

TROPES FOR OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

By Adolf Jeschke

Part One

I. Introduction

Looking at the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, as we have it, one sees, in addition to the consonants and vowel points, the so-called signs, symbols, accents, or tropes, which serve not only to indicate the tone-syllable and the punctuation, but also to indicate the music.

The intention of this work is to introduce, describe, and illustrate the subject matter of the tropes, as well as possible, with the apparatus available, in the hope of interesting other students who, like the writer, desire to derive more benefit from the Hebrew Scriptures as they are before us today.

It may be that this hope can be realized with the richly illustrated volume entitled "Biblical Chant" before us for reference. This well written book is the work of Dr. A. W. Binder,¹ distinguished authority on the music of the Jewish people. It is considered of interest to students of the Old Testament, students of ancient music, musicologists, and students in religious schools and seminaries. Coinciding with the terms employed therein the accents will be known as "tropes."

II. Singing unto the Lord

In many of our churches it is customary to sing certain passages and portions of Scriptures. This is seen, for example, as we examine our hymnal, pages 12, 22, 29, 33, 43, and items numbered 662 to 668.

The concept of "song" is mentioned often in the Scriptures, where the word "sing" occurs more than a hundred times, mostly in exhortations to sing unto the Lord, or in pointing to instances where such singing was done.

In Deuteronomy 31:19, we read: "Now, therefore, write ye this song." A commentary says in this connection: "National songs take deep hold of the memories and have a powerful influence in stirring the deepest feelings of a people, and in accordance with this principle in human nature a song was ordered to be composed by Moses, doubtless under divine inspiration, which was to be learned by the Israelites themselves and to be taught to their children in every age, embodying the substance of the preceding address, and of a strain well suited to inspire the popular mind with a strong sense of God's favor to their nation."²

Although we do not place the Talmud on an equal basis with the Holy Scriptures, reference to it in this connection can be helpful. M. C. Peters³ calls the Talmud "a remarkable literary production of antiquity" and says that in its twelve folio volumes it embodies the mental labors of the ancient Jewish teachers during the period of about 800 years.

The Talmud says "the Bible should be read in public, and made understood to its hearers in musical and sweet tones—and he who reads the Torah without tune, shows disregard for it, and its vital values and laws." "Whosoever intones the Holy Scriptures in the manner of secular song abuses the Torah." These statements of the Talmud dating to the first century A.D. prove that the reading of the Bible in public in musical style was a long established practice. Be it noted, however, that nothing besides this conclusion is the object of the Talmudic quotations in this connection.

Dr. Binder says: "Portions of the Bible were rendered musically in the early history of Israel in Palestine. We know for example that the Song of the Sea, the Ten Commandments, and certain Psalms were sung at the daily service in the Temple at Jerusalem."

"The association of the Torah reading with melody becomes more evident from observation of the fact that only those books of the Bible were provided with tunes, the public reading of which was obligatory."⁴

In Matthew 26:30, we read: “And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.” Dr. R. C. H. Lenski in his *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (p. 1012) indicates that this hymn consisted of Psalms 115–118. In Acts 16:25, we read: “At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises to God; and the prisoners heard them.”

A modern language course⁵ pictures a group of tourists speaking with their guide near the Jeshurun Synagogue in Jerusalem, where the Chief Rabbi of Israel worships. One of the tourists asks: “May we go in?” The guide answers: “Certainly, but it is worth while to come on the Sabbath during the service. Then the Torah is read and the Cantor sings.” As he admiringly raises his voice to emphasize the last syllable of the word *chazzan* (cantor), the listener is made to conclude that to hear the cantor sing must be a wonderful experience. This illustrative dialogue gives testimony concerning cantillation in Jerusalem at present.

III. Perpetuation of Cantillation

It is interesting to learn that the custom of chanting the Scriptures was carried on when a system of musical notation such as we have was not in existence. Dr. Binder says on this point: “It was customary in former days for every Jew to read the Biblical portion of the week in private on the Sabbath, before it was read publicly in the Synagogue, ... with special chanting motifs, called tropes of cantillation, as well as he knew how.”

“This musical practice was perpetuated by tradition. It was remembered for a long time by ear, and was taught to children by special teachers who were paid for their service.”

Why was the tradition of the custom of cantillation so important? Some light is shed on this matter as we recall that the consonantal text is one thing, and the Masoretic system of points is another. The watchmen of Israel stood guard against alteration of, or addition to, the SACRED TEXT. This vigilance is acknowledged with gratitude. Even in recent times we find that Jewish authorities do not permit use of voweled or accented texts to be used for public reading in the synagogue, as seen from this statement: “While in the scrolls which are read in the Synagogue the bare consonants are alone permitted, readers must prepare themselves from copies allowed for private use, in ancient times written and now printed, which contain the additional signs for vowels and accents.”⁶ Two books, *Tiqqun Laqqorim* and *Encyclopedia for Readers of the Torah* are available to readers who prepare to read the consonantal text in the Synagogue. These books contain the Pentateuch, the *Haftorahs*, the laws concerning the reading, the music, and the *Megillos*.⁷

Since the musical practice was perpetuated by tradition, is it possible to present an authentic system of Biblical cantillation? Although the symbols were supplied by the Masoretes, no less an authority than Dr. S. Fundaminsky⁸ writes: “It cannot be said with any degree of certainty which was the original pronunciation of Hebrew.” Could more be said concerning cantillation? In either case we rely on tradition to furnish the best possible answer.

The wide variety of possibilities for men to express themselves through the medium of music must be admitted. Be it said in this connection that the New Testament Church uses a variety of musical interpretations in its services. In our hymnal, for instance, we have three ways of singing “Hallelujah” on page 10, three tunes for hymn No. 73 and an array of tunes adaptable to many of our hymns, as listed in the metrical index of tunes on pages 839 to 845. Assuming that authenticity of a musical heritage is important, did the New Testament Church, during its adversity and prosperity, triumphs and oppressions, adhere as well to its traditional music as did the Jewish nation in oppression, dispersion, and persecution? Though we leave this question unanswered, some light is shed upon this matter as we review briefly some of the events preceding the Masoretic culmination.

