claim is that the reason for the difference is the relationship of the translations to the epic as genre. In other words, in translations which  $PCA > 2$ , the engagement of psalms as genre with the epic is more visible than in other translations. I do claim that psalms are relating themselves both to the lyric and to the epic. And the translations with  $PCA > 2$  are more engaged with the epic story and narrative about liberation. In this context, one can suppose that this PCA would correlate with a PCA visible in naming Psalms by the name “Psalms of David”: contemporary editions rarely use the term because everybody knows that among 150 Psalms maybe half of the set is not written by David. Some scholars would argue that even those psalms which are claimed to be written by him are not authentic. But the problem is not in authorship and authenticity but in generic or genre characterization. Boney M. would not sing verse

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<sup>44</sup> OSWALT, John A.: *The Bible among the Myths*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009. ePub Edition, Chapter 8: *Does it Matter Whether the Bible is Historical? The Problem of History* (2).

<sup>45</sup> FRYE, Northrop Frye: *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. New York, NY: Mariner Books, 2002. I am using here a Polish edition FRYE, Northrop: *Wielki Kod. Biblia i literatura*. Transl. Agnieszka Fulińska, ed. Michał Paweł Markowski. Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Homini, 1998. Frye writes: *Najłatwiej to dostrzec w mitach o wyzwoleniu, ale przecież centralnym mitem Biblii, z jakiegokolwiek punktu widzenia ją czytamy, jest właśnie mit o wyzwoleniu*. s. 77.

9 of the Psalm 137 because there are cultural obstacles in accepting the archaic elements of the past culture. There is a blockage stemming from many sources; it is quite easy to identify at least three blocking narratives which prevent us from triggering the story of liberation in the archaic form: New Testament stories, the generic cognitive frame of the lyric, and domination of pacifism in the 20th and at the beginning of 21st century.

## 6. Re-definition of the Psalm 137

Then, how we should re-define Psalm 137 and its relationship to the genre characteristics? It is quite easy to see the PAV of mourning and grief in the text forming from the beginning a sub-genre called a communal lament.<sup>46</sup> The lament is noticeable in a body domain of the singers who “sat” and “wept” and it is apparent in a melancholic image of the rivers of Babylon and nostalgic mention of Zion in the first verse of the poem. The instruments hang on the poplars. The setting is quite powerful. So the main CF of singing with joy, expressing gratitude and blessing (praise) is present here by negation. So-called “Sitz im Leben” is a communal lament of a nation in exile. But the other CF is triggered by “captors” and “tormentors” already in verse 3. A strong presupposition multiplies this epic CF: the presupposition that forgetting Jerusalem is wrong, and that loyalty to the land of Zion is good. And since verse 7 there are other significant elements connected with epic fight: destroying, tearing down, falling of Jerusalem, crying, destruction. So the epic CF is prevailing in introducing another PAV that is revenge and anger. “This psalm is notable for the ferocity of its final wish (v. 9). This is a vivid application of the principle of talion, the principle that punishment should match the crime (Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:23–24).”<sup>47</sup> We should take into account that blood revenge was not at odds in the ancient times. And especially blood revenge on children was not strange: “the vile practice of destroying the infants of a conquered people is well-attested in the ancient world (e. g., 2 Kings 8:12; Hos. 10:14; 13:16; Nah. 3:10; Homer’s *Iliad* 22. 63).”<sup>48</sup> With this particular scenario – a CF with events – we enter a broader CF of epic fight: the infants are just

<sup>46</sup> *ESV Study Bible Notes*. In: OTBSA. Op. cit.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*.

a prop in this particular frame. And just the act of “dashing the babies” is a trigger of a broader CF: the epic grand narrative of liberation (and revenge). In the setting of CF of a grand epic narrative in some translations FRCF B and E are stronger in verse 9 to evoke more vividly that grand narrative. The reasons for that more definite FRCF B and E may vary. But more detailed explanation cannot be given here. And it is obvious that, in popular culture, Boney M. could not use the grand epic CF in the explicit way. It could just allude to it. Pop songs are straight in one PAV. Complexity is not the domain of popular culture. Psalm 137 has a very strong nostalgic PAV combined with an epic PAV of blood revenge. From the contemporary perspective, it forms a very complex and hard to grasp texture because the present CFs connected with the lyric are very different from the ancient ones connected with the psalms.

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