THE BOOK OF NAHUM AS
A LITURGICAL COMPOSITION: A PROSODIC ANALYSIS

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Since Robert Lowth's famous lectures on Hebrew poetry in the eighteenth century, the book of Nahum has been held in high esteem with respect to its poetic quality.[1] Hence my comment on another occasion: "In its poetic form the book of Nahum has no superior within the prophetic literature of the OT."[2] Moreover, as Aage Bentzen argued some years ago, "the book as a whole has in all likelihood been shaped into its present form for use as a liturgy for the celebration of Assyria's overthrow."[3] It is thus a bit surprising to see how little attention the book has received from a prosodic point of view.[4]

Apart from the acrostic hymn in chap. 1, Nahum has not received its due within the mainstream of Biblical research. If it was composed as a cultic liturgy in ancient Israel, it should be a useful text for testing theories of Hebrew prosody—perhaps as useful as Lamentations or even the Psalms.[5] My attention was drawn to this little book by a request to write a commentary on Nahum for the *Harper's Bible Commentary*. What was found when the entire book was subjected to detailed prosodic analysis is indeed interesting. Like the Song of Songs, the book of Nahum displays a remarkable structure—intricate in its detail, with repeated metrical refrains and almost perfect symmetry in terms of total mora-count and syntactic-accentual stress units.[6]

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[1] R. Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (Boston, 1815), sec. 281. I owe this citation to C. F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949 reprint), 2. 7.

[2] See D. L. Christensen, "Nahum, the Book of," in *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (ed. P. J. Achtemeier; San Francisco: Harper, 1985) 681.

[3] This citation is taken from S. J. De Vries, "The Acrostic of Nahum in the Jerusalem Liturgy," *VT* 16 (1966) 476.

[4] The most important recent studies of Nahum are K. J. Cathcart, *Nahum in the Light of Northwest Semitic* (BibOr 26; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1973); H. Schulz, *Das Buch Nahum: Eine redaktionskritische Untersuchung* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973). On the study of the acrostic in Nahum 1 see D. L. Christensen, "The Acrostic of Nahum Reconsidered," *ZAW* 87 (1975) 17-30; "The Acrostic of Nahum Once Again: A Prosodic Analysis of Nahum 1,1-10," *ZAW* (forthcoming).

[5] The book of Lamentations is the focus of a monograph on Hebrew prosody to be published shortly by D. N. Freedman. Acrostic poems have long been the focus of attention for testing theories of Hebrew prosody.

[6] My work on the Song of Songs was presented to the Biblical Hebrew Poetry Section of SBL in Anaheim, California (November 25, 1985).

The method of analysis used here is discussed in detail elsewhere.[7] Here it is sufficient to note that the method combines the counting of morae (subdivisions of the syllable) and syntactic-accentual stresses, along lines described by the Polish linguist Jerzy Kurylowicz.[8] Morae are units of length in time and hence are useful in assessing relative length of poetic units, from that of individual phrases (and even single words) to much larger structural entities that sometimes display remarkable parallels in terms of total mora-count.[9] The distribution of syntactic-accentual stresses, on the other hand, seems to be an approximation to rhythmic beat as such and hence displays regular patterns that include repetition of "metrical refrains" and a tendency to "nest" strophic units within larger concentric structures sometimes called palistrophes.[10]

The recent work of Suzanne Haïk Vantoura suggests that we may be approaching that time when we can reconstruct, with some confidence, the musical aspect of the original performance of the Biblical text.[11] As Thrasybulos Georgiades has shown for classical Greek, music and language are not separate categories in the study of ancient texts:

> For the ancient Greeks, music existed primarily as verse. The Greek verse line was a linguistic and simultaneously a musical reality. The connecting element, common to both language and music, was rhythm. A verse line in a modern Western language—German, for example—can, to be sure, establish an order in the succession of accents which, proceeding from language, is also binding for the music. . . . It cannot, however, by itself determine all aspects of the musical rhythm. For this Western verse line is not a musical but rather a linguistic form. For that reason it can be set to music in various ways. . . . The ancient Greek verse line behaved differently. Here the musical rhythm was contained within the language itself.[12]

A somewhat analogous situation apparently existed for ancient Hebrew. The rhythmic structure of the Biblical text is reflected in the Masoretic accentual system, which incidentally is still used to present that text in a musical form within the various canting traditions. A careful examination of this rhythmic structure has much to contribute in terms of understanding the meaning of the text as well.

