

TERMINOLOGICAL PATTERNS AND THE TERM עָצוּם "STRONG, POWERFUL" IN THE PENTATEUCH

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In a recently published *Introduction* it has been stated that Pentateuchal studies, once the "show-piece of critical biblical scholarship,"¹ has become probably the most difficult and controversial area in exegesis. In view of this fact it is my contention that it is worthwhile to make "the only fact available to us . . . the text of the Pentateuch itself in all its complexity"² the sole point of departure for any exegesis. If we scrutinize the vocabulary by tabulating all the words used in a given literary unit, which may consist of a brief passage, a chapter or even a biblical book; the distinct distribution, the relative frequency, and the structural positioning of significant terms and/or phrases will be brought to light. When we carefully tabulate the respective positions and the frequencies of the words actually used, several suggestive terms turn out to be significant as far as structural outlines are concerned. It is these outlines based on counting a given clause, phrase, or word, which we call "terminological patterns."³

The disclosure of terminological patterns—especially in view of their role in structuring the respective textual units—suggests that major parts of the extant text of the Pentateuch are consciously and carefully composed literary entities.⁴ The present study aims at exposing a terminological pattern based on the term עָצוּם "strong, powerful" found eleven times in the Hebrew text printed in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. In my view it is of significance that this terminological pattern encompasses almost the entire Pentateuch.

In Deut 7:1 it is stated: "When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many

¹E. Zenger, et al. *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1996), 69.

²R. N. Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 27.

³W. Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus*, BInS 35 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 25.

⁴Cf. *ibid.*, 133-166; *idem*, "Terminologische Verknüpfungen und Genesis 12,1-3," *Bib* 81 (2000): 386-390; *idem*, "Terminological Patterns and Genesis 38," *AUSS* (2000): 293-305; *idem*, "Terminologische Verknüpfungen in der Urgeschichte," *ZAW* (forthcoming); *idem*, "Terminologische Verknüpfungen und Leviticus 11," *BN* (forthcoming).

nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger [וְעַצְמוֹתַיִם] than you . . .” (NIV). While the names of the nations that lived in Palestine prior to the Israelites have been mentioned at several points in the Pentateuch, it is important to notice that these lists differ considerably—i.e., the numbers of peoples enumerated differ widely. In Gen 15:19-21 we find a list of ten pre-Israelite nations (both the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint come up with eleven nations because of adding the חוּי “Hivites”).

After having scrutinized every list of pre-Israelite nations in the Hebrew text,⁵ it is noteworthy that Deut 7:1, with its seventh occurrence of the term עַצְמוֹת in the Pentateuch, is the only text where the names of seven nations have been listed. To demonstrate this, the respective references to these nations are given below, and the figures in parentheses indicate the number of nations mentioned in that immediate passage.

Proceeding from the longest list in Gen 15:19-21, which lists ten nations, we see that the קִינִי “Kenites” are spoken of in the Pentateuch only one more time, in Num 24:21; the קְנִזִּי “Kenizzites” are referred to a second time in Num 32:12; and the קַדְמוֹנִי “Kadmonites” are spoken of only here in the Hebrew Bible.

The חִתִּי “Hittites” are mentioned in Gen 15:20 (10 nations listed); 23:10; 25:9; 26:34²; 36:2; 49:29, 30; 50:13; Exod 3:8 (6 nations listed), 17 (6 nations listed); 13:5 (5 nations listed); 23:23 (6 nations listed), 28 (3 nations listed); 33:2 (6 nations listed); 34:11 (6 nations listed); Num 13:29 (3 nations listed); Deut 7:1 (7 nations listed); 20:17 (6 nations listed); and the proper noun חֵת “Het” occurs thirteen times in Genesis and nowhere else in the Pentateuch: Gen 10:15; 23:3, 5, 7, 10², 16, 18, 20; 25:10; 27:46²; 49:32.

