

Sephardic Liturgical Music: Liturgical Music of Middle Eastern Jews

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Jewish liturgical music in Sephardic and Middle Eastern communities shows a vast range of musical styles. The term Sephardic comes from the Hebrew word *Sepharad*, which is found in the book of Obadiah, verse 20. The region that is mentioned in this biblical passage is not known, but by the eighth century c.e. *Sepharad* was the term used for the Iberian peninsula. Jews moved into this region during the seventh century and were spread across communities surrounding the Mediterranean. Jewish life that emerged first under the Muslim and Christian rule of Spain has had an important impact on Judaism from the medieval era to the present. After the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal in 1492 these Jews spread out across the Mediterranean and other parts of the world (this will be explained further). As used today “Sephardic” refers to the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula and their descendants in various areas of relocation. The liturgical music of Sephardic Jewish life is rich with a diversity reflecting the styles of the regions where these Jews lived. This essay will briefly survey the role of music in Jewish life during the post-Temple era (after 70 c.e.) and the history of Sephardic Jews, and then focus on styles of worship in their liturgical music, including cantillation of the Bible, liturgical song, and liturgical poetry.

A Survey of Jewish Liturgical Music

Jewish liturgical music develops in terms of form and function during the first millennium. Rabbinic sources, archeological evidence, and other sources attest to the important role of music during the First and Second Temple periods. Music was part of the daily sacrifice – Levites sang, and instruments were played, at the end of the ceremony. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 c.e. ritual life in the Temple ceased, prayer changed, and the context of worship shifted to the synagogue.¹ Three daily prayer services were instituted, and by the seventh century the role of *hazzan*, the prayer leader, emerged. During this era music was a banned activity. A third century source from the Mishna (*Sota* 9:11) states: “From the time that the Sanhedrin ceased to function, there ceased to be singing [*shir*] at places of merriment as it is written: ‘They shall not drink wine with song’ (Isaiah 24:9).” The Sanhedrin, the legal court that governed Jewish life, ceased in 57 c.e. This Mishna records that as places of merriment included drinking, rabbis forbade going to these establishments because the Sanhedrin no longer functioned; if people who attended lost their good judgment and behaved immorally no authority existed to impose a ruling. The text from Isaiah is employed as a proof text for this purpose.² This same text was used in a related discussion in the Talmud (*Sota* 48a) dating to the sixth century: “How do we know that the text (Isaiah 24:9) applies to the time when the Sanhedrin ceased? Rabbi Huna son of Rabbi Joshua, said: Because Scripture states ‘The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music’ (Lam 8:14).” The destruction of the Temple was seen over time as a profound event, and music, which is usually used for joyous purposes, was not appropriate.

Singing during worship was allowed, but not instrumental music. Outside of worship the ban on music needed to be rearticulated by the rabbis. Rabbi Moses Maimonides, a late twelfth-/early thirteenth-century codifier of Jewish Law, states in his work the Mishnah Torah:

Similarly, they ordained that one should not play melodies with any sort of musical

instrument. It is forbidden to celebrate with such instruments or to listen to them being played [as an expression of mourning] for the destruction [of the Temple]. Even songs that are recited over wine are forbidden, as it is written: "They shall not drink with song" (Isaiah 24:9). It has become a custom among the entire Jewish people to recite words of praise, songs of thanksgiving, and the like with wine. (*Hilchot Ta'anit* 5:14)

In the fifteenth century the *Shulchan Aruch*, the main text that codifies Jewish law, states: "Producing a sound with a musical instrument is forbidden on Shabbat but knocking on a door, etc. is permitted when it is not done musically" (*Orach Chayyim* 338:1). In the nineteenth century the Reform movement reintroduced instruments into worship on the Sabbath and holidays. Even today Orthodox synagogues do not make use of instruments in worship, nor do Sephardic congregations.

