THE CONCEPT OF MODE IN EUROPEAN SYNAGOGUE CHANT

An analysis of the Adošem Malāk Shtejger

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When the traditional chant of European (Ashkenazi) synagogues was transcribed in modern notation and compared with contemporary music during the nineteenth century, the special character of certain melodical and formal traits soon became obvious. In particular, some strange modal structures were revealed that differed both from the present and from the past forms of Western music, or appeared to perpetuate some of them in an anachronistic way. To begin with, very summarily they were placed on a par with the Phrygian and Mixolydian ecclesiastical modes¹; more cautiously, Ferdinand Hiller spoke of "tunes that cannot be inserted in our system because of their haphazard semi-tones and augmented Seconds, but nevertheless are not lacking a... tonal basis, or how that may be called".²

The first attempt at a systematic description of the traditional modes of the Ashkenazi synagogues was made by the Viennese cantor Josef Singer³ who initiated the use of the professional term *Shtejger* that was already familiar to his colleagues as a designation of modal genres; this word means in Yiddish "mode, modus, manner" (e.g., *lebens shtejger* = mode of life). Singer still had the impression that a scale of eight notes was sufficient to describe the range of a mode — in accordance with the scholastic opinion concerning Plainsong. In this way, he established three principal *Synagogentonarten*, declaring the remaining modes a blend or mixture of these three, and named the *shtejger* after the initial words of important prayers chanted to them. The next step of relating the singing practice of the East-European synagogue song

¹ H. Weintraub, Schire Beth Adonai oder Tempelgesänge (Königsberg 1859), Vorwort, p. 1. — S. Naumbourg, "Etude historique sur la musique des Hébreux", in his Agudat Shirim, Recueil de chants religieux et populaires des Israélites (Paris 1874), p. XIV; scales with augmented Seconds pointed out p. XV-XVI. — Zvi Nisan (Hirsch) Golomb, Zimrat-Yah (Wilna 1885), § 10.

² Ferdinand Hiller, Künstlerleben (Berlin 1880), p. 295.

³ Josef Singer, Die Tonarten des traditionellen Synagogengesanges (Steiger); ihr Verhältnis zu den Kirchentonarten und den Tonarten der vorchristlichen Musikperiode (Vienna 1886). abstracts in A. Friedmann, ed., Dem Andenken Eduard Birnbaums (Berlin 1922), pp. 90–100. to order and system was carried out by P. Minkowski⁴. His modes are four in number and are again understood as octave scales; some of them have different intervals in ascent and in descent.

Early in this century, the definition of a shtejger was refined by the realization that it need not be bound to repeated octave scales; it may extend over a wider or narrower range than the octave, and individual notes may be lowered or raised according to their position in the first or the second octave. A. Friedmann⁵ was the first to propose such "utilitarian scales" (Gebrauchsleitern) for the shtejger. As knowledge and understanding of the principles governing the oriental maqāmāt, ragas and similar phenomena (such as the modes of the neo-Greek church) increased, investigators recognized their resemblance to the structure of the shtejger6. They started asking whether, besides the specific scale, a certain stock of motives might also belong to the characteristics of the synagogue modes; they even asked if an ethos was connected with them as is the case with the maqāmāt and ragas. Moreover, it was suggested that a htejger should be defined not by means of an abstract scale, but rather by a formula model demonstrating the most typical movements (motives) within the scalar framework, similar to the practice of the singers of the Orthodox Church⁷. As far as I know, E. Werner⁸ was the first to produce such a formula model as a demonstration of the shtejger.

The earlier investigators had been trained synagogue cantors and knew the facts and problems from within. They found it easy to communicate with each other, and it was possible to arrive at a consensus of opinion without working out the theses to the last detail. In particular, they neglected the systematic establishment of the motive-stock of the *shtejger9*, relying, instead, upon general impressions that could be taken as self-explanatory by the initiated.