The פְּרִזִּי “Perizzites” are spoken of in Gen 13:7 (2 nations listed); 15:20 (10 nations listed); 34:30 (2 nations listed); Exod 3:8 (6 nations listed), 17 (6 nations listed); 23:23 (6 nations listed); 33:2 (6 nations listed); 34:11 (6 nations listed); Deut 7:1 (7 nations listed); 20:17 (6 nations listed).

The רְפָאִים “Rephaites” are referred to in Gen 14:5; 15:20 (10 nations listed); Deut 2:11, 20²; 3:11, 13.

Mention is made of the אֲמֹרִי “Amorites”⁶ in Gen 10:16; 14:7, 13; 15:16, 21 (10 nations listed); 48:22; Exod 3:8 (6 nations listed), 17 (6 nations listed); 13:5 (5 nations listed); 23:23 (6 nations listed); 33:2 (6

⁵In Gen 15:21; Exod 3:8, 17; 13:5; 23:23, 28; 33:2; 34:11; Num 13:29; Deut 20:17 some ancient versions—primarily the Samaritan Pentateuch and the LXX—add or omit different peoples.

⁶In Gen 10:15-18 the following have been listed as sons of Canaan: “Canaan was the father of Sidon, his firstborn, and of the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites” (NIV). Each of the following gentilic names, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites, occurs only once in the Pentateuch.

nations listed); 34:11 (6 nations listed); Num 13:29 (3 nations listed); 21:13, 21, 25, 26, 29, 31, 32, 34; 32:33, 39; Deut 1:4, 7, 19, 20, 27, 44; 2:24; 3:2, 8, 9; 4:46, 47; 7:1 (7 nations listed); 20:17 (6 nations listed); 31:4.

Mention is made of the כְּנַעֲנִי "Canaanites" in Gen 10:18, 19; 12:6; 13:7 (2 nations listed); 15:21 (10 nations listed); 24:3, 37; 34:30 (2 nations listed); 38:2; 46:10; 50:11; Exod 3:8 (6 nations listed), 17 (6 nations listed); 6:15; 13:5 (5 nations listed), 11; 23:23 (6 nations listed), 28 (3 nations listed); 33:2 (6 nations listed); 34:11 (6 nations listed); Num 13:29 (3 nations listed); 14:25, 43, 45; 21:1, 3; 33:40; Deut 1:7; 7:1 (7 nations listed); 11:30; 20:17 (6 nations listed).

The גִּרְגָּשִׁי "Girgashites" are referred to in Gen 10:16; 15:21 (10 nations listed); Deut 7:1 (7 nations listed).

The יְבוּסִי "Jebusites" are spoken of in Gen 10:16; 15:21 (10 nations listed); Exod 3:8 (6 nations listed), 17 (6 nations listed); 13:5 (5 nations listed); 23:23 (6 nations listed); 33:2 (6 nations listed); 34:11 (6 nations listed); Num 13:29 (3 nations listed); Deut 7:1 (7 nations listed); Deut 20:17 (6 nations listed).

The חִוִּי "Hivites" are mentioned in Gen 10:17; 34:2; 36:2; Exod 3:8 (6 nations listed), 17 (6 nations listed); 13:5 (5 nations listed); 23:23 (6 nations listed), 28 (3 nations listed); 33:2 (6 nations listed); 34:11 (6 nations listed); Deut 7:1 (7 nations listed); 20:17 (6 nations listed).

This survey supports the above-stated hypothesis: It is only in Deut 7:1 that in the Hebrew text the names of seven peoples are listed. By correlating this fact with the distribution of the term עֲצוּם, "strong, powerful," the following comes to light: It is in Deut 7:1 that the term עֲצוּם is being used the *seventh* time in the Pentateuch and it is exactly here that we find the explicit statement: "When the Lord your God brings you into the land . . . he drives out before you many nations . . . *seven* nations larger and stronger than you."⁷

The following table (Figure 1) draws attention to two more structural peculiarities: It is only in four of the following eleven texts that the term "strong" is syntactically related to the two verbs הִיב "be" and עָשָׂה "make." Whereas in Gen 18:18 and Deut 26:5, the *first* and the *last* texts, the term עֲצוּם is syntactically correlated with the verb "be," in Num 14:12 and Deut 9:14, the *third* and *third-from-last* texts, it is closely connected with the verb "make."