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[7] See D. L. Christensen, "Prose and Poetry in the Bible: The Narrative Poetics of Deuteronomy 1,9–18," *ZAW* 97 (1985) 179–189; "The Song of Jonah: A Metrical Analysis," *JBL* 104 (1985) 217–231.

[8] J. Kurylowicz, *Studies in Semitic Grammar and Metrics* (London: Curzon, 1973); *Metrik und Sprachgeschichte* (Wroclaw: Z. Narodowy, 1975). For a convenient summary and illustration of this approach see T. Longman, "A Critique of Two Recent Metrical Systems," *Bib* 63 (1982) 230–254.

[9] See my discussion of Zeph 2:14–15 in *CBQ* 46 (1984) 675–677; Deuteronomy 33 in *Bib* 65 (1984) 388; Deut 1:9–18 in *ZAW* 97 (1985) 187–188.

[10] The most striking example of this phenomenon found so far was presented in a symposium on the Song of Songs at the SBL meetings in Anaheim (November 25, 1985); see n. 6 above.

[11] S. H. Vantoura, *La Musique de la Bible Révélée* (Paris: Dessain et Tolra, 1970).

[12] T. Georgiades, *Music and Language: The Rise of Western Music as Exemplified in Settings of the Mass* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982) 4.

In the translation and analysis that follows, the first column of figures in the right margin indicates the mora-count of that line, which is simply the syllable count plus one additional unit for each long vowel. The second column lists the number of syntactic-accentual units, which for the most part coincides with the disjunctive marks in the Masoretic accentual system. The boundary of such metrical units in the translation is marked by a slash (/), with a double slash (//) for both *ʾatnāḥ* and *sillûq*. The triple slash (///) marks the presence of the *sětûmâ* and *pětûḥâ* paragraph markers in the Masoretic tradition. The horizontal lines in the two columns indicate the boundaries of larger groupings of metrical units, which suggest that the familiar concept of parallelism in Hebrew poetry can be demonstrated quantitatively, and that parallelism is operating on a number of levels simultaneously. One aspect of this phenomenon can be called "parallelism at a distance" as shown by the distribution of syntactic-accentual stress units, which tend to "nest" within concentric configurations.

Nahum: Prosodic Analysis[13]

1:1	An oracle / concerning Nineveh //	8	2	
	A book of vision / of Nahum / the Elkoshite //	16	3	
:2	A jealous and punishing God (El) / is Yahweh /	10	2	9
	Punishment Yahweh metes out /	7	1	
	yea, (he is) a Lord (Baal) of wrath //	8	1	
	Punishment Yahweh metes out / against his foes /	12	2	4
	Yea, he stores up (fury) / for his enemies //	13	2	
1:3	Yahweh (is) / slow to anger / but immense in power /	16	3	5
	And he will surely not leave the guilty /			
	unpunished //	10	2	
	Yahweh /	3	1	
	in the whirlwind and in the storm / (is) his way /	15	2	5
	Yea, clouds / (are) the dust of his feet //	10	2	
1:4	He rebukes the Sea / and he dries it up /	12	2	
	Yea, all the rivers / he desiccates //	12	2	8
	It languishes (that is) Bashan / and Carmel /	12	2	
	Yea, the green of Lebanon / languishes //	12	2	

[13] The omission of disjunctive accents in 3:2, 8, 14 is indicated in the translation by means of a blank space. The mark : in 1:14, 2:12, 3:13 indicates the addition of a disjunctive accent, in each instance where *ʾazlāʾ* is followed by an accent other than *gereš*. Notes to the text: (a) taking the *hē*-article with the previous word and repointing as *wattiššāʾeh* from the root *šʾh*, "crash into ruins," rather than the root *nśʾ* of MT; (b) deleting the *waw* conjunction as dittography to improve the metrical balance and meaning within the presumed cipher (see discussion below); (c) reading *yizzākěrû* (cf. LXX *kai mnēsthēsontai*); (d) adding the *waw* conjunction; (e) reading *ʿammēk* with BHS for MT *ʿim* (cf. 3:13), the *kap* apparently dropping out by haplography.