IV. The Interim Period

During the time the tradition of Biblical cantillation was perpetuated, and before the Masoretes had completed the work of writing down the accents, two intermediate developments took place.

1. A system of manual accents was devised. This was called chironomy and was found to be in use as late as during the Middle Ages. This system was based upon the rise and fall of the finger or the stretching of the palm of the hand by an individual who was called a *Tomekh* or helper, standing at the right of the reader. These signals served to remind the reader of the direction of the melody and were later included in the list of tropal signs. We refer to the “full upright,” the “lesser upright,” the “hand-breath,” and “extending.” These signs are numbers: 5, 6, 7, and 10 in the list of the second part of this article.

2. In time there were scrolls devised with a system of accents, using, at first, only three signs, one for the beginning, one for the half stop, and one for the full stop of the sentence. They are numbered: 25, 2, and 1, in the list just mentioned.

The era between the 5th and 9th centuries is important in connection with this work. During that period the Catholic Church perfected the Gregorian chant and its notations, the musical world was devising its system of notation, and the family of Ben Asher in Tiberias, Palestine, became interested in accentuation and its systematic presentation. In the ninth century Aaron Ben Asher established the vocal punctuation in the Bible and provided the first scroll with such punctuation, according to Dr. Binder. The Lutheran Cyclopaedia mentions the gradual introduction of these symbols into the Sacred Text as having taken place from the 4th to the 10th century a.d.⁹

V. Nature of Musical Interpretation of the Tropes

About musical interpretations of the tropes, Dr. Binder says, they are numerous and include the Ashkenazic, Sephardic, Moroccan, Egyptian, Syrian, Baghdadian, and Yeminite systems, some of these being still further subdivided. However, he points out that there are many conspicuous similarities in the musical interpretation of the tropes of these various traditions, which prove that they all stem from a common origin in Palestine.

“Western Jewry uses the Ashkenazic system. Our interest is in this system according to the East European tradition. It has gone through a long span of time and space ... but the original Jewish outlines are discernible to those who are interested in searching for them. When expertly chanted, the whole strikes one with its singular effectiveness in making clearer the meaning of the text and impressing it on the mind of the listener.”

“The rhythm of Biblical chant is of the irregular or asymmetrical brand. To place it behind rigidly spaced bar lines is to imprison its ancient and authentic character. Biblical chant is not influenced by and musical metric tropes, but rather by the accentuation ingrained in the text, which determines its musical flow.”¹⁰ Be it said in this connection that the Gregorian chant is “unaccompanied and without meter.”¹¹

The musical interpretation of the tropes is not the same throughout the prose books of the Bible. It is not always the same for one occasion as for another. For the Pentateuch, for instance, there is one system for the weekly reading and another for high holidays. This is similar to the practice of using one tune for the offertory on Communion Sundays and a different one on Sundays on which Communion is not celebrated in our circles.

Some time ago, in a pre-confirmation class, the pastor asked why one of the students was absent. Another student, answering in her behalf said that her aunt, the absentee’s mother, “does not like it at all in our church, because the people sing just like the Jews.” In astonishment the pastor eloquently replied: “But the Jews sing so beautifully!” So we proceed with the hope that from the following pages the reader will conclude not only that Hebrew cantillation is in several respects similar to certain phases of our cantillation, but also that it can be beautiful.

Part Two

I. Introduction

Part One of “Tropes for Old Testament Scriptures,” published in the April 1961 issue of the Quarterly,

was intended to provoke interest in cantillation of the Old Testament Prose Books. Proceeding along this line it is deemed necessary to assume or confirm the accentuation of the Text which is to be chanted. To indicate the place of accent is one of the functions of the tropes. Therefore the listing, description, and application of the tropes will interest us presently.

II. Historical Notes

Prior to the Christian Era the Hebrew of the Old Testament was written by means of consonants only. The reader had to supply the vowels according to context. He also had to supply the accents for reading and the intonations for chanting. This was done in the synagogues on the Sabbath by trained readers. When Jerusalem was no more the center of Jewish religious learning and practice, it became necessary to devise a system according to which the correct reading and chanting of the Old Testament could be fixed, so far as possible. This was done by the addition of vowel points and so-called signs, symbols, accents, or tropes.¹² The men of learning to whom the development of the system of vowelizing, accentuation, punctuation, and intonation is ascribed, are known, as, "Masorettes." The most celebrated of all Masorettes was Aaron ben Moses ben Asher, who lived at Tiberias, early in the tenth century.

III. Function According to Grammarians

The purpose of the signs, symbols, accents, or tropes is to "assist in standardizing the public reading of the Scriptures" and "their function was to help in the liturgy."¹³

One grammarian says about the accents:

1. They mark the tone-syllables;
2. they are signs of logical interpunctuation, like our comma, etc.;
3. they are musical expressions."

He also says "The books of Job, Proverbs, and Psalms have an accentuation in some respect different from that of the other books, called the Poetical."¹⁴

Dr. Shlomo Fundaminsky says the accents or symbols serve as:

- a. "musical notes,
- b. marks of punctuation,
- c. marks indicating the accented syllable."¹⁵

IV. Classification

In the list to follow, tropes No. 1 to 19 are termed "Lords or Disjunctives," and tropes No. 20 to 27 are called "Servants and Conjunctives," by Dr. Binder in his book: "Biblical Chant," pages 20 to 22 (see footnote No. 5a).

Twenty-one of the twenty-eight tropes are placed on the accented syllable of the word. This is important for cantillation because the accented syllable of the word receives the melodic body of the trope.

Seven of the tropes in the list do not indicate the accent. These include the prepositives, No. 18 and 11, the postpositives, No. 10, 26, 9, and 3, and No. 28, which might be termed "intrapositive," because it is positioned between words.