⁴ P. Minkowski, "Hazanut", in *Ozar Yissrael*, Vol. IV, (New York 1907–1913), p. 263. — Other suggestions came from A. Eisenstadt, *Alt-israelitische liturgische Gesänge* (Berlin 1897), p. I; I. Schwarz, "Ueber Chasonus und Steiger", *Der Jüdische Cantor*, XVI (Bromberg 1894), reprinted Friedmann, *Dem Andenken E. Birnbaums*, ed. cit., pp. 198–206.

⁵ A. Friedmann, Der synagogale Gesang² (Berlin 1904), p. 87.

⁶ A. Z. Idelsohn, "Der synagogale Gesang im Lichte der orientalischen Musik", Israelitisches Familienblatt, Jahrgang 10 (1913); reprinted A. Friedmann, Dem Andenken E. Birnbaums, op. cit., pp. 62-69.

⁷ J. B. Rebours, *Traité de Psaltique* (Paris 1906), pp. 97; 112. — Cf. also Daliah Cohen, "Patterns and frameworks of intonation", *Journal of Music Theory* XIII/1 (1969), pp. 78-85.

⁸ E. Werner, "Jewish music", *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*⁵, Vol. IV (1954) p. 628. — Idem, "The music of post-Biblical Judaism", *New Oxford History of Music*, Vol. I (1957), p. 320-324.

⁹ An exception: A. Z. Idelsohn, "The Mogen-Ovos-Mode; a Study in Folklore", HUCA XIV (1939), pp. 559-574 (formerly as "Der Mogen-Ovos-Steiger; eine folkloristische Studie", Der Jüdische Kantor, VII (Hamburg 1933), No. 1, pp. 3-6).

It has proved impossible, however, to elucidate, or even to ask questions about, melodic structure and particularities of modality without a substantial knowledge of the motives belonging to a certain cycle of chants. This paper undertakes to supply part of the missing links with regard to one of the more important *shtejger*, and to outline the resulting conclusions.

The subject of investigation is the Ashkenazi synagogue mode called *Adošem* malak shtejger after the initial words of Ps. XCIII ("The Lord reigneth"). It may be regarded as the second in significance after the *Ahavah rabbah* mode, but is better suited to an analysis by its more definite limits of application. The following examination of the *Adošem malak* mode is based upon a sample of 30 melodies chosen to represent a cross-section, i.e., with due consideration given to such variables as may influence the distribution of motives: assignment to different liturgical purposes, synagogal or domestic; origin in different countries or provinces; prose or poetical texts; recitative or "melody" character of the tune; different period and authorship of notation.

1. Tonal Range (Scale)

The "scale" of the *Adošem malak shtejger* was formerly sometimes called "Mixolydian" because of the diminished Seventh that characterizes it. According to present concepts, its tonal range can be specified as given in Example 1 (the pitch not to be understood as absolute, but merely as convenient for performing most of the melodies).

Ex. 1



The Seventh above the final note is diminished both in ascending and descending movement. Whenever melodies go beyond the octave range, a minor Tenth appears; and if they descend below the final note the subfinal is sharpened a semitone. Thus, a major Third stands opposite a minor Tenth, and the flattened Seventh faces the sharpened tone below the final note.

Points of rest of the melodies ("half-clauses", "semifinals") are located at the Fifth and Third. The Fifth is the most prominent note in most of the melodies — a "dominant" according to the concept of the church modes; in rare cases it may even assume the function of a finalis. On the other hand, the Fourth is a very marginal note and is occasionally passed over; this feature distinguishes the *shtejger* from the ecclesiastical modes with which it has been compared. Some cases of a Fourth sharpened when leading to the Fifth occur, almost exclusively, with one and the same notator (A. Friedmann, Example 3a; but also with G. Selig¹⁰, in 1777); they may be considered as secondary — probably influenced by the notator's thinking in the terms of contemporary harmony.

