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DOCTORAL SCHOOL

THESIS SUMMARY

*CHURCH MUSIC IN THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN
COMMUNITIES AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN
THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MILLENIUM*

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Since its creation, from the first sacred cult forms that Christianity organizes, music imposes as a decisive element. In the Gospel of Matthew it is stated clearly that after the Last Supper, Jesus Christ together with His apostles sang songs: “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matthew 26, 30).

And the Holy Apostles imitated what happened at the Last Supper, borrowing the music to commit worship: “(...) whenever they were gathering day and night in private houses where they were praying, they were also singing praising hymns (Acts 16, 25)”. This truth is confirmed by Saint Apostle Paul in his epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians: “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, always giving thanks and singing from your hearts to the Lord!” (Ephesians 5, 19 and Colossians 3, 16)”

Considering that the music was used in the mosaic spiritual environment, the first Christians that were coming from this environment, took the singing of the religious hymns. “It is known that the first seed of the Christian being thrown in Jerusalem, and the first Christian church being formed by the Christians born Judeans, understandably the song of the psalms from

the Old Testament prevailed in the primary Church; thus we can state that until the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70 AC, in the Christian Church, it could not be other melody but the Jewish one”.

Therefore, the beginning of the Christian Church’s music must be searched in the Jewish synagogue. This beginning coincides with the history of Christianity itself. Jesus Christ the Savior is the One that makes the transition from the Jewish cult to the Christian one, establishing new ordinances and taking hymns and liturgical forms from the Hebrew one.

The first Christians, coming from Jews, brought also with them the chanting of the psalms; the notes to emphasize certain syllables of the psalms, constituted perhaps a rule of height chanting or execution of the rhythm, of a diatonic modulation.

The Erudite Bishop Nifon Niculescu of the Lower Danube, pleads for the homophonic chanting in the Church, in his support brining examples of the Holy Fathers from the first Christian centuries: “What kind of singing were the Christians using the in the church in the first three primary centuries of Christianity? Regarding this two church fathers, Tertullian and Saint John Chrysostom assures us that in these three primary centuries of Christianity, at the divine service, were singing all Christians, men and women, old and young; either psalms from the Holy Scripture or hymns made by the Christians, from their own religious reflection, in a single melody”.

The religious chanting embellishes the religious cult and exalts the human spirits towards the high spheres of faith and spiritual living: “Music is therefore the speaking of the spirit, because it shows us its secret movements and intimate life”.

Being a constant of the spiritual life, music was part of the cult of each religion, developing from the simple incantations until the choral melodic masterpieces through which the man wishes to express the harmony of the universe or the symphony of the angels. Along with the word and symbol, music ennobled the cult music, with the human’s desire to realize the conscious and free link with the divine.

Not only music, but also other arts – architecture, sculpture, painting, literature, poetry – were inseparable from religion, even more were inextricably connected with it, reaching the highest peaks under the tutelage of religion. Both religion and art, and in our case music, have in common the idea of divine inspiration, without which great works whether religious or artistic, could realize.

Developed in parallel with the neighboring cultures – Egyptian, Assyrian, Mesopotamian or Hellenistic – Jewish music played a special role both in the Jewish cultic and secular life, but most of the time the latter standing still in relation to the sacred. Holy Scripture doesn’t give many information regarding the music of the chosen people, but yet we can find in its pages enough notes on the role this art played in expressing the Old Testament divine cult.

From the beginning we are stating that the Hebrew language uses the same terminology both for the vocal music and instrumental one.