Jewish liturgical music during worship employs three musical styles that generally correlate to the type of text: (1) cantillation of biblical texts; (2) chanting of rabbinic texts, written from the first to the seventh centuries, with melodies added later; and (3) liturgical song from *piyyutim* or liturgical poetry, from the eighth century to the present, with more recent melodies. The centerpiece of the Shabbat morning service is the reading of the weekly biblical portion. Chanting of rabbinic texts is the mainstay of daily, Shabbat, and holiday liturgies. During the first millennium Jewish liturgy was formulated by the prayer leader who, in the earlier centuries, improvised the liturgical text. Over time these texts became standardized and compiled into the prayerbook. These portions were chanted, and each regional tradition has its own musical style. Liturgical song is the liturgical genre that has received the most development in the modern period. Many of the texts that are part of the High Holiday liturgy were created in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Over the past two hundred years, particularly among Sephardic Jews, new melodies have been added to these texts. The singing of *piyyutim* in the twentieth century has become an active para-liturgical context. Text and melodies of the past as well as newly composed or adapted melodies are sung.

A Survey of Sephardic History

The Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) was the center of Jewry up until the fifteenth century. 1492 serves as a final marker for the expulsion of Jews from Spain, although expulsions from this region took place both prior to and after that year. The tenth-to-twelfth centuries are referred to as the Golden Age of Spain. Under Muslim rule the Jews interacted with Christians and Muslims in free exchanges, often referred to as *convivencia*. As Muslim culture developed new forms of philosophy, logic, organization, grammar, and poetry, Jewish culture flourished with significant achievements in exegesis (Nachmonides, for example), philosophical works (such as those by Maimonides), and poetry (Ibn Ezra, Halevi, Ibn Gabirol). These accomplishments forever influence Jewry. The Christian reconquest of Spain in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries led to an increase of Jewish unrest. During this period the Inquisition forced Jews to convert to Christianity, or face death, and later expulsion.

The expulsions led to Jews migrating to areas throughout the Mediterranean, to Europe, the Balkans, and the Americas (see fig. 1 on the accompanying CD). Along the Mediterranean routes Jews from Spain co-mingled with Jews in pre-existing Jewish communities like North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia), Greece, Egypt, and Syria. On the routes to the Balkans and Europe some Jewish communities already existed, but the new arrivals essentially established

new communities, as did the Jews who arrived in South America (Brazil). The result is a network of groups connected through commerce by trade routes and caravans. Spanish Jews had a significant influence on the new locations of resettlement, as will be explained later.

The dispersion of Spanish Jewry led to various forms of retention of cultural and religious traditions, and a definition of Sephardic Jewry needs to account for this complexity. The generally accepted definition is as follows: "Sephardic" Jews are from the Iberian Peninsula and their descendants in various areas of relocation. With the emergence of a significant Sephardic population in Israel, and a growing sense of ethnic pride, many of these Jews have taken on the label of "Mizrachi" or "Eastern" Jews. The designation "Sephardi and Mizrachi" is an encompassing term to refer to this diverse population. At times non-Ashkenazi groups are included in this category, including Jews from Yemen, Iran, Ethiopia, and other locales, even though the migration did not include these areas.

The population of Jews from Sephardi/Mizrachi communities in the twentieth century shows significant changes in recent years (fig. 2). Prior to 1948, the year Israel was established as an independent state, over one million Jews lived in the Middle East. Fifty years of tumultuous change in the region led to a considerable shifting of the Jewish population. By 2005 ninety-five percent of the Middle Eastern Jews had emigrated from the region, most to Israel, and secondarily to Paris.

The Levant is the French name for the Eastern edge of the Mediterranean, from Turkey to Syria and Egypt, also known as the Fertile Crescent. Portions, and even entire Jewish communities, migrated to Israel during the 1950s. Originally, following the expulsion from Spain, the Jews who fled to North Africa settled along the Northern coast in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. In large measure Jewish life in these regions prospered, with some prominent wealthy Jews. As shown in figure 2, the population of North African Jewry is larger than of Jews who migrated from the Levant and Yemen. Following the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 the tension between Jews and Arabs made Jewish life there more difficult. Therefore significant portions of North African Jewry migrated to Israel and France in the 1950s and 1960s.