2. Standard Motives

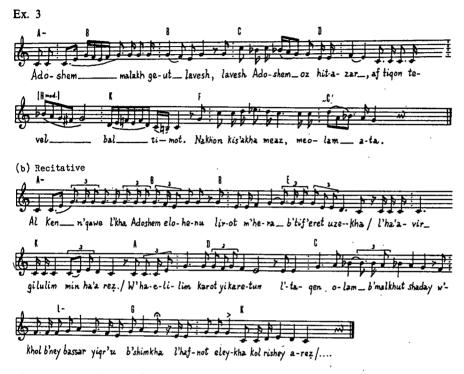
The Adošem malak Shtejger, as represented by our test specimens, contains a stock of eleven standard motives each of which occurs at least four times, but in the majority of cases more often, in the examined tunes. These motives are of a melodic character with changing rhythmic configurations; but their basic melodical form or "idea" may also be expanded or abbreviated in many ways, as we shall see below. The motives cannot be classified as initial, intermediate and final: only their "preference for a certain function" can be recognized, which does not preclude varying applications. The following Example 2



¹⁰ Gottfried Selig, Der Jude; eine Wochenschrift (Breslau 1777), Part II 7; III 25.

contains a *Table of Motives* including the more characteristic variants (but not all of them).

The assortment of variants given for every motive demonstrates the changeability of the melodic material in itself, and also its adjustment to various rhythmical patterns. The practical application of the standard motives is illustrated in Example 3.



The more concise motives may be closely tied together to form a unit, as it were. Some specimens are given in Example 4.



Examples 3 and 4 demonstrate the application of the modal pattern to true melodies as well as to Arioso-passages and pure recitatives (where motives may be stretched to form a *tonus currens*).

As to the origin of the motives provided by this *shtejger*, it has sometimes been compared with the mode of the Pentateuch reading at the Penitential Feasts. Some investigators have argued the relation of this reading-tone to the *Adošem malak shtejger*¹¹. The various notations of this Pentateuch mode differ somewhat from another, but the diminished Seventh appears only with the chapter-clause, where *shtejger* motives are also quoted (Example 5). Possibly this was meant as a sort of hallmark on this as on other important tunes of the feast¹².

Ex. 5



In general, Idelsohn exaggerated when he declared the modes of Bible reading to be the main source of motives in synagogue chant¹³: We would rather observe a quite unsystematic dispersion of certain motives — *shtejger* or not — over the songs of the particular feasts, detached particles of music that participate in creating the festal atmosphere. Since freedom from rigid regulation is characteristic of synagogue song in general, we should not promptly draw conclusions of dependencies at every recurrence of motives.

3. Structural Connection of Motives

With the exception of the initial phrase A, the motives of the Adošem malak Ex. 6



11 A. Z. Idelsohn, in A. Friedmann, Dem Andenken, op. cit., p. 65.

12 Cf. the versions recorded by: S. Naumbourg, Zemirot Yissrael; chants religieux des Israélites, Vol. I (1847), No. 61. — S. Sulzer, Shir Zion, Vol. II (1865), No. 340. — A. Friedmann, Der synagogale Gesang op. cit., p. 14. — A. B. Birnbaum, Omanut haHazanut, Vol. II (1912), No. 29. — A. Z. Idelsohn, OHM Vol. II (1922), p. 71; Vol. VII (1932), Part 1, No. 183. — P. Minkowski, "Piske te'amím", Hatqufa, II (1923), pp. 381-382. — S. Zalmanov, Sefer ha-nigguním (Brooklyn 1948), No. 173.

¹³ A. Z. Idelsohn, "Der jüdische Tempelgesang", in G. Adler (ed.), Handbuch der Musikgeschichte¹ (Berlin-Wilmersdorf 1924), pp. 122-126.

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Shtejger can be related to definite structural functions only with certain reservations. While motives like E and K are given priority as final clauses, and D and G are preferred to mark a caesura, both E and G may also open a tune, or G may form the very end (Example 6).