:5	Mountains / quake before him /	13	2	4
	Yea, the hills / melt away //	<u>14</u>	2	
	And the earth crashes (in ruins)a / before him /	13	2	4
	Yea, the world / and all who dwell in it //	<u>14</u>	2	
:6	In the presence of his fury / who can stand? /	12	2	
	Yea, who can endure / his burning anger? //	15	2	8
	His wrath / is poured out like fire /	13	2	
	Yea, the rocks / are broken asunder by him //	<u>13</u>	2	
1:7	Good is Yahweh /	5	1	
	indeed, a stronghold / in the day of trouble //	12	2	5
	Yea, he knows / those who take refuge in him //	11	2	
:8	[ ]In the passing floodb /	7	1	
	a full end / he will make of her place //	12	2	5
	Yea, his enemies / he will pursue into darkness //	<u>12</u>	<u>2</u>	
1:9	What will you (pl.) devise / against Yahweh? /	10	2	4
	A full end / he himself will make //	<u>10</u>	2	
	It will not arise a second time / (namely) distress //	14	2	
:10	For / (you will become) like entangled thorns /	12	2	
	And (though you are) like sodden / drunkards //	12	2	9
	Consumed (you will be) / like dry stubble /			
	completely //	<u>14</u>	<u>3</u>	
1:11	From you (f. sg. = Nineveh) has one come forth /	7	1	
	Plotting against Yahweh / evil //	12	2	5
	Counseling / wickedness ///	10	2	
:12	Thus / says Yahweh /	8	2	
	"Though they are unscathed / and so numerous /	<u>12</u>	2	
	Even so they shall be cut off / and it shall be over //	13	2	9
	And though I have afflicted you (f. sg. = Judah) /	5	1	
	I will afflict you / no more //	<u>8</u>	2	
:13	And now / I will break his yoke / from upon you //	19	3	5
	And your bonds / I will burst asunder" //	13	2	
:14	Yahweh / has commanded concerning you (m. sg. = king) /	11	2	
	"Your name will not survive / any more //	11	2	
	From the house of your gods /	8	1	9
	I will cut off the graven image : and the cast idol /	12	2	
	I will prepare your grave / for you are fickle" ///	<u>13</u>	<u>2</u>	
2:1	Behold, on the mountains /	9	1	
	the feet of the bearer of good news /	7	1	5
	The one who proclaims peace /	8	1	
	Celebrate, O Judah / your festivals /	12	2	

Fulfill your vows //	10	1	
For never again / shall the villainous one invade you /	21	2	4
He is utterly cut off //	6	1	

2:2 A shatterer has come up / against you (f. sg. = Nineveh) /	13	2	
Man the ramparts //	8	1	7
Watch the road / brace yourselves /	11	2	
Marshal your strength / exceedingly //	9	2	

2:3 For Yahweh is restoring / the majesty of Jacob /	15	2	
like the majesty / of Israel //	8	2	8
For plunderers / have plundered them /	12	2	
And their vines / they have ruined //	12	2	

2:4 The shield of his mighty men / is reddened /	15	2	
(His) warriors / are clad in scarlet /	11	2	
Like fire (are) the iron fittings of the chariot /	12	1	8
on the day they are made ready //	8	1	
Yea, the pine spears / are brandished //	12	2	
:5 In the streets / the chariot storms /	15	2	4
They rush to and fro / in the squares //	12	2	
They gleam / like flaming torches /	10	2	4
Like lightning / they dart about //	13	2	
:6 They are summoned[c] / his picked troops /	11	2	
They stumble / as they go //	13	2	8
They hasten / to her walls /	10	2	
And it is set up / the mantelet //	9	2	

2:7 The gates of the rivers / are opened //	15	2	
And the palace / collapses //	10	2	
:8 It is determined / she will be carried away in exile //	14	2	8
her maidens / lamenting /	12	2	
Moaning like doves / beating / their breasts //	18	3	
:9 Yea, Nineveh / (is) like a pool of water /	12	2	7
her waters — //	5	1	
Yea, they are draining away /	9	1	

"Stop! Stop!" (they cry) / but none turns back //	14	2	4
:10 Plunder the silver / plunder the gold //	14	2	
Yea, there is no end / to the treasure /	12	2	5
(The) wealth / from all / its precious vessels //	13	3	

2:11 Desolation and devastation / and destruction //	19	2	
And hearts faint /	7	1	4
And knees give way /	7	1	

And anguish / is in all loins /	11	2
And all their faces / grow pale //	<u>16</u>	<u>2</u>

(braces → 4)

2:12	Where / is the lion's den /	11	2
	Yea, that place where they fed / their young //	<u>11</u>	2

(braces → 4)