⁷At this point mention should be made of another term, the *seventh* mention of which is likewise correlated with the explicit reference of the number "*seven*." Following Gen 13:18; 23:2, 19; 35:27; 37:14; Num 13:22a, the *seventh* and *last* mention of "Hebron" in the extant Hebrew text of the Pentateuch occurs in Num 13:22b, where we read: "Hebron had been built *seven* years before Zoan in Egypt."

In the following translation (Figure 2), leaning strongly upon the NIV, the term עָצוּם has consistently been rendered “strong,” although by doing so the English rendition at times sounds slightly awkward:

Gen 18:18	<i>Abraham will surely become a great and</i>	<i>strong nation</i>	Abraham
Exod 1:9	the Israelites have become too numerous and	strong for us	
Num 14:12	<u>but I will make you into a nation greater and</u>	<u>stronger than they</u>	Moses
22:6	because they are too	strong for me	
32:1	... the children of Gad had numerous and very	strong cattle	
Deut 4:38	to drive out before you nations greater and	stronger than you	
7:1	<u>seven nations more numerous and</u>	<u>stronger than you</u>	7 th
9:14	... <u>I will make you into a nation</u>	<u>stronger . . . than they</u>	Moses
11:23	and you will dispossess nations larger and	stronger than you	
26:5	<i>and there he became a great nation</i>	<i>strong and numerous</i>	Jacob

Figure 2. Translation of Figure 1.

In the above table the phrase גוי גדול "a great nation" occurs three times (Gen 18:18; Num 14:12; Deut 9:14), which we shall look at more closely. Whereas according to the concordance the phrase, appearing first in Gen 12:2, "I will make you into a great nation,"⁸ is found altogether eleven times in the Pentateuch, it occurs only eight times prefixed by the preposition —ל "to" (it is not present in Deut 4:6, 7, 8),⁹ each time containing the idea of *becoming* a "great nation." In these eight texts the verbs עשה "make," נתן "give," היה "be," and יָשָׂא "put; cause to be, make" have been employed by the ancient author in expressing this concept of becoming a "great nation." While in the preceding table the verbs "be" and "make" are of structural significance, being used in the first and last, and third and third-from-last positions respectively, in the following equidistant structure it is the verb יָשָׂא that has been placed in the *fourth* and *fourth-from-last* positions. The terminological and thematic similarity of the two almost identical statements (except for the suffixed pronominal form) cannot be overlooked. Whereas Gen 21:18 is a divine promise addressed to Hagar on behalf of her son Ishmael, "for I will make him into a great nation,"¹⁰ in Gen 46:3 the Lord is speaking to Jacob: "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there." In view of these striking similarities we can conclude that in the very center of this equidistant structure two distinct groups of Abraham's offspring are addressed as the recipients of the divine promise: Abraham's descendants through his son Ishmael and his grandson Jacob and his offspring are to become great nations (Figure 3). As was the case with the preceding table, the translation likewise leans strongly upon the NIV (Figure 4).

In these tables the "form" (terminological patterns encompassing major parts of the extant Pentateuch) and the "content" (theological meaning) emphasize (the promise of) numerous progeny. Since the congruence of the form and the content can hardly be denied, the following can be concluded:

First, the structure based on the term "strong" begins with Abraham and ends with Jacob. Gen 18:18 being part of a divine soliloquy gives the reason as to why Abraham is privileged by the Lord: "Abraham will surely become a great and strong nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him." Whereas Abraham at this point is still waiting for the promised heir to be born, the fulfillment of the divine promise of progeny still pending, the

⁸Warning points out that by means of two terminological patterns this first occurrence of the phrase "great nation" has been closely interlinked with the preceding primeval history ("Genesis 12,1-3," 388-389).