Moreover, the selection of motives to be used in a certain tune and, above all, their sequence, are left to the discretion of the individual singer. He may give full play to his creative imagination, at least when composing melodies not already fixed by tradition. Thus shtejger tunes may be compared to a mosaic work tesselated from the given motive material. They reveal by their intrinsic character a strong similarity with the combination of "migrating motives", the "Cento structure", the "mosaic style" observed in certain archaic portions of Plainsong. More so, we discover a clear parallel with Byzantine hymnody and its concept of musical mode, which is known to be the combination of a specific scale with a number of standard motives. With this, the shtejger of the European synagogues approaches styles of sacred song that flourished late in the first millenium CE, or go back to that era¹⁴. We cannot yet be certain as to when and how Byzantine, Gregorian and synagogue chant encountered one another. In any case, the former have either disappeared from use or have been kept alive by reference to written records, while the latter has been perpetuated by an oral tradition faithfully adhered to in a European environment that was not very sympathetic to musical forms of this kind. In spite of the similarity of principles, Jewish motivic modality did not fall into the stagnation and torpor that paralyzed its Byzantine counterpart. On the contrary, its form has retained its flexibility, and its motives have remained fluid configurations. Written notation reached it in the nineteenth century but did not interfere with the natural freedom of an oral tradition.

When the texts are hymnal and consist of rhymed or metrical stanzas, shtejger motives may be rearranged to form an orderly pattern approximately corresponding to the poetical form (Example 7); thus tunes may contain the so-called "musical rhyme".

Ex. 7



If a melody of the *Adošem malak* mode is performed by a gifted cantor who wishes to display his virtuosity and coloratura, the basic motives may be adorned and elaborately developed in a variety of ways (Example 8).

¹⁴ H. Avenary, Studies in the Hebrew, Syrian and Greek Liturgical Recitative pp. 34 f. (Tel Aviv 1963). — Idem, "Mosaikstruktur in altmediterraner Monodie", IGM, Bericht über den 9. Internationalen Kongress, Salzburg 1964, Vol. II (1966), pp. 124–128.



On such occasions, the tune may also modulate by passing to another *shtejger* for a while; this is done, for instance, in the tune of our Example 8 in order to underline the beseeching words "redemption and consolation"¹⁵; the cantor then returns to the original mode (with motive K). We should remember that the Oriental singer also likes to display his art and skill by passing from one *maqām* to the other. In West European synagogues, the modulation from *Adošem malak* to the major scale is, of course, relatively frequent.

4. The Question of the "Ethos"

Considering the basic relationship of *shtejger* modality with the *maqām*raga-nomos idea, the question automatically arises whether it too is connected with an "ethos", that is: does listening to a certain *shtejger* arouse definite associations of an intellectual or emotional nature?

No theory or doctrine to this purpose exists. As an experiment one may look for the implications of the idea "God proclaimed King" which is suggested by the name "Adošem malak"-Shtejger and the eponymous Psalm "The Lord reigneth, He is clothed in majesty" (Example 3a above). In the liturgy of the Penitential Feasts, benedictions of "The Holy God" are replaced by "The Holy King" throughout. A whole section of the fundamental prayer is called, then, "Kingship verses" (malkuyôt), and is suitably intoned in the Adošem malak Mode (Example 3b above). However, the very same mode is applied not only to other prayers and hymns of the Penitential Feasts (Example 4a; 6a-b; 7), but it is also involved in the liturgy of other holidavs. It appears at certain liturgical sections of the sabbat (Example 3a), at the blessing of the New Moon (Example 8), during Passover (Example 4b) and the other Feasts of Pilgrimage¹⁶, even in a hymn for the Fast of Esther¹⁷. Thus, the said shtejger serves throughout the liturgical year, disproving our presumed association with the idea of the Kingship of God. Even the reservation of certain motives for a particular feast cannot be demonstrated. There remains only the fact that tradition demands the employment of this shtejger for definite chapters of the liturgy.