	Where the lion ⟨and⟩d lioness went : there /	15	2
	(And the) cubs / (with) none to disturb //	12	2
:13	(The) lion tore / sufficient for his cubs /	16	2
	And strangled prey / for his lionesses //	<u>12</u>	2

(braces → 8)

	And he filled his caves with prey /	10	1
	And his dens / with torn flesh //	14	2
:14	Behold, I am against you (f. sg. = Nineveh) /	7	1
	utterance / of Yahweh of hosts /	11	2
	And I will burn in smoke / her chariots /	<u>13</u>	2

(braces → 8)

	And your young lions / the sword will devour //	13	2
	And I will cut off from the land / your prey /	<u>12</u>	<u>2</u>

(braces → 4)

	And it will be heard no more /	9	1
	the voice of your messengers ///	9	1
3:1	Alas / bloody city // all of it /	<u>10</u>	3

(braces → 5)

	(With) lying (and) pillage / (it is) full /	9	2
	Never without / prey //	<u>9</u>	2

(braces → 4)

3:2	The sound of whips / and the sound of rattling wheels //	13	2
	And horses galloping / and chariots / jolting //	20	3

(braces → 5)

3:3	Horsemen charging / and flashing sword /	13	2
	and glittering spear /	7	1
	And hosts of slain / and heaps of dead bodies //	<u>14</u>	2
	Yea, there is no end / to the corpses /	12	2
	They stumble / over their corpses //	<u>13</u>	2

(braces → 9)

:4	Because of the countless / harlotries of the harlot /	13	2
	Graceful / (is) the mistress of sorceries //	<u>13</u>	2

(braces → 4)

	The enslaver of nations / by her harlotry /	14	2
	And families / by her witchcraft //	<u>13</u>	2

(braces → 4)

:5	Behold I am against you /	7	1
	utterance / of Yahweh of hosts /	10	2
	And I will lift your skirt / over your face //	<u>16</u>	2
	And I will show nations / your nakedness /	12	2
	And kingdoms / your shame //	<u>12</u>	<u>2</u>

(braces → 9)

3:6	I will pelt you / with filth /	14	2
	And I will treat you with contempt //	5	1
	And make you / a spectacle //	<u>9</u>	2

(braces → 5)

3:7	And it shall be that anyone who sees you /	10	1	
	He will flee from you / and he will say /	10	2	4
	"Nineveh is in ruins /	10	1	
	Who / will mourn for her?" //	8	2	
	Whence / shall I seek comforters / for you? //	15	3	5
3:8	Are you better / than Thebes /	13	2	
	The one who dwells / on the Nile? /	11	2	4
	Water is round about her //	8	1	
	Whose rampart is the sea /	6	1	4
	Sea (forms) / her wall //	9	2	
3:9	Cush was her strength / and Egypt / is without number //	16	3	6
	Put and Libya / they were / among her allies //	17	3	
:10	Yet she / was taken captive /	8	2	
	She went into exile /	9	1	
	Her infants also / were dashed to pieces /	13	2	8
	At the head of all the streets //	8	1	
	And for her nobles / lots were cast /	14	2	
	And all her grandees / were bound in chains //	16	2	
:11	You also will become drunk / may you become / obscured //	15	3	8
	You also / shall seek refuge / from your enemy //	16	3	
:12	All your fortresses / (are like) fig trees /	11	2	
	⟨Your⟩e people are early figs //	8	1	6
	When they are shaken / they fall /	12	2	
	into the mouth of the eater //	7	1	
3:13	Behold your people : (they are) women /	10	2	
	in your midst / to your enemies /	10	2	4
	Wide open / are the gates of your land //	16	2	4
	Fire has consumed / your bars //	13	2	
3:14	Water for the siege / draw for yourselves /	12	2	
	Strengthen your defenses // go into the clay /	17	2	8
	And tread the mortar / make strong the brick-kiln //	17	2	
:15	There / the fire will devour you /	9	2	
	The sword will cut you off /	7	1	
	It will devour you / like the locust //	9	2	6
	Multiply like the locust /	7	1	
	Multiply / like the grasshopper //	10	2	
3:16	You have increased / your merchants /	8	2	
	More than the stars / of the heavens //	12	2	6
	A locust spreads its wing / and flies away //	10	2	