The cult consists of all the rites and ceremonies which pay homage to the deity. In the Holy Scripture, the word cult only appears two times in the Old Testament: once regarding the cult that the people had to bring to the Lord after entering Canaan (Exodus 13, 5) and another to prevent the children of Israel against the false cults addressed to the heavenly bodies (Deuteronomy 4, 19). In the Colombe version, the expression “to serve (God or our Lord)” is sometimes translated through “practicing a cult”, “to address to a cult” (Exodus 3, 12; Deuteronomy 6, 13; 10, 20; 13, 5 etc.). In the New Testament, this word is applied either to the Judean cult (Romans 9, 4; Hebrews 8, 5; 9, 1; 9, 21; 10, 2), or to some idolatrous cults (Acts 7,

42; Colossians 2, 18) or results of human imagination (John 16, 2; Colossians 2, 18), or to some attitude adopted by the believer towards God (Romans 12, 1; Philippians 3, 3; Hebrews 12, 28). Therefore, this term never refers to what we call Christian cult. In the majority of these passages, the used Greek word is “latreia” (verb “latreno”) which means: to serve (a man or God), to bring worship, to adore.

In the Old Testament, the central place in the cult were occupied by the sacrifices. Even since the beginning of mankind, people expressed their gratitude and veneration towards God through sacrifices (Genesis 4, 4; 8, 20; 35, 14), calling His Name (Genesis 4, 26; 12, 8). On Sinai, God codified the way to bring to Him an acceptable worship. The cult practiced at the Tabernacle and the Temple consists of: reading of the Law (Exodus 24, 7-8), various prayers (Leviticus 1, 7; Deuteronomy 12, 5-7), saying the Israelite creed (Numbers 15, 37-41; Deuteronomy 6, 4-9; 11, 13-21), of various prayers (2 Kings 8, 22-53; 2 Chronicles 20, 5-12; 30, 18-20), incense burning and later the singing of psalms by the Levites (1 Chronicles, 12, 42; 2 Chronicles 5, 12-13; Psalms 81, 2, 3), accompanied by ritual dances (Psalms 87, 7; 149, 3; 150, 4). In the end, the priest gave the blessing (Numbers 6, 24-26). The cult of God included all Israelites' life: (Numbers 28, 3-8), Sabbath (v. 9-10), new months (v. 11-15), holidays (v. 16-29, 39), Sabbatical (Leviticus 25, 1-7) and jubilee years (v. 8-19). The priest and Levites were mandatory mediators of an available cult, but also with the holidays there were participating all Israel's congregation (Deuteronomy 16, 16; Luke 2, 41-42) through praises (Psalms 93; Psalms 95-100) and prayers (Psalms 60; 79; 80), to express their gratitude towards God (Deuteronomy 11, 13). The Israelite cult had a community nature (1 Chronicles 29, 20; Psalms 42, 4), with rare exceptions (Exodus 33, 9 – 34, 8).

In synagogue, the cult is centered on lecture and explanation of the Scriptures (Luke 4, 15-27) (the desk of the one reading the Scriptures was in the middle of the room). Beside these, there were red prayers, the mosaic creed, sung psalms and was repeated the blessing of Aaron (Numbers 6, 24-26). These kind of services were assured by laities.

The first Christians took the essential elements of the synagogue cult adding Lord's Table. They were participating at the Temple cult (Acts 2, 46; 3, 1; 5, 42; 21, 26; 24, 17-18), but they were having Lord's Supper in houses (Acts 2, 42, 46) and prayed together (Acts 4, 31; 12, 12).

The Christian cult is characterized through freedom (1 Corinthians 14, 26; 2 Corinthians 3, 17) and orderliness (1 Corinthians 14, 32-33). It consists of: prayers in the language of those present and a different language (1 Corinthians 14, 14-15), praising songs, psalms, spiritual singing (Ephesians 5, 19; Colossians 3, 16), reading of the Scriptures (1 Timothy 4, 13) and of the epistles coming from the apostles (Acts 15, 30-31; Colossians 4, 16; 1 Thessalonians 5, 27), and some teaching, advise and edification words (Acts 17, 2; 18, 28; Romans 15, 4; 1 Corinthians 14, 26; 1 Timothy 3, 16; 2 Timothy 3, 16).