17 Bimte m'at: G. Ephros, Cantorial Anthology (New York 1957), Vol. V, p. 53.

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¹⁵ S. Schechter, Nussach Hat'filoh (Czernowitz n.d.) Vol. I, No. 97. Other instances of modulation may be found in the same book, No. 6; A. Friedmann, Der synagogale Gesang p. 95 (end of biršūt hattorah).

¹⁶ I. Schwarz, op. cit.

Therefore, the potential capacity of expressing an ethos has shrunken, with the Ashkenazi modes, to the rudimentary relationship Mode = Liturgical Section, and has lost the more comprehensive Mode = Idea or Mood. In contrast to this recessive trend, some oriental Jewish communities carefully observe the relationship Mode = Mood = Feast, and even relate Mode = Mood to the contents of their weekly Bible readings.¹⁸ It should be kept in mind, however, that mode means to them *maqām*, and that it is the familiar ethos doctrine of the *maqāmāt* that they apply to their synagogue chant; this development is believed to barely antedate the second half of the 16th century.¹⁹ There is then no point in assuming the existence of a genuine *shtejger* ethos in Europe on the basis of what is found today in the oriental communities. There is room only for the cautious generalization of E. Werner²⁰, stating that the *Adošem Malak* mode is preferred for laudatory prayers.

5. Conclusion

The Adošem malak Shtejger, one of the prominent modes in European (Ashkenazi) synagogue chant, can be defined as the systematic association of a modal scale²¹ and a group of standard motives. Both elements — scale and specific motives — are concomitant to such a degree that the occurrence of the scale alone does not suffice in ascribing a melody to this mode²². The primordial connection of scale and motive stock is in accordance with the principle known from Near Eastern maqāmāt, Indian ragas, and the modes of Byzantine chant.

It was a natural reaction of European research workers to compare the shtejger with the modes of the Roman Church. The tertium comparationis

¹⁸ A. Z. Idelsohn, "Die Makamen in der hebräischen Poesie der orientalischen Juden", *MGWJ* LVII = NF XXI (1913), pp. 324 f. — Idem, *Hebräisch-orientalischer Melodienschatz*, Vol. IV (1923), pp. 37 f.

¹⁹ Idelsohn, Die Makamen pp. 322 ff.

²⁰ E. Werner, Jewish music op. cit., p. 628.

²¹ "Modal scale" means a series of characteristic intervals that is not bound to the octave range; it contains also a framework of fixed "dominant notes" (several "half-clauses"). ²² For example: Yah ribbon 'alam, in A. Nadel, Die häuslichen Sabbatgesänge (Berlin 1937) p. 20. — The integration and modification of the Adošem Malak mode in modern Israel song is demonstrated, among others, by Yedidya Admon's 'Al geva' ram (written in 1948; Zemer hen, 1960p. 84), or 'Immanuel Amiran's Lânu hakkoahla-'avod we-lismoah (Dafron zimrah ba-yehidah (Nos. 5-6, p. 3, 1950). The subject has been discussed at length by B. Bayer, 'סודות מורחיים ומערביים (Tel-Aviv 1968), pp. 74-84, (Hebrew). The development was towards a scale that lays stress on the Fifth-to-Tenth section of the Adošem malak range with only occasional descents below the Fifth (see M. Zmora in the discussion of the said article, p. 85); the composers gradually withdrew from the use of shtejger-motives.

was either the scale with diminished Seventh found in Mode 7, or some detached short phrases occurring in Mode 5^{23} . The comparison was rather superficial. Due attention was not given, for instance, to the dominant role of the Fourth in Mode 7 (a negligible interval level in the *shtejger*), nor to the frequent cadences on the Second²⁴ (appearing in the Pentateuch mode of the Penitential Feasts, but seldom in the *shtejger* itself). As to the motives, some parallels may indeed be pointed out, although only among the more concise figures. Some, at the first glance rather tempting, similarities can be found in the *Improperia* of Good Friday²⁵ (Example 9).