:17	Your princes / are like grasshoppers /	11 2	} 4
	Your captains / are like locusts upon locusts //	12 2	
	That settle in the walls / on a cold day /	{ 18 2	} 4
	The sun shines forth / and they fly away /	{ _11_ 2	
	And their place is not known / where are they? //	14 2	
:18	Your (m. sg. = king) shepherds are asleep /	8 1	} 6
	O king of Assyria / they slumber / your nobles //	_15_ _3_	
	Your people are scattered / upon the mountains /	{ 14 2	
	And there is none to gather them //	{ 7 1	} 6
3:19	There is no assuaging your hurt /	{ 10 1	
	It is grievous / your wound //	{ 8 2	
	All / who hear the news of you /	{ 9 2	
	They clap their hands / over you /	{ 10 2	} 8
	For / upon whom / has not come your evil /	{ 17 3	
	unceasingly? ///	{ _4_ _1_	

The following table presents a summary of the prosodic structure of the book of Nahum. Italicized units indicate repeated metrical refrains discussed in detail below.

Accentual Stress Units and Mora-Count

|	Distribution	# Stress Units		# Morae	
1:1–10	/9:4/5:5/8:4:4:8/5:5/4:9/	= 70		414	
1:11–14	/5:9:5:9/	= 28	} 170	162	} 1036
2:1–10	/5:4/7:8/8:4:4:8/8:7/4:5/	= 72		460	
2:11	/4:4/	= 8		60	
2:12–14a	/4:8:8:4/	= 24		157	
2:14b–3:7	/5:4/5:9/4:4/9:5/4:5/	= 54	} 170	329	} 1038
3:8–13	/4:4/6:8:8:6/4:4/	= 44		266	
3:14–19	/8:6/6:4:4:6/6:8/	= 48		286	

In terms of total length in mora-count and syntactic-accentual stress units, the book of Nahum falls into two equal halves, which frame 2:11—a verse that numerous commentators have described as a summation of the book itself in its portrayal of the plight of Nineveh:

Desolation and devastation / and destruction //
And hearts faint / and knees give way /
And anguish / is in all loins /
And all their faces / grow pale //

Nahum 1:1–2:10 is the same length as 2:12–3:19 in terms of both accentual stress units (170//170) and mora-count (1036//1038). The situation is

remarkably similar to that of the Song of Songs, which also consists of two equal halves that frame a coda at the center of the book.[14] In both cases the content of the coda is central to the message of the composition as a whole.

The /8:4:4:8/ unit at the center of the opening metrical unit in 1:1-10 is found again at the center of another configuration in 2:1-10, and once more in its variant form /4:8:8:4/ as the opening section of the second half of the book in 2:12-14a.

1:1-10   /9:4/5:5/8:4:4:8/5:5/4:9/

2:1-10   /5:4/7:8/8:4:4:8/8:7/4:5/

2:12-14a   /4:8:8:4/
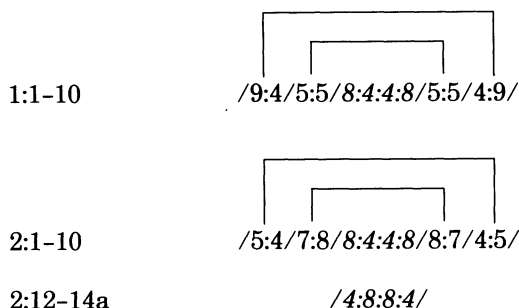
In terms of mora-count the three occurrences of /8:4:4:8/ are 155, 151 and 157 morae respectively.

In each of the major sections of the book of Nahum the Hebrew text appears to be arranged metrically according to concentric patterns in terms of the distribution of accentual stress units. The situation is similar for much of Deuteronomy,[15] the book of Jonah[16] and the Song of Songs.[17] Deuteronomy 12-14 includes repetition of some of the same metrical units found here in the book of Nahum, in particular the configurations /4:8:8:4/ (four times) and /6:4:4:6/ (four times). The Song of Songs has a threefold repetition of the units /8:4:4:8/ and /6:4:4:6/ in a carefully structured manner that is remarkably similar to that observed here in Nahum.[18]

Of the five minor textual emendations suggested in the above prosodic analysis, two are found in 1:1-10. In my 1975 study of this same text eleven emendations were suggested for 1:3-8 alone. It may be, as a

[14] See n. 6 above.

[15] See D. L. Christensen, "Two Stanzas of a Hymn in Deuteronomy 33," *Bib* 65 (1984) 382-389; "The *Numeruswechsel* in Deuteronomy 12," *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division A: The Period of the Bible (Jerusalem, 1986) 61-68; "New Evidence for the Priestly Redaction of Deuteronomy," *ZAW* (forthcoming). Evidence for the entire book will be presented in my commentary on Deuteronomy in the *Word Biblical Commentary* (forthcoming).