All the divine service from earth is a mirroring of the one from the heavens. The cult of the Old Covenant was the shadow of the heavenly realities (Hebrews 8, 5). Jesus Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary with His own blood and there He officiates as a Great Priest (Hebrews 9, 11, 12, 24). The angels are His servants (1, 14). The seraphim praise God day and night (Isaiah 6, 2-4). The Revelation evokes some scenes of the heavenly cult (4, 8-11; 5, 8-14; 7:9-12; 11:15-19; 14:1-3; 15:2-4), in which, we can discern some elements of the Christian cult from the end of the first century.

Usage of the word cult (Cornilescu uses it through the spiritual service, ministry, worship. Check other N. Ed. versions) in Romans 12, 1; Philippians 3, 3 and Hebrews 12, 28

proves that the true Christian cult begins with a consecration act of our entire being in the service of God, that it includes the entire activity in our lives, that it is inspired by the Spirit of God and our gratitude for His blessings.

The scriptural references from the book of Genesis does not specify the time or way in which the music, respectively the chanting, with all its dimension, were planted by God in the human being. But the first biblical testimony on the art of music we can find in chapter 4, verse 21: "His brother's (of Jubal) name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes". We can observe that in this verse the author of Pentateuch does not specifically aims for a cultic connotation of the first musical reference. Rather the art of music appears in the Book of Genesis closely related to the shepherd's occupation, if we take into account that Jubal had a brother, Jabal, which was "the father of those who live in tents, in herds" (Genesis 4, 20).

From the biblical perspective Jubal appears in the history firmament as being the one that invented music and especially the instrumental one.

Although the text of Genesis 4, 21 can be considered as first mention of the musical art (of the scriptural books' chronology perspective), cultic chanting has its roots in the doxological chanting itself brought by God's angels, before the creation of the seen world: "while the stars were being born and My angels were glorifying Me in chorus? (Job 38, 7) says God the Lord Himself. Saint John of Damascus refers to this glorification as a permanent mission of the angels: "They live in heaven and have only one thing to do: to praise God and to serve His divine will".

In the biblical acceptation this praise brought to God is equivalent to the chant exalted to Him, and this act we can observe especially in the poetry of the psalms: "Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of His faithful people. Let them praise His name with dancing and make music to Him with timbrel and harp". (Psalms 149, 1-3).

In psalm 148, the psalmist considers necessary that the praise brought to God must start from the heavens, from the high ones, from angels and His powers, from the stars, moon and light, and later to praise the Lord for the earthly ones: nature – depths, fire, hail, snow, ice, blizzard blowing, mountains, hills, fruit trees, cedars, beasts and all animals, creeping things and flying birds – and the man: the kings of the earth, all nations, the greatest and all judges of the earth, young and virgins, elders with the younger. This enumeration makes us realize that the celeste and earthly elements have planted in them a music of their own, real, through which is praised God.

Holy Scripture gives us information regarding the use of the music as a cult element during the time of the biblical patriarchs until Moses. This we can explain especially in that there isn't any unitary organized cult, but one developed after ordinance imposed by the first-born. The central element of the cult was the animal sacrifice brought on the altar to God. It defined the human drama in the Edenic post state that expressed the dependence of the Creator, the wish of realizing the communion with Him and in the same time a recognition of the sinful state. Of this cult, we could individually say that the musical elements miss. Throughout history, the cult would take different forms of manifestations, and music, in all religions, was an integrant part of the cult and manifestation form of the human religiosity in relation with the divinity.

The myth of the "skills origin" is found in Genesis 4, 20-22, where it is registered the first "blacksmith" (Tubal-cain), the first cattle breeder (Jabal) and the "first" musician (Jubal), identifying the three most useful occupations (at least in the mind of the later biblical writer), until the earliest times of human history. The fact that the musician is placed alongside

more practical professions suggests the age of music and the position it occupies in the Israelite culture.

Even in its most primitive forms, music should have been engaged by the human communities for a variety of purposes. For example, it could have been used to calm a child or sheep flocks. When people were engaged in monotone or intense works (i.e. breaking grapes, or in wells – Numbers 21, 17-18 – or building a new house, or barn), the singers could have been used to help maintaining the rhythm of the workers and speed of fulfilling the task of that day.