Western Sephardic migration is the migration of Jews from Spain into Western European countries and the Americas. From Spain Jews went to France, England, Amsterdam, and into Hamburg and Vienna. Migration routes also included South America. These communities grew steadily in a Westernized context. Given the opportunities Jews had had in Spain as financiers, politicians, administrative officials, and businessmen, they were able to translate this experience into a new context. Over time the Americas became more prominent as a locale for Sephardic migration. In the seventeenth century Jews came to North America, and until the early nineteenth century the history of Jews in the United States was primarily Sephardic. Shearith Israel, also known as the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, in New York, has become a prominent institution for western Sephardic Jewry.

The map of Sephardic Sephardi and Mizrachi Jews (fig. 3) shows areas of similarities, with five major regional clusters. Each region has identifiable characteristics, and each regional cluster represents a tradition in practice that stems from a particular locale. For example, the "North Africa" region refers to the Jews from North Africa, and their maintaining North African traditions in other places (like Israel, France, and the Americas).

Language and culture are primary features of each region. Languages spoken by Sephardic and

Mizrachi Jews include Judeo-Spanish, Arabic, Greek, and Turkish. Later we will see how these regional clusters provide characteristic distinctions that are expressed in music. The red region denotes “Yemen.” Jews in this region follow Arabic music and cultural traditions; these developed as a unique Jewish tradition. Exiles from Spain did not reach these regions, and Judeo-Spanish language and culture are not a part of them. The communities in grey, the Middle East, comprising Iraq and Iran, spoke Arabic, and Farsi, or Persian, in most areas of Iran. Like the Yemenite region, they did not receive exiles from Spain, and so their traditions were not reformed. The “Levant” refers to the Fertile Crescent, the region around the Eastern edge of the Mediterranean. In this region the Jews are predominantly Arabic speakers, and although Spanish Jews did settle in this region, by the eighteenth century they were integrated with the indigenous Jews in this region. The green-shaded region of the Iberian Peninsula, or Spain, identifies the Western Sephardic communities, now in locales outside of Spain. Their cultural features are Western in focus, being influenced by Western, largely European, traditions. By the eighteenth century they integrated with the indigenous Jews in this region.

Cantillation

The written text of the Torah, or five books of Moses (fig. 4, on the left), does not include vocalization of the text with indications of vowels or punctuations. Transmission of the Torah is an oral process, and generation after generation reads from the scrolls in the unvocalized format. The Ben Asher Family of Tiberius (ca. 950) codified the vocalization, which included a system to indicate the melodic rendering. These signs are known as the *ta’amim*. The earliest complete rendition of the *ta’amim* is found in the Leningrad Codex (late tenth early eleventh century; fig 4, right side, and fig 5, where the signs circled in red are the *ta’amim*). Today a reader would prepare the biblical cantillation from a modern vocalized rendition that would indicate the punctuation and vowels (fig. 6). While there is ample evidence of vocal recitation of the Torah during public reading (*Megillah* 3a and 32b), we do not know how it was sung. A. Z. Idelsohn postulated that modern renditions by various communities contain vestiges of ancient practices. He tried to explain the commonalities he saw in the melodic similarities of communities separate by vast differences in space retained over time:

Both this uniformity of tradition and the independence of Church influence prompt us to adopt the opinion that the Biblical modes treated thus far, are of an ancient age, probably preceding the expulsion of the Jewish people from Palestine, and older than the Christian Church. They are the remainder of the Jewish-Palestinian folk tunes, representing the Jewish branch of the Semitic-Oriental song.³

Scholars today doubt this theory since it assumes that cantillation practices have remained unchanged from ancient times until today. Scholars today have a more nuanced view of the age and veneration of traditions (see below).

Cantillation practices during the twentieth century pertain to five regional areas, to be compared below. The text of the comparison is *Bereshit bara Elokimi* (Gen 1:1-5), the first five verses from the Torah (fig. 7). A comparative chart (fig. 8) shows characteristics for cantillation in Sephardic communities in the five regions.⁴ Recordings taken from the National Sound Archives at the Jewish National University Library in Jerusalem display renditions of this biblical passage. Each version reflects a reader of a tradition in the second half of the twentieth century. The features compared are scale, rhythm, melodic range, role of the *ta’amim*, and characteristics. “Scale” is the arrangement of the notes that form an octave (a duplication of the

originating note that is higher). A *maqam* is an Arab scale that makes use of notes not found in Western music. For example, a major scale on C compared to the Arabic *maqam* rast is as follows:

C major: C D E F G A B C

Maqam Rast C D E $\frac{1}{4}$ flat F G A B $\frac{1}{4}$ flat C

The E $\frac{1}{4}$ flat is a note between E-natural and E-flat; this does not appear on a piano and other Western instruments, but does appear on Arab instruments and can be sung by the human voice. Thus cantillation from Yemen, Middle East, and the Levant is distinct solely in that it uses a *maqam*, whereas North African and Western Sephardic cantillation make use of Western scales.