⁹In Deut 4:38; 9:1; 11:23 the plural גוים גדולים "great nations" occurs.

¹⁰In contrast to the MT reading in Gen 21:13 וגם את בן האמה לני אשכנז "I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also" (NIV), the Sam Pent, LXX, Peshitta, and Vg add "great."

later Israelite bringing his firstfruits to an officiating priest is to remember Jacob, who "went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, strong and numerous" (Deut 26:5). Abraham had still to wait for the fulfillment of the Lord's promise, but after the settlement in Canaan the Israelite could joyfully recite its fulfillment, and even more so, as he was privileged to personally experience the fulfillment of another divine promise, the promise of the land.

Second, the role of Moses as the intercessor *par excellence* between the Lord and Israel comes to the fore in the third and third-from-last positions. At two crucial moments in the history of Israel when the Lord proposed to destroy Israel and make Moses into a nation greater and stronger than they, Moses' intercession averted the divine threat (Num 14:12; Deut 9:14). We should take notice that in the first structure the events described appear in a reversed chronological order, since the episode of the golden calf (Deut 9) took place prior to the rebellion of the people (Num 14). Whereas the term עָצוּם "strong" is not present in Exod 32:10 *ואעשה אותך לגוי גדול* "and I will make you into a great nation," which appears in the second structure, it appears in the report given in Deut 9:14: *ואעשה אותך לגוי עצום רב ממנו* "and I will make you into a nation stronger and more numerous than they" (NIV).

Third, in this study which began with the lists of the nations living in Palestine prior to the Israelites, it has been brought to light that Deut 7:1, with its *seventh* occurrence of the term עָצוּם "strong," is the only place in the Hebrew text that *seven* nations are listed.

Fourth, the second structure leaves no doubt that the promise of numerous offspring holds true for both of Abraham's sons, Ishmael and Isaac, irrespective of the fact that Gen 46:3 is addressed to the latter's son Jacob and not to Isaac himself.

Probably no reader of the present text would want to attribute to chance the two terminological patterns presented above. The fact that their author has been successful in intricately interlinking quite distinct pericopes might shed some new light on the method of composition of the present Pentateuch.

Gen 12:2	לְגוֹי גָדוֹל	וְאֶעֱשֶׂה	וְאֶעֱשֶׂה
17,20	לְגוֹי גָדוֹל	וְנִתְתִּי	וְנִתְתִּי
18,18	לְגוֹי גָדוֹל	וְעֵצוֹם	וְאִבְרָהָם הָיָה יְהוּדָה
21,18	כִּי לְגוֹי גָדוֹל	אֲשִׁימֶנּוּ	Ishmael
46,3	כִּי לְגוֹי גָדוֹל	אֲשִׁימְךָ	Jacob
Ex 32,10	לְגוֹי גָדוֹל		וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אוֹתָךְ
Num 14,12	לְגוֹי גָדוֹל	וְעֵצוֹם מְכֻמָּו	וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אוֹתָךְ
Deut 26,5	לְגוֹי גָדוֹל	עֵצוֹם וְרֹב	וְהָיָה שֵׁם

Figure 3. The usage of the phrase לְגוֹי גָדוֹל

Gen 12:2	I will make you into a	great nation	Ishmael
17:20	I will make him into a	great nation	Jacob
18:18	Abraham will surely become a	great nation and a strong [one]	
21:18	<u>because</u>	<u>great nation</u>	Ishmael
46:3	<u>because there</u>	<u>great nation</u>	Jacob
Ex 32:10	I will make you into a	great nation	
Num 14:12	but I will make you into a	great nation and a stronger [one]	than they
Deut 26:5	and there he became a	great nation strong and numerous	

Figure 4. Translation of Figure 3.