Possibly that another common use of the music and dance would have been with the occasion of celebrations or holidays, both small and large ones. They were used to mark major events in the people's lives or to express their joy and satisfaction the life gives them. Thus, in Ecclesiastes 3, 4, in the litany of life's events, the dance is contrasted by wailing. Not every frivolity was accepted by the biblical writers. For example, a mocking song of the drunk is mentioned in Psalms 69, 13 – Eng. v. 12, and in Job, the one that suffers observes without understanding that the sons of the sinners dance while the sinners themselves sing the rhythm at the tambourine, lyre and chord (21, 11-12).

The diversions given by the entertainment were essential to their lives, amid so many concerns regarding the hostile conditions of the environment and unfriendly neighbors. This thing could very well explain, at least partially, the holiness of the hospitality code which meant that visitors (both known and unknown) to be received, fed and sent from the guests' house having good feelings. The visitors' accommodation involved to some extent the entertainment, both for the host and for the visitor, which, as suggested by Laban in the word addressed to James, could have included songs and musical instruments (Genesis 31, 47).

Since the economic base for most people, even during monarchy, it was given mainly by the pastoral and agricultural work, sowing, reaping and shearing could be occasions for religious and secular holidays. Thus, Shiloh's young women were dancing each year near their vineyards (Judges 21, 19-21), and the sons of David rejoiced at the feast that followed of Absalom's sheep shearing. (2 Samuel 14, 28). In the case of Shiloh's festival and dance of the young woman from Song of Solomon 6, 13, the dance offered the opportunity of a possible match-making, serving thus to the religious purpose, and helping for the community's perpetuation.

Marriages were also occasions for music and merriment. Samson's riddle, full of alliterations and word games (Nel 1985, 542-43), suggests a song that would be fit for the celebrations related to his marriage (Judges 14, 14). The ritual of the marriage included also a planned meeting between the groom and bride at a party, which was accompanied by tambourine players (1 Mac. 9,37-39; Sendrey 1969,461). Them, and the other fellows joined in chants as the feast and other activities were ongoing (Jeremiah 16, 9). Curiously, the celebrations of the marriages described in the New Testament (Matthew 22, 1-13 and John 2, 1-11) do not include any mention related to the musicians or songs. However, these aspects is possible to have become so common, that were simply assumed by the audience.

Births, with the promise of a new life and continuity of heritage, were also marked by the ceremonial and ritualized music. Right before the baby is born, songs and incantations were used to guard and help for a quick and easy birth. At the birth preparation were required the midwives, and in some cases, singers, to celebrate and guard the birth. The formula "don't despair" used by the midwives in Genesis 35, 17 and 1 Samuel 4, 20, followed by the receiving the mother's name, suggests a traditional litany which is sang at the birth of children. This thing is somewhat suggested also by Luke's description of the birth of Jesus, which is

proclaimed to the angels pastors, which tells them not to despair, then Jesus receives His name and is chanted in chorus (Luke 2, 9-14).

With the establishment of the royal court, there appeared new uses of music and dance. The coronation of the kings was announced through trumpet sounds (2 Samuel 15, 10; 1 Kings 1, 39), and in the case of Solomon, by a procession that was marching to the sound of the tambourines (1 Kings 1, 40). The latter marks an intentional parallel of his father's career. David also entered in Jerusalem with a procession, while the Ark of the Covenant was brought to the Capital. With this occasion, people sang while they were walking in the rhythm of the lyre, harp, tambourines, castanets and drums (2 Samuel 6, 5). When he arrived in the city, David praised God and demonstrated the right to control the power of Yahweh and of the Ark, dancing "with all its strength" while the horns were playing (verses 14-15). It is possible that the dance of David and his procession could have been committed again by his successors to the throne, legitimizing thus their mastery and invoking the covenant made by Yahweh with David. Actually, there is an entire group of "psalms of enthronement" (mentioning Psalms 2; 20; 72; 89; 101; 110; 144), which reiterates the right of the Davidic dynasty to rule and of which, probably, was made use in the fall festival marked by its creation.