The examples presented in Example 9 have been chosen by deliberately neglecting the differing, and more frequent, configurations of the same motives that occur in the *Improperia* and do not fit the framework of the *Adošem Malak* mode. As to the Jewish aspects of this very distinctive Gregorian tune of possibly Byzantine parentage,²⁶ further research must be postponed.

As long as Plainsong has not been subjected to an analysis of its actual tonal ranges ("utilitarian scales") and the motivic material that may be connected with them, there is no way of determining whether it is in fact probable and arguable that the *shtejger* principle can be correlated with the modality of Plainsong.

Meanwhile, the *shtejger* may be regarded as a phenomenon *sui generis* on European soil, reminiscent of Eastern forerunners. A more detailed definition of its origin and history should cease to rely on "impressionistic" methods, but should await further developments in musicology.

²³ E. Birnbaum, "Besprechung von Singer's 'Tonarten'", Jüdisches Literaturblatt XV (1886), Nos. 24–25 (reprinted: A. Friedmann, Dem Andenken E. Birnbaums pp. 16–17, and Der Jüdische Kantor, Hamburg 1932 VI, No. 5, pp. 1–3).

²⁴ See, for instance, the Introitus-Antiphon Puer natus est nobis (Liber Usualis 408).
²⁵ Popule meus (Liber Usualis 737).

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²⁶ Cf. E. Wellesz, *Eastern Elements in Western Chant*, (Boston 1947), pp. 11-12. — E. Werner, "Zur Textgeschichte der Improperia", *Festschrift Bruno Stäblein* (Kassel, 1967), pp. 274-286.

Sources of the Music Examples

Ex. 3a: A. Friedmann, Der synagogale Gesang² (Berlin 1908) p. 86.

Ex. 3b: A. Baer, Baal Tefillo oder Der practische Vorbeter², No. 1232 (Goeteborg 1883).

Ex. 4a: A. Z. Idelsohn, "Der Missinai-Gesang der deutschen Synagoge", Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft, VIII (Leipzig 1926), p. 454 (Ex. 1, II).

Ex. 4b: A. Baer ibid., No. 765 (Deutsche Weise).

- Ex. 5: S. Naumbourg loc. cit.; A. Friedmann loc cit.; A. Z. Idelsohn, Hebräisch-orientalischer Melodienschatz (1932) Vol. VII, Part 1, No. 183.
- Ex. 6: G. Ephros, *Cantorial Anthology* (New York 1929), Vol. I, No. 18; A. Baer *ibid.*, No. 961 (cf. Nos. 965; 975; 984, I). A. Friedmann, *ibid.*, p. 90.
- Ex. 7: A. Baer ibid., No. 1426, II.

Ex. 8: S. Schechter, Nussach Hat'filoh (Czernowitz n.d.), Vol. I, No. 97.

Ex. 9: E. Wellesz, Eastern Elements in Western Chant (Boston 1947), pp. 11-12.

Sources of other Test Samples

A. Baer, ibid., No. 781, I; 1244; 1426, I.

M. Deutsch, Vorbeterschule (Breslau 1871), No. 409; 450.

- G. Ephros ibid., Vol. III (1948), p. 115 (cf. Baer ibid., No. 779, I); p. 121. Vol. V (1957), p. 53.
- A. Friedmann ibid., pp. 85; 87; 88.
- A. Friedmann, Fünf Mussaf-K'duschos (Berlin n.d.), p. 11 ("Alte Weise").

A. Z. Idelsohn, Melodienschatz, Vol. VII, Part 1, No. 104.

M. Kipnis, 60 Folkslieder (Warsaw 1930), pp. 97-98.

S. Rawicz, in: J. Smilansky (ed.), Haggadah Erez-yissraelit le-Pesah (Tel-Aviv 1938), p. 38.

S. Schechter ibid., No. 6; 109.

G. Selig, Der Jude, Eine Wochenschrift (Breslau 1777), Vol. II. 7; III.25.

H. Weintraub, Schire Beth Adonai, oder Tempelgesänge für den Gottesdienst der Israeliten Königs berg 1859).



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