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THE RHYTHMICAL ANALYSIS OF IS. 1: 10-20

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The nature of Hebrew rhythmical laws, the regularity with which they are applied and the existence of a strophical system, at least to anything like the extent which is often claimed, are problems which still await a final settlement. It must be candidly admitted that the metrical analyses are too often compromised by the large amount of purely conjectural emendations with which they must be carried through. Yet this should not prejudice the mind unduly against these metrical experiments. How many masterpieces in the world of art would still be left unrecognized under the disfiguring grime of the centuries were it not for the work of the judicious restorer! Granted that he may not everywhere succeed in recovering the original brilliancy of color or wonder of the creative stroke, his loving work is not repudiated but rejoiced in. And should we not equally welcome the work of those who seek to remove for us the layers of textual grime which often conceal the beauty of the ancient prophetic masterpieces? Provided always that the literary restorer, like the skilful artist, works with that judiciousness, love and reverence for the original which would restrain him from importing into it his own secondary inspirations and fancies. It is at this point that the most of us fail. There are few successful literary restorers just as there are few successful restorers in the world of painting, sculpture or architecture. But it is clear that, theoretically at least, no sound objection can be urged against the work of restoration. As to its feasibility, one observation has gone far with me to remove the doubts which I originally entertained of it. It is surprising to notice how frequently the obvious defects in the rhythm of a passage coincide with exegetical or critical difficulties in it. The suggestion at once presents itself, if the exegetical or critical difficulty can be solved, may not the rhythmical difficulty also be relieved, and conversely may not the proper solution of the rhythmical difficulty also furnish the key to the exegetical or critical difficulty?

At Is. 1:12b there is an exegetical question of considerable interest. To what does 'this,' זאת refer? The masoretic text makes it point forward to the last two words of the verse 'to trample my courts.' The LXX, on the other hand, make it point back to the sacrifices mentioned in vs. 10 f. and take the last words of the verse with what follows. This necessitates a change in the construction of v. 13. It must now be read

To trample my courts continue not,
To bring an oblation (or oblations) is vain.¹

In favor of the LXX interpretation of the passage has been urged the stylistically unfortunate idea of trampling the courts with one's hands, which is supposed to be the result of the masoretic conception of the text, and the impropriety of thinking that God would require any one to *trample* his courts.² In favor of the LXX rendering is also urged the very interesting theological inference which naturally flows from it. For it is said that according to this rendering there is an absolute and unqualified repudiation of the ritual by Isaiah. When 'this' is referred to what precedes then v. 12 implies that God has not required *any* sacrifices and when 'vain' is put into the predicate, then v. 13 states that *any* oblation is vain. The masoretic text is supposed consciously to tone this down. It diverts the זאת from the sacrifices and refers it to trampling Jahweh's courts; it does not prohibit the presentation of any oblation, only of a *vain* oblation. There is certainly much to be said in favor of this view and it is the favorite view of the passage at the present time.³ Yet the arguments used in favor of it cannot be regarded as convincing. Duhm's stylistic objection falls to the ground in view of the very frequent conventional use of 'hands' in Hebrew.⁴ When Duhm objects to the idea that Jahweh would

¹ Instead of the construct relation כנחה-שוא either כנחה or כנחה is to be read and שוא regarded as a predicate. Duhm's attempt to regard both רכס חצרי and הביא as objects of לא תוכיפו is anything but esthetically satisfying.

² So Duhm.

³ The LXX interpretation is followed in some form or other by most recent commentators. Cf. Duhm Marti Gray Skinner and Wade.

⁴ Ehrlich shows how wide of the mark Duhm's criticism is at this point. He shows, however, that on other grounds the phrase בקש מירכס is open to suspicion and proposes כאתכם as a substitute for מירכס.

require men to 'trample his courts' he seems to forget for a moment the uses of irony in which his own commentary shows Duhm himself to be so adept. As to the absoluteness of the repudiation of the ritual represented by the LXX text I am quite prepared to admit that Isaiah could so express himself. But the question is whether he did so express himself in the present passage. In this connection it may, perhaps, be permitted to remark that commentators have been altogether too ready to deny that the eighth-century prophets recognized the legitimacy of any sacrifices whatever. This is against all the probabilities of the case. The same commentators are equally eager to point out, and probably correctly, how these prophets interpreted religion from the point of view of the nation rather than of the individual; when they urged the social moralities upon their hearers they were thinking of them not as fellowmen but as fellow country-men. But a thoroughly nationalistic religion without some sort of ceremonial is inconceivable in the antique world. This fact seems to be overlooked by ultra-Protestant critics. Further, the significant fact that Isaiah adopts a name for Jahweh which has a positive cult significance (*The Holy One* of Israel) has not been sufficiently considered by students of the prophet. When, therefore, the prophets indulge in those sermons against the ceremonial which seem to repudiate all ritual, their words must probably be taken with several grains of salt.