V. The Tropes With Their Hebrew Names

[Chart on next page – WLS Library Staff]

VI. Transliteration and Comment

1. *silluq* for reading, *sof pawasuk*, end of sentence, for chanting.¹⁶
2. *esnahtaw*, to rest.
3. *segol*, duster of three dots.
4. *shalsheles*, chain.
5. *zawkef-gawdol*, full upright.
6. *zawkef-koton* for reading, *koton* for chanting lesser up-right.¹⁷
7. *tipchaw*, hand-breadth.
8. *revia*, four-square.
9. *zarkaw*, scattered.
10. *pashtaw*, extending.
11. *yesiv*, staying.
12. *geresh*, to chase.
13. *azlaw*, going on.
14. *gershayim*, double geresh.
15. *tevir*, broken.
16. *pawzer*, to scatter.
17. *karne fawraw*, horns of a heifer.
18. *t'lishaw g'dolaw*, big *t'lishaw*, to draw out.
19. *munach legarme*, independent *munach*.¹⁸
20. *munach*, sustained.
21. *mahpach*, reversed.
22. *dargaw*, stepwise.
23. *merchaw*, to lengthen.
24. *merchaw chefulaw*, double merchaw.
25. *kadmaw*, to proceed.
26. *t'lishaw k'tanaw*, small *t'lishaw*.
27. *yerach ben yomoh*, moon of a day.
28. *p'sik*, to restrain, to stop.¹⁹

VII. Tropes and Punctuation

As previously pointed out, three functions are ascribed to the signs, and one of them is the function of indicating punctuation. A few observations to point out to what extent the tropes indicate punctuation are prompted by the pursuit of completeness of this work.

The above signs were listed as disjunctives and conjunctives. In English we have punctuation marks that render disjunctive service. Furthermore, certain conjunctive features are present in the use of brackets, parentheses, quotation marks, commas, etc., so that the group of words enclosed within such signs or set apart by them may be said to belong together. But in our endeavor to be simple and brief, we quote an authority who says: "As for the conjunctives, they cannot be represented at all in English by means of signs" (Page 38 of the source listed in footnote No. 4).

One grammarian names *esnachtaw*, *segol*, *zawkef-koton*, *revia*, and *tipchaw*, as being the main disjunctive accents and says that by stopping at them, as at the stops of modern languages, the reader will do justice to the sense. He points out that "very roughly":

1. *sof pawasuk* may be said to correspond to our full stop, (.),
2. *esnachtaw* to our colon (:),
3. *segol*, *zawkef-koton*, and *revia*, to our semi-colon (;), and
4. *tipchaw* to our comma (,). Page 231 of the source listed in footnote No. 3.

On the same page he mentions that there are other disjunctives of lesser force and a number of conjunctives, or servants, to serve the disjunctives, and that these servants are placed on the words that stand

immediately before and in close relation with those on which the disjunctives are placed. He adds that it would seem to follow from the variety of the conjunctive signs that they had musical significance; otherwise one conjunctive might have served all disjunctives alike.

It may be seen in due time that a definite musical value is assigned to each disjunctive as well as to each conjunctive, and that the variety, location, and perhaps other features of the signs reflect, to some extent, the fact that a three-fold purpose or function is involved.

While reading the Old Testament Scriptures the frequent appearance of disjunctives is readily noted. In the writer's humble opinion the complete meaning and significance of a disjunctive cannot be obtained without considering also its musical aspect. A word of the Sacred Text, provided with its trope, disjunctive or conjunctive, in its intended musical setting, speaks for itself with an eloquence that cannot be approached by the use of conventional punctuation marks alone.

VIII. Recognizing A Few Signs

It is helpful for reading and chanting to know if a sign is disjunctive or conjunctive. But it is suggested to memorize only the names of the conjunctives, because they are less in number than the disjunctives. For this purpose it can be practical to assemble memory aids consisting of a few letters included in the names to be memorized. Conjunctives No. 20 to 23 may be remembered by the first two letters of each transliterated name. In memorizing the names of conjunctives 24 to 27, a short sentence can be composed, omitting the word *merchaw*, which was in the group above, and the word *t'lishaw*, which applies also to a disjunctive. The following list of the conjunctives, showing the memory letters in parentheses, was found to be time-saving and practical for memorizing: (*mu*)*nach*, (*ma*)*hpach*, (*da*)*rgaw*, (*me*)*rchaw*, *merchaw* (*chef*)*ulaw*, (*kad*)*maw*, *t'lishaw* (*k't*)*anaw*, (*yer*)*ach ben yomoh*. *P'sik* might be added merely for completeness. So it is easy to have at one's fingertips the readiness to distinguish between a conjunctive and a disjunctive.

Why is it useful to make this distinction? There are two reasons:

1. Knowing how closely a word is connected with, or how far it is separated from the following one, can help derive the masoretic meaning of a word. Furthermore,

2. If a student considers cantillation, the ability to tell a disjunctive from a conjunctive saves perplexity in cases where two tropes are placed on one word, as in the case of "please" in Genesis 50:17, which has *munach* and *pawzer*, and as in the case of "draw ye near" in Leviticus 10:4, which has *t'lishaw g'dolaw* and *gershayim*.

Knowing the difference between signs that indicate the accented syllable and signs that do not, is even more important. It is well to recognize the signs that do not always indicate the accented syllable. There are only six of them. Knowing that all others (except *p'sik*, which stands between words) are used to indicate the accented syllable, it is necessary only to memorize the names of the four postpositives and the names of the two prepositives. This is easily done by using the transliterated names in this order: 3, 9, 26, 10, 11, 18, and memorizing only a few letters of each. The following two lists include time-saving memory verses in parentheses: (*se*)*gol*, (*zar*)*kaw*, (*t'l*)*ishaw k'tanaw*, (*pa*)*shtaw*, for the postpositives, and (*yes*)*iv*, (*t'l*)*ishaw g'dolaw*, for the prepositives. Students preferring other phrases can easily arrive at them by changing the sequence.