Among the events that occurred at the annual festival, we are mentioning a big event, probably using Psalm 68 that urges people, "Sing to God, sing in praise of His name" (verse 5), in his first part. Priests and nobles, advisers and representatives of the tribes were marching on the streets of Jerusalem towards the temple having the "singers in front, minstrels, last, and between them, the young women playing the tambourines". Then there were brought sacrifices and were held speeches that, like in the psalm, included in a summarized form, the triumphant acts of Yahweh. Both Yahweh, "who rides on the clouds" (verse 5 – a title used for Ba`al in Ugaritic writings) and His king were thus glorified.

Once enthroned in their palaces, the rich kings and nobles wanted to enrich them with all the jewelry found in the other royal courts. Thus, as it is described in Ecclesiastes 2, 8, they "amassed silver and gold and a great number of kings and satraps: brought male and female singers and a harem as well, the delights of a man's heart." The singers and musicians became an evidence of power (2 Samuel 19, 35), both for fun and for ostentation (Isaiah 5, 12). Such an extravagance brought the social critic of the prophets. Among others, we mention Amos, which punished harshly the rich who "are lounging on ivory beds, and are lying in their sheets and eat lambs from the flock and calves raised in stables. They look skilled in the lyre songs and just like David, they compete in musical instruments" (6, 4-5).

The army was using such music, especially with the purpose of focusing their forces (Judges 3, 27; 6, 34), to lead disparate men groups on the battlefield, or to signal troops in advance (Numbers 10, 9), or to retreat. Sendrey (1969, 469-70) suggests that there were "war dances" that were preparing the battles. He quotes Ezekiel 6, 11, "Strike your hands together and stamp your feet" as an allusion to such a dance. Isaiah 13, 3, which urges the soldiers to "bless themselves" before going to battle, could be a clue of the ritualistic activities, including the dance.

The trumpets used by Gideon (Judges 7, 15-24) serve the additional function of amazement of the Midianites and help in the surprise attack of the Israelites. Similarly, the sound of the ram horns, played by the Israelites priests in the Jericho siege increase the psychological effect on people after they marched in silence for six days before reaching the city (Joshua 6, 13-16).

Victories, of course, were bringing a spontaneous celebration and joy (Judges 11, 34). For the commemoration of these events, were composed heroic ballads and praising songs of Yahweh. Among the most important hymns of gratitude we mention “The Song of the Sea” (Exodus 15, 1-18), Sihon’s victory ballad over the Amorites (Numbers 21, 27-30) and “Song of Deborah” (Judges 5). Each one of these epic poems, as well as the short songs of Lamech (Genesis 4, 23) and Samson (Judges 15, 16) have their own rhythm. The instrumental accompaniment, although subordinate to the reciting of the verses, helps creating the state, the high tension and helps in the symmetry of the composition (Polin 1954,14). Dancing, also could have been a part of these celebrations, such as the procession of the women who were singing at drums and executing the “round-dance” (Mahol), while joining the sinner soldiers or priest, on their path to Yahweh’s sanctuary.

Less elaborated chants, with the purpose in rhythmically accompany the dance, were also composed. The progressive phrase chanted by the village women in welcoming Saul and David “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands” (1 Samuel 18, 7) – must have haunted king Saul. These women were hitting the ground with their feet as they were singing and twisting by the sound of the drum, as the Bedouin women of today. The universality that this phrase gained can be seen in the fact that it was repeated in Philistines in two different moments of the nation (1 Samuel 21, 11; 29, 5). There is the possibility that it could have been at one point an entire block of narrations and heroic songs that no longer exist. These may have been included in the lost resources of the biblical writers, the Book of the Wars of the Lord (Numbers 21, 14) or Book of Jasher (Joshua 10, 13; 2 Samuel 1, 18).