But to return to the point at issue, in the choice between the LXX and the masoretic construction of vs. 12 f. one factor in the problem has thus far been ignored. Do rhythmical considerations favor the Hebrew or the LXX?

In the analysis of Is. 1: 10-16, omitting for the moment vs. 17-20, there are certain clearly defined, indisputable facts which may be taken as the premises of our argument.

(1) In the first place the unity of subject is obvious. It is a thoroughgoing criticism of the ceremonial as practised in Isaiah's day. No thought alien to this subject intrudes.

(2) In the next place the most easily recognized rhythm in Hebrew poetry is the line of five tones regularly divided into 3x2. This rhythm dominates our passage.⁵ It is preserved

⁵ This was long ago recognized by Francis Brown in his valuable study of the rhythms of Is. chaps. 1-5, *JBL.*, 1890, pp. 82-86.

almost without a flaw in vs. 10, 11 and vs. 15, 16. The text need be slightly corrected at only three points in these verses in order to secure a practically perfect rhythm. The 'lambs' must be removed from the herd of sacrificial animals at v. 11c, the 'from you' must be deleted from v. 15a and the last phrase of v. 16 must be taken with the following verse. This last suggestion is not an emendation of the text but only an obviously necessary correction of the verse division. The first suggestion has the external support of the LXX which omits 'lambs,' while the second suggestion is supported by the parallel phrase in the next line.⁶

(3) In the third place it should be noticed that vs. 15, 16 give us four lines in two couplets, the parallelism being not within the lines, but between the lines. On the other hand vs. 10 and 11 give us five lines. The first two of these (v. 10) are again a couplet but the next three (v. 11) are at present a tristich, though the principle of parallelism is the same as in vs. 15, 16. At once the question is raised whether this is an intentional variation in the rhythmical figure or not. The first two lines of v. 11 could also be regarded as a couplet. In that case the last line of v. 11 would be without a parallel. This is unlikely. Therefore either v. 11 must be regarded as an intentional departure from the couplet *or a line must be found parallel to the last line of v. 11.*

But however the principle of parallelism may be decided, the rhythm of these two groups of verses is unmistakable and constant. Since the subject of the passage is the same throughout, and since we are dealing with what is evidently a poem, the presumption is certainly in favor of the intervening verses, vss. 12-14, being in the same rhythm and organized upon the same general principles of parallelism.

(4) If we turn to v. 14 this presumption is confirmed. The second clause is an admirable five-toned line and the first clause is probably in the same rhythm.⁷ But while v. 14a is probably rhythmically correct, *critically* it is not above suspicion. Why

⁶ אינני שכי' . The first phrase in v. 15 וּבְפִרְשָׁם כַּפִּיָם is probably to be regarded as three-toned.

⁷ Either חֲרָשִׁים or וּכְיִרְיָם, 14a, is probably to be regarded as two-toned just as וּבְפִרְשָׁם in v. 15a. No rhythmical analysis which requires the deletion of 14b can be regarded as secure (against Marti).

should 'your new moons' be repeated immediately after 'new moon' in v. 13b? The repetitiousness somewhat weakens the passage. Schwally long ago suggested the substitution of another word.⁸ But may not 'your new moons' be only a variant of 'new moon'? In that case it must be deleted. But this critical operation would lead us to injure a rhythm whereas the thesis from which we started was that the solution of critical difficulties often enables us to correct already injured rhythms. The present difficulty in which we have entangled ourselves cannot be solved till we have examined vs. 12 and 13.

(5) In vs. 12 and 13 both the rhythm and the parallelism which we have found to dominate the rest of the poem are badly disorganized. The presumption, therefore, is that we are dealing with verses more or less corrupted. Now the interpretation of these verses is disputed. There are exegetical obscurities in them. One of these we have noticed in the case of v. 12 and we have seen that the masoretic and LXX texts represent two divergent views of the construction and meaning of v. 12 and 13a. The other exegetical difficulty is found in v. 13b and here again the LXX presents us with a different text. Here, then, is an instance of the coincidence of rhythmical and exegetical difficulties which should put us on our guard with respect to the soundness of the text. In the present case the solution offered should clear up the exegetical difficulties and at the same time satisfy the rhythmical demands of the rest of the poem.