IX. Exceptional Signs

Under this caption will be included *kadmaw* and *pashtaw*, *geresh* and *azlaw*, and the prepositives and postpositives. *P'sik* requires no further comment, as seen in the listing and footnotes No. 7 and 8.

Kadmaw and *pashtaw* look alike. *Kadmaw* is always found on the accented syllable of the word and is usually followed by *mahpach*. *Pashtaw* is a postpositive found on the last letter of the word and does not necessarily indicate the accent. It is usually followed by *munach* or *zawkef-koton* or both.

Geresh and *azlaw* look alike and are found on the accented syllable of the word. If the accented syllable

is the last one, the sign is called *azlaw*. If the accented syllable is next to the last one of the word, the sign is called *geresh*. The fact that the musical equivalent of *geresh* differs from that of *azlaw*, will help to justify the listing of each one separately.

The four postpositives, *segol*, *zarkaw*, *t'lishaw k'tanaw* and *pashtaw*, are found on the last letter of the word and do not necessarily indicate the accent. But when two postpositives are found on one word or hyphenated word, the sign to the right indicates the accented syllable.

Similarly, the two prepositives, namely *yesiv* and *t'lishaw g'dolaw*, are attached to the first letter of the word and do not indicate the accent. But when two prepositives are found on one word or hyphenated word, the sign to the left indicates the accented syllable.

Both above rules might be thus summarized: Prepositives and postpositives do not indicate the accented syllable unless there are two of them on the same word or hyphenated word, in which case the sign located away from its regular position does indicate the accented syllable. A few illustrations follow.²⁰

In Genesis 1:5, we observe *kadmaw* over “and called,” *mahpach* under “God,” *pashtaw* over “light,” *koton* over “day.” Thus *kadmaw* is followed by *mahpach* and indicates the accent of the last syllable of “and called.” *Pashtaw* is on the last letter of “light.” It is followed by *koton* and does not indicate the accented syllable.

In Exodus 14:26, we observe two *pashtaws* over “the waters” and *koton* over “upon the Egyptians.”

In Exodus 14:27, we observe two *pashtaws* over “morning,” and *munach* and *koton* with “to his might.”

In each of these last two examples one *pashtaw* is on the last letter and one to the right. The one to the right is away from its regular place and indicates the accented syllable. According to the rule quoted above, *pashtaw* is usually followed by *munach* or *koton*. Here both cases are illustrated.

X. Using the Signs

This work would seem incomplete without an invitation to apply the above statements, descriptions, and suggestions, by examining the Sacred Text in order to see to what extent a person may rely on the signs to indicate the accented syllables, and to what extent he must resort to other help, such as grammar, or lexicon, for this purpose.

The reader's familiarity with Hebrew consonants, vowels, and the signs being described, as a general class, is assumed. It might be helpful at first to use, for reference, a card inscribed with the two prepositives and the four postpositives. While reading the Text, a person could watch for these exceptional signs which do not, or do not in every case, indicate the accented syllable.

We could begin with the Old Testament passages listed as proof texts in the Small Catechism,²¹ with the Hebrew Text before us. The plan is presently to list the accents as found in the Hebrew Bible,²² and to indicate, with the use of parentheses, cases where the accent was not clearly pointed out by the signs.

Leviticus 19:2, beginning with “Holy shall ye be” has the following signs: *munach*, *esnachtaw*, *munach*, *koton*, *tipchaw*, *merchaw*, *sof pawasuk*.

Micah 6:8: *merchaw*, *tevir*, *tipchaw*, *esnachtaw*, *gershayim*, *munach*, *revia*, *munach*, *mahpach*, (*pashtaw* on “judgment”), *munach*, *koton*, *merchaw*, *tipchaw*, *sof pawasuk*.

Deuteronomy 6:6: *gershayim*, *munach*, *revia*, *kadmaw*, *dargaw*, *tevir*, *tipchaw*, *sof pawasuk*.

Deuteronomy 6:7: *munach*, *koton*, *tipchaw*, *esnachtaw*, *mahpach*, two *pashtaws* on “in thy house,” *munach*, *koton*, *tipchaw*, *sof pawasuk*.

Deuteronomy 10:4: *kadmaw*, *azlaw*, *munach*, *revia*, *yesiv*, *munach*, *koton*, *munach*, (*t'lishaw k'tanaw* on “spoke”) *kadmaw*, *merchaw*, *tevir*, *merchaw*, *tipchaw*, *munach*, *esnachtaw*, *merchaw*, *tipchaw*, *sof pawasuk*.

Isaiah 42:8: *merchaw*, *tipchaw*, *munach*, *esnachtaw*, (*pashtaw* on “and my glory”), *munach*, *koton*, *tipchaw*, *sof pawasuk*.

Psalms 115:3: *merchaw*, *esnachtaw*, *tipchaw*, *munach*, *sof pawasuk*.

Psalms 115:4: (No accent on “their idols”), *munach*, *esnachtaw*, *revia*, *munach*, *sof pawasuk*.

Proverbs 3:5: *munach, tipchaw, esnachtaw, revia, sof pawasuk.*

XI. Looking at the Results

By counting the items enclosed in parentheses the results can be tabulated. Extensive reading of Biblical Prose discloses that the accents of about 200 words out of a total of 210 words are indicated by the system herein described.

In the course of this essay a grammarian was quoted as saying that the books of Job, Proverbs, and Psalms have an accentuation in some respects different from that of other books. An attempt was made to obtain information concerning the Poetical accentuation. In answer to repeated inquiries the oldest Jewish Publishing Company in our land came forth with the assurance that no material is available concerning the accents of the Poetical Books, that there was a publication in Hebrew along that line, and that this is now out of print.