Using the music in religious purposes can be seen both popular and institutionalized. Both for the king and peasant, music was part of the wail process (2 Samuel 3, 32-34; Judges 11, 40). The funeral processions in which was included the presence of professional mourners, beating their temples, were mourning and lamenting on the background of the flute songs of mourning. Disease and premature death were frequently seen situations for these antic nations, and thus were composed songs and special instruments (like the hanging bells of the priest’s robe – Exodus 28, 33-35), and also dances with apotropaic purpose. People then were hoping that through calming the ill one (1 Samuel 16, 16) or by casting away the demons that caused the death, the man could recover his vitality.

The apotropaic character of the religious ritual, including here the chants and dances, is easy to identify in the case of the horrified Israelites that asked Aaron to forge a golden calf for them, right when they thought Moses was lost, and they needed a tangible worship object, to calm their fears. Worshiping included strong, frantic chants and dances (Exodus 32, 19), that could be a way of the writer to differentiate the idol Canaanite worshiping (also the golden calf from Dan and Bethel) from the real Israelite rituals (of Jerusalem). A clue of this thing is the similarity between their actions and of the prophecies of Baal in 1 Kings 18, 26-29. These prophets were chanting an incantation “O Baal, answer to us!” and were dancing with irregular steps. Then, in their frenzy to receive an answer, they were cutting themselves and screaming. Elijah mocks them and their ineffective actions, demanding ultimately their death, as Moses demanded the death of Israel’s infidels.

Finally, the apotropaic chants and dances become more complex and served as basis for the Israelite drama and religious ritual. For example, the psalms associated to the reciting of the creation story – Psalms 8; 19; 104; 139 – contain both literary and musical elements (based on the superscription entries, where there are choral signs and text assonances) necessary for an appropriate performance. Similarly, in the narrative sections of the biblical text

there can be found stories that include forms of apotropaic musical expression and celebration. For example the “Song of the Sea” and “Song of Miriam” from Exodus 15 suggests calmness and also the fear of power which God cast it upon the chariots of the Pharaoh.

Many prophetic narrations suggest that music and dance were an intrinsic part of the religious expression. For example, the prophets that Saul met while he was descending from the high place, playing the harp, tambourine, flute and lyre, were prophesizing as the music offered them a state of ecstasy (1 Samuel 10, 5). Elisha hired the use of a musician to cause the prophetic trance in 2 Kings 3, 15.

While the music became more formal, the professional guilds of musicians were contracted to form choirs and orchestras serving various temples and around and even the palace. An evidence of this phenomenon we find in the book of Amos. During his stay in Bethel, Amos preached against the emptiness of worshiping in the temple there, declaring that Yahweh would not listen anymore the songs of the servants and of the harp (5, 23). Another clue regarding these musician guilds we find in the Assyrian Annals. Following the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian king Sennacherib, King Hezekiah was forced to pay an immense ransom for the city that included musicians, men and women.

The Israelite musician guilds have many parallels during the Old Testament. They, in essence, represent the music movement towards a liturgical form, having a religious calendar of performances. Sarna (EncJud 13, 1317) suggests that the Levites singers, of which is said that David gave them permission to sing inside the Temple of Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 6; 15; 16; 25; 29; 2 Chronicles 35, 15), had actually their place in the cultic community not long after this traditional date. Every time they were called, it was their responsibility to bring a constant praise to Yahweh and to “prophesize with lyres, harps and cymbals (1 Chronicles 25, 1). Between their musical themes was the calling of Yahweh to have mercy and concern for the people (Psalms 23; 46) and curse the unfaithful (Psalm 58). That is why, they were reciting the epic history of the past victories of Yahweh with the occasion of the great holidays and enthronement of the kings (Psalms 78; 81; 105).

These Levitical singers, of which original rulers are considered to be Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman (1 Chronicles 25, 1) were probably even more prominent in the temple cult during the second Temple, that followed the Exile. These were united in an organization and were singing the liturgical music of many other groups, including those associated to Chenaniah, “leader of the singers’ music” (1 Chronicles 5, 27) and Mattithiah and other five men, that “were to lead the lyres” (1 Chronicles 15, 21). Another group, (1 Chronicles 15, 21), was part of the musical community, since their names appear in the superscript of several psalms (42, 44-49; 84-85; 87-88).