(a) Let us first examine the difficulty in v. 13b.⁹ What is the meaning of 'iniquity and the solemn meeting'? It is supposed to mean that the religious service which is accompanied by some sort of iniquity on the part of worshippers cannot be pleasing to God. But the phrase is a most dubious one¹⁰ and commentators have for the most part rightly preferred the LXX reading 'fast and a solemn meeting.' But with what is this phrase to be construed? To regard it as the object of the preceding verb, as the R.V. text suggests, is grammatically impossible. If, with Duhm, an infinitive 'to bear' is inserted¹¹ we get two

⁸ חכסם. Cf. *Z.A.T.W.*, 1891, 257.

⁹ It is illustrated by the variant readings in the R.V.

¹⁰ Duhm still defends it by referring to 1 S. 15:23. But this is to support one questionable phrase by another equally doubtful.

¹¹ לטאת, cf. לנשא at v. 14b. That the present Hebrew text can be supported by Ps. 101:5 alone, is more than doubtful.

lines in v. 13b, either 4x4 or 3x4, and at the same time create an extremely awkward sentence, for the verb would have two series of subjects, before it and after it.

New moon and sabbath, the calling of an assembly—
I cannot endure fast and feast.

This is almost intolerable. There is only one expedient which can solve the difficulty in any adequate way and which at the same time takes account of the critical difficulty raised at v. 14a. Delete 'your new moons' and take 'fast and festival' with what follows.¹² This construction of 'fast and festival' meeting with what follows has the support of the LXX and therefore must not be regarded as a pure conjecture. But if 'your new moons' is deleted, this logically carries with it a modification of 'your appointed feasts.' I suggest that ומועריכם should be emended to ומוער and the line be read

Fast and festival and calendar feast my soul hateth.

This secures an excellent, five-toned line and every step in the process by which it is secured is soundly based on grammatical, exegetical and text-critical considerations.

(b) But if the reconstructions thus far made be once admitted, it follows that the remainder of v. 13b must also be corrected. New moon and sabbath and calling of assemblies is almost certainly four tones and לֹא אוֹכֵל by itself is grammatically suspicious. Again the infinitive 'to bear' is to be supplied, not only in thought but in fact, after לֹא אוֹכֵל¹³ and we get two tones. This suggests that there should be only three, not four, tones in the preceding phrase. At this point again conjecture must be resorted to, but conjecture which is by no means caprice. The phrase 'the calling of an assembly' is found *only here* in this particular form. I would suggest that קרא should be deleted.¹⁴

¹² Marti, Gray.

¹³ Duhm.

¹⁴ This may be due to dittography or it may be an interpretative gloss. The whole phrase קרא בקרא has been struck out by critics as a levitical addition. But the phrase in the levitical legislation is different. It is always בקרא-קרא with makkeph and without the article, in Ex. 12, Lev. 23, Nu. 28 and 29. Three times in these passages the plural form appears בקרא-קרא (Lev. 23: 2, 4, 37). Elsewhere בקרא appears alone at Is. 4: 5; Nu. 10: 2 and Neh. 8: 8. In the last case it refers to the lection. But in Nu. 10: 2 it has the force of an infinitive (the summons

We have now to examine vs. 12 and 13a and reconsider the rival interpretations of these lines in the masoretic and LXX texts. But we come to them now with a strong presupposition. *That interpretation of the lines will probably be nearest the original text which conforms most closely to the five-toned rhythm established for the remainder of the poem.*

(c) The second line in v. 13a 'incense (or much better 'smoke,' i. e. the smoke of the sacrifices) is an abomination unto me,' is possibly a five-toned line, but it is admittedly a poor one. I have no suggestion as to how to better it. I would not venture on any deletion here, however, for the line is necessary in the parallelism (see below) and the supposed difficulty of a reference to קטרת in the sense of 'sacrificial smoke' as early as Isaiah does not exist.¹⁵

(d) We come finally to the two rival interpretations of v. 12 and 13a. Which shall we choose? Here a singular fact meets us. Neither interpretation of the text satisfies the rhythmic requirements in all particulars! But along which line of interpretation are we to seek the solution of the rhythmical difficulties? If the LXX interpretation is followed and the last two words of v. 12, רמים חצרי, be taken with what follows, then vs. 12 and 13a can only be naturally scanned as 3x3x3(2'x3)