Nevertheless the reading of several pages of Psalms and other Poetical Writings leads one to the conclusion that the prose system of accentuation described in this essay offers considerable help in connection with the reading of the Poetical Books. Two of the Psalms are being considered.

Psalm 108 consists of about 87 words. The accents of 83 of these is clearly indicated by the system at hand. The words the accent of which is not thus indicated, are the following: "so that" in verse 7, "and Ephraim" in verse 9, "upon Edom" in verse 10, and "He will lead me" in verse 11.

A study of Psalm 109, which consists of about 204 words, discloses that the accents of all except fifteen words are clearly indicated by the system. The group of fifteen words mentioned includes words of the simplest kind with two or more syllables.

XII. Conclusion of Part Two

A grammarian wrote: "So complicated and perfect a machinery of signs could have matured only very slowly and by successive generations of labourers" (Page 14 of the source listed in footnote No. 3).

In the writer's humble opinion the tropal system becomes very helpful when it is examined and applied for reading the Scriptures. Furthermore, the study of the system is delightfully rewarding, especially when it is studied for cantillation. The Jewish scholars performed a difficult and complicated task. It is now for students like me to help themselves, to derive an inestimable benefit, and to let Moses and the Prophets not only speak but also sing to them. When thus, to the writer, the Sacred Text becomes clearer, more attractive, and more irresistible, he is overwhelmed with its beauty, and while he has breath his thought is this: "I will sing unto the Lord" (Exod. 15:1).

The third part of this work is intended to show how the tropes can be applied for chanting the Sacred Text. The writer closes this part with the prayer that this sincere though imperfect effort may be an invitation and encouragement to others who are also endeavoring to derive beneficial enjoyment and satisfaction from the study of the Sacred Volume, and to whom this work is humbly dedicated.

Part Three

I. Deriving the Benefit

In the conclusion of Part Two of this essay the trope system was said to be a complicated and perfect machinery of signs.²³ To avoid misunderstanding, the following account of the essayist's experience is offered.

With favorable guidance on the subject of Biblical cantillation the student soon finds that he is about to profit from the work done by the Jewish scholars and that the task before him is comparatively easy. Reading a passage from the Prophets, for example, while following the trend of music, leads to the conclusion that proper placement of the tropes was a complicated task.

When describing the attributed perfection, we might use the term "melody" as denoting "an agreeable

succession of sounds,”²⁴ in this case articulated with the human voice. With this definition in mind we might say that perfection may be ascribed to the melody of the trope system. We might also express this thought by saying that the music of a passage sounds correct to the ear. If, for the purpose of putting this statement to a test, we substitute other tropes for the ones placed with the words, or if we change the sequence of words, the melody may come to be uninteresting or cease to be a melody.

II. Retaining Biblical Sequence

From the foregoing we may conclude that if a passage is to be chanted according to the tropes, the sequence of the words must not be altered in translation. Since the charts accompanying this essay are bilingual, it is deemed necessary for the purpose involved, to have the English follow in the same sequence as does the Hebrew. Therefore some realignment was deemed advisable for some of the passages used. We take for example the closing phrase of Isaiah 55:1, where the following sequence is observed in the Hebrew Old Testament: “Without money and without price, wine and milk.”²⁵ If instead we read: “Wine and milk without money and without price,” we are not following the Biblical sequence in the source mentioned. Luther, in his translation, retained it when he translated: *Ohne Geld und umsonst, beide Wein und Milch.*²⁶

May this explanation serve to offer the reason for some of the unusual features of the translations in the charts mentioned, for the purpose of illustrating Biblical chanting, with the use of the English language, as a part of the objective. The translations are not interpretive. They are illustrative to serve the purpose involved.

III. Setting Hebrew to Music

The trope system of musical notation is compact when compared to the widely expanded system in Common use today. Without requiring much additional space each word was provided with its musical sign, as seen in the accompanying charts or from the Sacred Text. However, our present interest is in transcribing and translating the music of the tropes into our system of writing and expressing music. Several methods of presenting Hebrew words, together with the well-known system of musical notation as we have it, are in use.

Usually the accepted manner of presenting music from left to right is employed. This necessitates changing the Hebrew text, so that this also reads from left to right, which is usually done by transliteration, that is, by writing or spelling Hebrew words in the characters of the English alphabet that represent similar sounds. Because of the differences among national and regional ways of speaking the Hebrew language, there came into being several systems of transliteration, some of which are subdivided.²⁷

Another system of presenting Hebrew music involves the use of the known system of musical notation, which reads from left to right, and using Hebrew letters in this manner: Each syllable is left intact, together with its vowel points; each following syllable is placed to its right. Thus the progression of words and music is from left to right.²⁸

Presently a different approach is being made toward the presentation of Hebrew cantillation. The conventional system of musical notation is a device used mostly for languages reading from left to right. It will serve our purpose reversed and reading from right to left, when used for Hebrew words. In this way the Sacred Text is left as it is, reading from right to left, and the musical notation serves the text. Inasmuch as only one note at a time is chanted, it is hoped that the difficulty involved in this procedure will be negligible. The essayist thought it best to reproduce the Hebrew Text unaltered. However, it was considered advisable to separate some of the letters as is usually done when setting words to music, so that the reader can easily tell with which note to chant each part of a word. This was done by using the well-known horizontal stroke, which was placed in the center of the word line in the Hebrew Text. The maqqeph, which is in the Bible, was left in every case near the top of the word line. Accordingly there will be no conflict in this respect.

IV. Examining the Charts

The busy student or pastor has many duties to perform and numerous studies to pursue. In preparing this essay, respect was paid also to readers who may have forgotten more Hebrew than the essayist will ever know. The reader will see at a glance that the charts were composed in both English and Hebrew, so that a person without knowledge of Hebrew can follow.