Each guild would be created and associated, ultimately, with a certain repertoire of songs – thus helping in transmitting and survival of the sacred music (Sarna EncJud 13, 1317). Their survival during the Babylonian exile and their importance in the community establishment of the second temple can be seen in the list of exiled that returned with Zerubbabel in Jerusalem. Here it is remembered that 200 men and women singers (Ezra 2, 65), and also 128 “sons of Asaph” (2, 41) were part of the campaign return.

In light of the importance of the later guilds, it is interesting to note that “Asaph’s sons” are presented in the ceremony dedicated to the restored temple’s foundation placement in Ezra 3, 10-11, playing the trumpets and drums, singing a praising hymn addressed to Yahweh. Thus, no musician or choir is mentioned in the formal dedication of the temple by Solomon in 1 Kings 8. Seems probable, yet, that these kind of events need music and the ritual dancing, and

actually, these to be included in the expression “prayer and supplication” (8, 28, 30, 33). The absence of the interprets in this text probably reflects a more important intention from the writer’s point of view, that did not wished to heap the scene with obvious details.

Despite the fact that the music of the ancient Israel is, mostly, lost to us, there are clear evidences that show how organized was the music and the interpretations of the music. Here we will include the technical terms that we find in the Psalms. They consist of headings, formal instructions for directors (lamenasseah – a term that appears 55 times in the Psalms and in Habakkuk 3, 19). They have to do with style, tone (al-hasseminit – “on the eighteenth” – Psalms 6; 12, but not an octave, which was unknown to the Jewish musicians), instrumentation (neginot – stringed instruments – Psalms 4; 6; 54; 55; 67; 76) and even the engaging tone (al-tashet – Do not destroy – Psalms 57-59; 75 and ayyelet hassahar – “In accordance with the sunset” – Psalm 22). Some terms were used to identify the type. Among these we enumerate siggayon (Psalm 7), that was related to the word Akk. segu, “to wail”, and therefore it could have served as a basis for a lamentation song.

There are offered even indications. For example, al mut labben (Psalm 9) may indicate the use of tenor voice, el hannehilot (Psalm 5) can be a cue for the wind instruments entry. Many of these terms appear in the superscripts of the psalms, but some, as sela, appear in the texts of the psalms. This word, hard to translate, that is seen 71 times in 39 psalms and 3 times in Habakkuk (3, 3, 9, 13), can be a sign of respiration, a cue for the entry of the musicians, or simply, an affirmation of the latter said.

More general terms appear in superscripts. Some have the value of labels, as tehillah (“praising song” – Psalm 145) and tepilla (“prayer” – Psalms 17; 86; 90; 102; 142; Habakkuk 3, 1), that can be applied in the case of all psalms. Other are more explicit in identifying the type of psalm, and in some cases, even of the repertoire or group (guild) of which it belongs. Among these, the most often seen terms are the following:

1. maskil. This term is found in the header of thirteen psalms (32; 42; 44; 45; 52-55; 74; 78; 88; 89; 142). Its root is probably sakal, “to understand”, and thus was interpreted by many commentators as referring to a didactic poem. This is a general title; however, the term could have had even more particular meanings – probably, it could have been an indicator of a penitence song.

2. mizmor. It seems that only in the Psalms, the term is found 57 times, always being associated with a personal name; it is probably a term that indicates music being associated with the liturgy and guilds.

3. sir. While this is a general term, which simply means “to sing”, it also has technical qualities, appearing 30 times in the Psalms, as well as in other parts (Exodus 15, 1; Numbers 21, 17; Deuteronomy 31, 19, among others). It is found both in the header and body of the psalm, and is sometimes accompanied by mizmor. In some contexts, that’s why, it seems to indicate a body or some kind of a religious song. A sign of it is found in the title sir hamm’alot, “Ascending Songs”, Psalms 120-134.

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