מִי-בָקִיֵשׁ זֹאת מִיִּדְכֶם
רָמִים חֲצָרֵי לֹא-תוֹסִיפוּ
הִבִּיא מִנְחַת יִשׂוּא
קִטְרֶת תוֹעֵבָה הִיא-לִי

or call). Could the קרא be added in the present case to suggest that it refers to the summons to the feast rather than to the feast itself? The LXX reads *Kai ημεραν αεθλαγεν*. This reading does not seem to recognize the קרא but the adjective suggests an interpretation of the קרא cf. John 7: 37. The Kai probably represents an original ו which has been displaced when קרא came into the text. This solution seems to me to be much more reasonable than the rejection of the entire phrase (Marti; and Gray tentatively) which involves further drastic rearrangements of lines without attaining the five-toned rhythm. This solution is also favored by such textual evidence as there is.

¹⁵ Marti takes the word in the later sense of 'incense' and therefore deletes it. But it is singular how these later levitical terms should become inserted into a passage which was a repudiation of the ceremonial.

¹⁶ If מִיִּדְכֶם were deleted from v. 12b as a qualifying gloss not all sacrifices but only your sacrifices, then vs. 12 in its LXX form might be

Hence the LXX text in spite of its various advantages must be rejected as it does not conform to the metrical requirements. Since the first part of v. 13a in the Hebrew recension furnishes a fair five-toned line, the difficulty does not lie in v. 13 but in v. 12. To take the last part of v. 12 over into v. 13 only complicates the rhythmical difficulties. But when the present form of v. 12 is examined the second clause is again seen to be a perfect five-toned line. Therefore it is not to be corrected to the LXX form. The difficulty does not lie here either. But at v. 12a we strike a three-toned line. Here then the rhythmical difficulty is to be localized. If it is supposed that the last part of this line is lost, immediately our rhythmical difficulty is solved and the organization of the poem begins to appear. It is not difficult to conjecture what may have once stood here. Probably some such phrase as **אִינְנִי רִצְנָם** (I am not accepting you). Almost this exact phrase is found at Jer. 14:10, 12 where it refers to those who were offering sacrifices. Cf. also Hos. 8:13.¹⁷ At this point we must recur to the question raised earlier. Is v. 11 a tristich or was it originally composed of two couplets with the last line missing? This question leads us to consider the possible strophical organization of the poem as distinct from its rhythm.

(6) If the correction suggested for v. 12a be adopted, then this line must be regarded as the missing line parallel to the last line of v. 11. It refers to Jahweh's rejection of the persons of those who offer the sacrifices. In that case vs. 10-12a contain three complete couplets or six lines. But v. 12b with its question clearly begins the same subject over again, though with a variation in the treatment. The emphasis falls in what follows on the feasts rather than on the sacrifices. This thought runs through v. 14 and at v. 15 a third thought is introduced, namely

regarded as five-toned, but the remaining lines cannot be so scanned with any probability. Duhm divides as follows:

To trample my courts continue not—to bring oblation
Vain is the smoke-sacrifice; it is an abomination to me.

This does secure two five-toned lines but at the expense of a stylistically most improbable line, and to take both **שׁוּא** and **תִּינְבָה** with **קָטְרָה** is quite unlikely.

¹⁷I find that I have been anticipated in the supposition of a lost half line at v. 12a by Sievers.

the futility even of their prayers and the necessity of their moral regeneration. Now if the emendations suggested above in vs. 13-14 be adopted it will be found that vs. 12b-14 furnish us with three more couplets or six lines. This result increases our confidence in the process by which it has been attained. When once the Hebrew conception of vs. 12b-13 is retained as against the LXX and the text emended at the proper point and in the proper way, the outline of the poem becomes clarified. Two well-defined stanzas each of six lines emerge. But in vs. 15, 16 there are only two couplets or four lines. Is this reduction intentional and did the poem end with v. 16?

(7) The present compiler of the first chapter of Isaiah does not think so. He has provided the last two words of v. 16, and v. 17, in which the positive lines, along which the reformation urged in v. 16 is to follow, are laid down. That these lines are Isaianic both in thought and expression need not be denied. But that they are the original conclusion to the preceding poem is open to serious doubt. The rhythm has completely changed. It is now 2x2 or 4x4. It is of course possible that Isaiah himself may have intentionally changed to this rhythm of quicker movement at the close of his poem in order to give effect to his exhortation. Yet if another ending can be discovered which agrees in rhythm with the rest of the poem, supplies the missing couplet to the last stanza in vs. 15, 16, and provides a rhetorically equally effective close, it should certainly be allowed to put in a claim for respectful attention. If we examine the remainder of the chapter nothing can be culled from it to answer our purpose out of vs. 21-31. Vs. 21-26 are admitted on all hands to be an independent poem and vs. 27-31 are fragments which have nothing to do with the topic in vs. 10-16. Hence our choice of an alternative ending to v. 17 is restricted to vs. 18 and 19-20. So far as v. 18 is concerned, the difficulty of it in the present context has been recognized from the time of Koppe and no satisfactory explanation of its contextual meaning has as yet been forthcoming.¹⁵