Each of the two charts presented herewith consists of 21 lines set to music. Let us look at Chart I. It contains the Hebrew and English words of Isaiah 55:1–3. On each line the Hebrew begins at the right and the English at the left end, each continuing until the middle of the page. Each line is marked by a number directly under the G clef of the English part, and directly under the reversed G clef of the Hebrew part. The Hebrew is provided with the tropes as they appear in the Hebrew Old Testament mentioned. These same tropes were placed also with the English text. All tropes here used except the postpositive *pashtaw* and the prepositive *yesiv* have been placed with the accented syllable in both languages of Chart I.²⁹ Admittedly this involves duplication. That is: The tropes placed above or below the words in English as well as in Hebrew, indicate the music. Thus the music is duplicated. The reader will agree that after a person knows the musical equivalents for which the tropes stand, he will have no further need of the musical notations. He will read also other passages and know how to render them musically by following the tropes.

Let us look at Chart II. It shows all of the names of the tropes here used in both English and Hebrew, with their identification numbers in parentheses below the word line to indicate them, and their melodizations. Chart II shows the music of the tropes which is applied to the words of the text marked with them, for preparing to chant them, before such music was adjusted for the text. Each line of Chart II is marked under each G clef and reversed G clef with the letter “T” and a number. All the tropes used in Chart I are given by English and Hebrew name and number under their melodizations, in Chart II. The lines of the two charts thus coincide. That is, line T 15, for instance, contains the melodizations, names, and numbers of the tropes that are in the text, on Chart I, on line 15. It was intended to observe consistency with regard to this coincidence throughout the composition of the charts.

V. Looking at the Tropes

Where are the tropes? For the reader’s convenience the tropes have been placed with the Hebrew Text as they are in the Hebrew Bible mentioned on Chart I. They have been placed also with the English Text, which is on the left half of each line of Chart I. On Chart II, which gives the music of the tropes in both Hebrew and English, the reader will find also, in parentheses, the number assigned to each trope in the July issue of the *Theological Quarterly*.³⁰

The reader will readily recognize the English trope names from the list, though he will become aware of some modifications. He will notice minor additions or deletions which were made in order to shift the accents of the English trope names, to make their positions coincide as much as possible with the positions of the accents of the Hebrew trope names. These modifications were made so that the trope names can be chanted, for preparation, in either language. *Esnachtaw*, for example, with the accent on the third syllable, was named “and a rest,” thus locating the accent on the third syllable, as in Hebrew.

Trope No. 1, *sof pawsuk*, “end of sentence,” has two unaccented syllables before the accented one. The accented one is shown by the sign under it known as *silluq*. This accented syllable is *suk* of *pawsuk* in Hebrew, and “sen” of “sentence” in English, for our present purposes. The musical adaptation of the expression *sof pawsuk* and *koton* was discussed in the second part of this essay.³¹ The illustrations in Chart I consist of three Bible passages. Therefore Trope No. I is found three times in Chart I, namely in lines 7, 14, and 21. The name, identification number, and melodization of this trope, are seen in lines T 7, T 14, and T 21 of Chart II.

[Charts are on the next four pages – WLS Library Staff]

CHART I

CHART II

Trope No. 2, *esnachtaw*, “and a rest,” has two unaccented syllables before the accented one. The accented one is *taw* in Hebrew, and “rest” in English. This trope is seen in lines 3, 10, and 18, of Chart I. Its name, number, and melodization, are seen in lines T 3, T 10, and T 18 of Chart II.

Trope No. 6, which is named *koton* for convenience in chanting its music, is named “small upright” for our purposes, the accent falling on *ton* of *koton* and “up” of “upright.” How this trope is chanted for practice is seen in lines T 4, T 12, T 16, and T 20 of Chart II. How it is applied to the Text, is seen in lines 4, 12, 16, and 20 of Chart I.

VI. Adjusting the Music to the Text

When we speak in English, we aim to place stress and emphasis where they belong. The same holds true concerning Hebrew. When we add music to a spoken word, we want to place stress and emphasis where they belong also musically. Usually we do this in our non-measured musical selections.³² Exceptions appear where a given melodization is applied not only to a certain verse, stanza, or phrase, but to several such units. Let us consider, for example, the phrase: “Lord, I love to worship there,” in stanza one of our Hymn No. 2. The poem has the speaker express his love for divine worship without special emphasis on his person. However, the tune emphasizes the speaker’s person in the word “I,” even though there are features other than height of pitch which are also instrumental in deciding musical emphasis. It would seem practically impossible in this and many similar cases to make the words and the music say exactly the same thing, without much loss of beauty. Our love for symmetrical poetry and measured music prompts us to take some misplacement of emphasis in stride.

The trope system under discussion pertains to the Sacred Word only and does not embody these or similar exceptions. The Sacred Word is considered of utmost importance, and the music must serve that Word. With this thought in mind, the same rules which hold true concerning the one language hold true also concerning the other, and it is not intended to introduce anything new.

For the purpose of adjusting the music to the text, it was found helpful to consider each Hebrew word or hyphenated word, or its English equivalent, as consisting of two parts as follows:

1. The syllable or syllables before the accented one, if present. This part of the word is chanted with the note or group of notes known as introductory notes, “up-beat notes,”³³ or “anticipation.”³⁴ Dr. Binder, in his musical notations of the trope equivalents, distinguishes clearly between these notes and those following.³⁵

2. The accented syllable and the following one, if there is one. In English there may be none, one, or more syllables after the accented one.

Perhaps at this point the reader will be aware of some repetition and perhaps of some excessive simplification, and may need no further suggestions for using the charts and for chanting the text printed therewith. In the immediately following the essayist will merely venture to give an account of his procedure in a few instances.