[16] D. L. Christensen, "The Song of Jonah," *JBL* 104 (1985) 224-225; "Andrzej Panufnik and the Structure of the Book of Jonah: Icons, Music and Literary Art," *JETS* 28 (1985) 133-140; "Narrative Poetics and the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah," *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTSup, 1986).

[17] See n. 6 above.

[18] Ibid.

number of scholars have argued on other grounds, that an acrostic hymn was a source in the hands of the author of this liturgical composition and not the actual composition of the author/editor. If so, most of the emendations previously suggested are unnecessary. The changes are deliberate alterations on the part of the author and not scribal errors in the transmission of the text. In particular, the absence of the *dālet* line in the acrostic is intentional, as A. S. van der Woude has suggested.[19] An original acrostic poem has been altered slightly to produce an acrostic sentence from the initial elements of respective lines, which van der Woude has reconstructed as follows: *ʾny YHWH bgʾh wlpny ḥtyk*, "I am YHWH, the Exalted One, and (I am) confronting those who sin against you."[20] Such a reading would also explain why the *zayin* line begins with *lpny*. If these initial letters of the individual lines were chosen deliberately, as van der Woude has argued, "it follows also that they are a literary composition from the outset, since the peculiarity of the text would remain unnoticed if spoken publicly."[21] Musicians at other points in time have also made use of structural features in their compositions that would not be evident to the casual listener.[22]

If the above prosodic analysis is correct, the Hebrew text of the Masoretic tradition is remarkably well preserved—as is the case also for the Song of Songs. The reason for the absence of any serious textual corruptions is probably the simple fact that we are dealing with a rhythmic, musical composition. It is the musical rhythm to which the text was sung that served to preserve the text itself in its original form.

The rather elegant metrical structure of the book of Nahum revealed in this study argues strongly for the musical performance of this text within the cultic life of ancient Israel, much like the Song of Songs. In short, the book is indeed a liturgical composition. It is the day of Yahweh, as both F. C. Fensham and Kevin Cathcart have noted,[23] that provides the original setting for the book of Nahum. The holy war in ancient Israel, particularly in the premonarchic period, was a celebrated event, which F. M. Cross has described as the "ritual conquest."[24] The exodus-conquest

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[19] A. S. van der Woude, "The Book of Nahum: A Letter Written in Exile," *OTS* 20 (1977) 108-126.

[20] Ibid. 123. The sentence here is a slightly modified version of that suggested by van der Woude. For a more detailed discussion see D. L. Christensen, "The Book of Nahum: The Question of Authorship Within the Canonical Process," *JETS* 31 (March 1988) 51-58.

[21] Ibid.

[22] J. Bach inserted his own name in some of his works by means of a numerical code based on the order of the alphabet. A. Panufnik structured an entire symphony around the figure eight, creating in music what he saw visually in the Black Madonna of Czestochowa; see Christensen, "Andrzej Panufnik" 133-134.

[23] F. C. Fensham, "Legal Activities of the Lord According to Nahum," *Biblical Essays 1969: OTWSA* 12 (1969) 13-20; K. J. Cathcart, "The Divine Warrior and the War of Yahweh in Nahum," in *Biblical Studies in Contemporary Thought* (ed. M. Ward; Trinity College Biblical Institute; Greeno, Hadden, 1978) 68-76.

[24] F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1973) 99-111.

of the past was projected into the present and the future in cultic celebration, within the festal life of ancient Israel. The book of Nahum, like much of the so-called oracles against foreign nations in the prophetic literature of the OT,[25] is to be understood within this holy war tradition. Cathcart has described the situation rather well:

> In Nahum, *ʾl nqm*, "the avenging God," is the one who carries out the curses as punishment of the Assyrians, to save Israel. As the Divine Warrior he wages a war against these Assyrians; as King he topples the king of Nineveh from his throne and asserts his kingship, for "it is the establishment of Yahweh's eternal rule and sovereignty that is the ultimate goal of Yahweh's wars."[26]

[25] See D. L. Christensen, *Transformations of the War Oracle in Old Testament Prophecy: Studies in the Oracles Against the Nations* (HDR 3; Missoula: Scholars, 1975).

[26] Cathcart, "Divine Warrior" 76, quoting P. D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (HSM 5; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1965) 174.