¹⁵ The traditional interpretation of the passage as an offer of free pardon, a gospel message in the strictest sense, is certainly the most obvious interpretation of v. 18 when taken by itself, though an interpretation utterly at variance with the context. After the terrible denunciation just preceding this gracious offer is certainly out of place. It is equally contra-

There are left vs. 19, 20. Here is a couplet in the first place and it is a couplet which we are in search of. The rhythm of the couplet may be regarded as the five-tone rhythm of vs. 10-16.¹⁹ The threat after the denunciations and exhortations in vs. 10-16 is most appropriate and serves to round out the poem in a thoroughly impressive way. If these verses are adopted as the original conclusion of Isaiah's poetical polemic against the hollow ceremonialism of his day we have recovered a thoroughly organized poem of three stanzas of six lines each, in a consistent 3 x 2 rhythm with only very slight emendations of the text, each one of which has considerable exegetical or critical warrant apart from the necessities of the rhythm. This restoration seems to me decidedly preferable to the very drastic emendations of the passage which have been practised upon it in recent years, but it can be carried through only when the Hebrew conception of vs. 12 and 13 is adopted as against the LXX interpretation which has latterly found such favor with students of Isaiah.

I append a translation which embodies the emendations suggested above, together with the resulting poetical analysis.

dictory to the conditional promise which follows. But the attempts thus far made to construe it as a threat are most unconvincing. It is not natural to interpret the verse as a question (against Michaelis, Koppe and Eichhorn, an interpretation renewed by Wellhausen Proleg.² p. 443). For objections to this view cf. also Burney, *J.T.S.*, XI, p. 443 f. Equally unsatisfactory is the ironical interpretation of Duhm and Marti. The interpretation of v. 18 as a threat of judicial destruction of sin and therefore of sinners (Ges. Hitz.) is monstrous and Hackmann's symbolic interpretation (*Zukunftserwartung des Jesaja*, p. 118, n.) is fanciful, nor can I find anything of value in Ehrlich's explanation. Gray's translation, 'Though your sins were as scarlet they might become white' seems to seek a middle ground between an unconditional pardon and a positive threat, but with the emphasis upon the pardon. In view of the difficulty of the verse in its present connection one more guess may be hazarded. Give to the imperfects the sense of *must* (for this sense cf. Driver, *Tenses*, sec. 39 and Gen. 20: 9; 34: 7; Job. 9: 29; 1 Sam. 14: 43b; 1 K. 18: 5 and 27).

Though your sins are as scarlet, they *must* become white as snow.

It is the difficulty of the reformation which would then be emphasized. But even on this interpretation I doubt very much whether v. 18 originally had anything to do with vs. 10-16.

¹⁹ The makkeph is to be struck out after the two ׀א (vs. 19, 20) but supplied after טוב (v. 20).

I

- v. 10 Hear the word of Jahweh—ye judges of Sodom,
Give ear to the instruction of our God—ye people of
Gomorrhah.
- v. 11 What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices—saith
Jahweh,
I am sated with the burnt-offerings of rams—and the fat
of fed beasts,
And in the blood of bulls and of goats—I take no delight,
- v. 12 When ye come to see my face—[I will not accept you].

II

- Who hath sought this at your hands—to trample my
courts?
- v. 13 Do not continue to bring—an oblation of vanity;
Smoke (of sacrifice) an abomination—is it to me,
New moon and sabbath and call(?)—I cannot endure;
- v. 14 Fast and assembly and feast—my soul hateth,
They have become unto me a burden—I am weary of
carrying it.

III

- v. 15 When ye spread out your hands—I will hide my eyes,
Yea, when ye multiply prayer—I will not be listening;
- v. 16 Your hands are full of blood—wash you, cleanse you,
Put away the evil of your deeds—from before mine eyes;
- v. 19 If ye are willing to hear—the good of the land ye shall
eat,
- v. 20 But if ye refuse and rebel—ye shall eat the sword(?).