We look to see what trope is accompanying a word. We see the first word, which is “Ho.” The trope, which resembles an arrowhead pointed in a horizontal direction, is No. 11. For the present purpose it was named “a staying,” so that there is an unaccented syllable before the accented one, just as there is in the Hebrew *yesiv*. The music for “a staying,” or *yesiv*, is in line T 1. We hum or sing the three notes given with the words “a staying,” or *yesiv*, or both. In so doing we obtain a mental picture of the arrowhead under the first letter of the word and associate it with the three notes given in line T 1. Then we proceed to sing the same music with the first word, which is “Ho.” Now we see that neither the Hebrew nor the English word has a syllable before the accented one as in the case of the trope name *yesiv*, or “a staying.” This happens often. Then we merely omit the

first note in line T 1 over “A.” Now we are ready to sing the word “Ho” with the two notes which are called the main body of the trope. We are ready to apply this music also to other words, as for instance the word marked by this trope near the middle of verse 10 of the chapter being used.

Now we proceed to the second word, the English equivalent of which we call “everyone that thirsteth.” The diagonal line above the last letter is called *pashtaw*, or “extend,” as we wish to name it now. In Chart II, on line T 1 it is identified as Trope No. 10, the number being in parentheses under the word. How shall we go about using the two notes given for “extend” with a six syllable word? The main body of the music for this trope consists of the second note, which is over *taw* of *pashtaw* and over “tend” of “extend.” This is the note with which the accented syllable of the text is to be chanted, and with which the additional syllable, if there is one, is to be concluded. There is one such syllable in English, the “eth” of “thirsteth.” There is none in the Hebrew word; so no adjustment is to be made in that respect here.

We look at the syllables before “thirst” and find that there are four of them in English and two of them in Hebrew before the accented syllable. These syllables are chanted to the note given for *pash* of *pashtaw* or “ex” of “extend.” This note is repeated for each additional syllable of the text that comes before “thirst.” Now we are ready to adjust the music of this trope also to other words of the text, over which it is placed, namely in lines 4, 8, 11, 15, and 19.

We notice several tropes which do not always have the same music. The *munach*, “sustain,” for instance, in these three passages has three melodizations, each one different from the other. In lines 2, 16, and 20, the *munach* is before *koton*, “small upright.” In line 5 it is before *revia*, “foursquare.” In line 10 it is before *esnachtaw*, “and a rest.” In each case the melodization depends upon the trope that follows, as seen in the lines indicated and the corresponding lines of Chart II.

The group of tropes beginning with *merchaw*, “make long,” and followed by *tipchaw*, “hand-breadth,” has a certain melodization when it ends in *esnachtaw*, “and a rest,” as seen from line T 3 and the corresponding line of Chart I. The same group has a different melodization when it ends in *sof pawsuk*, “end of sentence,” as seen from lines T 7, T 14, and T 21, and the corresponding lines in the text. When *tipchaw*, “hand-breadth” is followed by *munach*, “sustain,” and then *esnachtaw*, “and a rest,” the melodization is shown in lines T 9 and T 17, and the corresponding lines in Chart I.

The reader, after going over the charts, will agree that it is not necessary to memorize the rules involved in the different melodizations. He merely memorizes the melodization of the groups of tropes mentioned as well as that of similar groups to be adjusted to the text. In so doing he uses the names of the several tropes involved, in their sequence, together with their music. A person memorizing the music could sing the well known syllables: “la, la, la,” to the music of the tropes given. However, this procedure would not give him a mental picture of the group of notes involved. So he goes over the group, as for instance *merchaw*, *tipchaw*, *esnachtaw*, or “make long, hand-breadth, and a rest.” He then remembers that the *chaw* of *merchaw*, or the “long” of “make long,” has a higher note in this group than it has in the group that ends in *sof pawsuk*, “end of sentence.”

The early use of this group of tropes: “make long, handbreadth, and a rest,” may be traced from an account of the development of musical notation, and the mental picture thus gained may be helpful as a memory aid.³⁶

The different melodizations of tropes, depending upon their position relative to other tropes, need not disturb us. All users of our Lutheran Hymnal are well acquainted with such variations. We look at the last line of the first hymn, verse 1, where the two phrases occur: 1. “Oh, how blessed is this place,” and 2. “Filled with solace, light and grace.” We would not sing both of them to the same set of notes. Each of the two lines of the second hymn in our Hymnal consists of two phrases. We would not sing both phrases of either line to the same melodization. Our frequent use of variation and contrast is readily noticed in many of the hymns.

VII. Features of Interpretation

What determines the manner in which Biblical chanting is to be done? Not the musical metric character of the tropes, but the accentuation ingrained in the Sacred Text. Therefore the reader will find no time

signatures, such as “3/4, ” “4/4, ” etc., to determine the time, and no rigidly spaced barlines which, as Dr. Binder points out, would imprison the ancient and authentic character of Biblical chant.³⁷

Directives such as *legato*, *piano*, etc., are being left unused in this connection. Dr. Binder says that the cantillation of the prophetic portions should be performed “in a declamatory and oftentimes dramatic style: fluent and rolling.”³⁸

Biblical chant is non-measured music. This type of music, involving the absence of regularly spaced bar-lines and time signatures, is found frequently in our Lutheran Hymnal on pages 5 to 52 and in items No. 661 to 668.

Karl Wilson Gehrken, professor at Oberlin Conservatory of Music, takes cognizance of non-measured music when he says: “The conductor usually follows the soloist through the group of words found between two bars with the conventional baton movements, but this does not imply regularly spaced pulses as in the case of measured music, and the beats do not correspond in any way to those of the ordinary measure of rhythmic music. They merely enable the accompanying players to tell at approximately what point in the measure the singer is at any given time, the up-beat at the end of the group giving warning of the near approach of the next group.”³⁹

Although we are not presently interested in conducting, accompaniment, or baton movement, we appreciate the light shed by the masters upon the nature of non-measured music and its execution, if we call to mind these two general principles pertaining to the movement of the baton:

1. The strongest pulse of a group of notes is marked by a down-beat.
2. The weakest pulse of the group is marked by an up-beat.

The notes of non-measured can filiation, which come before the note or notes of the main body of the trope, are the introductory notes, also known as “anticipation” or “upbeat notes,” as previously mentioned.

VIII. Speaking of the Ancient Chant

In the following quotations an author gives his views concerning the beginning and development of poetry and the utterance of prophecy.

“To ‘prophesy’ meant to sing, and there is little doubt that Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others like them, uttered their prophecies in song, no less than in verse, both alike being extemporized. To such men as these music could never be an art—it was a form of speech, closely knit up with poetry. It is most probable that the use of an instrument for accompanying was only occasional. Their song, no less than their verse, was purely unpremeditated.”

“With the Hebrews this impassioned speech received a very peculiar development from the parallelism of sentences in which their language delighted. The effect of this was to divide every poetical expression into two similar or contrasted parts, and the music which accompanied the poetry naturally received this arrangement likewise. This peculiarity of structure may still be noticed today in the religious chant of our churches.”

The author of these quotations says that this kind of poetry had begun while the patriarchs were living in the plains of Mesopotamia, with the poem of Lamech, Genesis 4:23 and 24. A few remarks concerning this poem will be made before the close of this section. The author of the above quotations goes on to say:

“The plain results of the establishment of such a form of poetry and song was this: When the minstrel of the Old Patriarchal times gave place to the choruses of city life, the division of the verse into two parts, each reflecting the other, would obviously suggest the division of the chorus into two parts, each responding to the other, as for instance the men to the women, or two companies of women, or it might be a solo-singer and a chorus. That this style was developed in the city life in Egypt we might imagine, since the first mention of it in the Bible is immediately after the passage of the Red Sea.”⁴⁰

A person cannot pass lightly over an incident marked by the poetical boasting of a sinister character because of his planned or accomplished perpetration. However, our interest is centered on matters associated with cantillation and poetry, and here is the first poem of which we have a record. Dr. H. C. Leupold mentions

this as “Lamech’s Sword Song.”⁴¹ Taking both verses, 23 and 24 of Genesis, Chapter 4, we note that the first and fourth line endings are in rhyme, as also the second and third line endings. Similarly there are phrases within several of the lines which are in rhyme with each other. The reader will find worthy, though less ancient specimens of Hebrew poetry in rhyme, for example, in verses 4 and 5 of Psalm 100 and in verses 11, 14, and 17, of Psalm 145.

IX. Nomenclature

The etymology, the history, and even the musical definition of the term “trope” do not appear fully to justify its use for identifying the Biblical cantillation signs or their music. The word is employed, however, because of its timehonored use among English speaking authorities on Hebrew music and because of its brevity.

The word is derived from the Greek *trepein*, to turn, and signifies the use of a word in a figurative sense, a figure of speech, or figurative language in general. In our effort to associate this word with our use of it, we find that it meant any of various short formulistic phrases used in Gregorian chants. In the medieval church the word “trope” meant the interpolation of phrases or passages into the authorized service, or it meant a passage thus interpolated.⁴²

The fact that the tropes of the Old Testament under discussion have little in common with the tropes of the early New Testament Church, is brought to light in the following historical resume by The Rt. Rev. W. H. Frere, D.D., C.R., Lord Bishop of Truro.

He says, there arose in the 8th or 9th century “a custom of making interpolations into the church chant, which in course of time spread through almost the whole range of liturgical song. Such interpolations had the generic name of trope... As the development went on there was little left that had not suffered from these parasites. Even the short closing versicle and response *Benedicamus Domino, Deo Graters* was troped and here as elsewhere the trope grew into an elaborate and almost independent composition. Then came a revulsion; as the 16th century drew on the tropes began to disappear, and finally, in the Tridentine revision of the Latin service books all trace of tropes was banished, unless the one or two surviving sequences may be counted as such.

“But some tropes had sufficient merit to preserve their existence in separate form: e.g. the popular melody set to ‘Of the Father’s Love begotten’ is in origin a trope to the *Sanctus*, while the popular poem *O filii et filiae* is a trope to *Benedicamus*.”⁴³

The two titles mentioned in the last paragraph may be found in our Lutheran Hymnal, under the numbers 98 and 208 respectively.

X. Closing Remarks

The musical charts in this part of the essay were assembled by the essayist in an effort to present an opportunity for examining the melodization of the prophetic writings according to Ashkenazic tradition, and to give an account of his experience concerning the subject matter. The remaining prose books of the Old Testament have melodizations which are somewhat different, but just as easily applied as the ones mentioned above, especially when one follows Dr. Binder’s practical volume mentioned, which includes the complete listing of the melodizations for the Prose Books and has many fine qualities that cannot be enumerated by the essayist, who considers “Biblical Chant” worthy of recommendation to serious fellow students who would allot some time occasionally to this study.

If the essayist’s efforts resulted in an invitation for further study, he is grateful. His cooperation involved in writing down his findings and experiences concerning this subject matter, was requested by our Reverend Dr. P. Peters of the Mequon Faculty, Managing Editor of the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, was also granted his permission for the temporary deviation from the usual mode of transliteration in favor of the *Ashkenazic* version in the course of this presentation, for reasons previously stated.⁴⁴

The essayist’s gratitude is due to Dr. Peters and his learned colleagues for their most welcome and

constructive criticism and comment and to the fellow students attending the Forum, for their interest and discussion, which were indispensable for imparting direction to the essayist's endeavors.

To the fellow students and readers who will be calling mankind back to God and to repentance, especially in a time when an Elijah must be reminded that not all the knees have bowed unto Baal (I Kings 19:18), and Elisha's servant must be reassured of those that be with us (II Kings 6:16), this work is humbly dedicated with the prayer that the Lord bestow upon them His grace to preach the Word with power, as they issue the call of the Prophets.

*Lord of hosts, we come before Thee,
To praise, adore, and to implore Thee,
To call upon Thy holy name.
Grant us grace, bestow Thy blessing,
That we, Thy grace and strength possessing,
May nevermore be put to shame.
The foe with might and main
Would ply his craft again.
Thou art greater,
Greater than all.
On Thee we call,
For Thou wilt make Thy foes to fall.⁴⁵*