“Rhythm” is the pulse or pace over time; in some cases Jewish tradition follows the biblical text, and in other cases the pulse is more regular. “Melodic range” describes the distance of the notes used; in some cases the melody is narrow and in other instances wide or more elaborate. The “*ta’amim*” in some cases determine the melodic formula to be applied, or major accents determine the melody.

Cantillation from Yemen shows a unique tradition. As you can hear (on the accompanying CD) the reader has a unique form of pronunciation: the *vav* is pronounced with a “w” sound, not a “v” sound (in figure 7, line 2, the word *ve-et* is pronounced “we-et”). The scale is a *maqam*, which adds to the distinct nature of this rendering, since this scale is not part of Western music. The rhythm follows the text, and the *ta’amim* determine the flow of the melodic line; in other words, after the third word of the first line, *Elohim*, you hear a pause over the trope sign *etnachta*. The sign determines a pause, as does the end of the *pasuk*, or sentence, with the *sof pasuk* sign. In other examples to follow each sign has a musical formula applied to a particular word or words. At the end of the word *ha-aretz*, the last word of the sentence in the second line with the trope sign *sof pasuk*, this reader from Yemen pauses melodically. In the second sentence, the third line of this example, there is a pause after the fourth word *va-vohu*; the trope sign here is *zakef-katon*. You can hear throughout this example that the major trope signs *sof pasuk*, *etnachta*, and *zakef-katon* have a pause; the other *ta’amim* are almost ignored as the reader simply recites the words over the same note. This leads to the description of the melodic range as being narrow, as there is not much melodic movement; there will be contrasts in the following examples. Lastly the characteristic of a “tense” sound is the overall melodic character, which results from the nasal quality of the singing; this is a feature common in all the music of this region. Western music, in comparison, seeks to avoid the nasal quality with a full sound that is supported with proper breath control resulting in resonant vowels. In Yemen and other parts of the Middle East the nasal sound aids in conveying the sound of consonants.

In the Middle Eastern example the reader is from Iraq. The scale also makes use of a *maqam*, and the reader follows the text. As with the Yemenite reader the major *ta’amim* are followed, and the melodic range is narrow, though not as narrow as in the Yemenite example. This Middle Eastern example is “declamatory” in that the melodic intonation sounds secondary to the declamation or recitation of the words.

The Torah reader from Egypt serves as an example of the Levant tradition. As in the Yemenite

and Middle Eastern examples the scale is a *maqam*, but other features are different. The rhythm is quite free in that the reader takes time to emphasize certain words. Also part of this freedom is the wide melodic range, with many high notes, encompassing a larger expanse. The reader does follow the major accents, but more than that, certain words are emphasized. For example the first word *Bereshit* is elongated with melodic embellishment, emphasizing the word. The trope mark for this work, *tipcha*, is not a major trope sign in terms of its grammatical function. The embellishment is purely at the choice of the reader. Other examples of melodic embellishment throughout this cantillation are the presentations of the word *Elohim* (one of the names of God). For example in the second sentence, fourth line of the Hebrew, fourth word, the reader signs a melodic flourish. This rendering from an Egyptian Torah reader is the most embellished of all the examples, the most elongated, and the longest in terms of time. Emphasis on particular words is the hallmark of a seasoned reader.

The North African style is represented in the example with a reader from Djerba. It sounds different because the scale is Western and recognizable to our musical ears. The consistent rhythm or pulse provides a steady beat. The *vav*, as with the Yemen reader, has a “w” sound, and there is also some guttural pronunciation with the letter *chet* (see the second sentence with the word *ve-khoshekh*, third line, last word). The melodic range is wider than with the Yemenite and Iraqi readers, but not as wide and embellished as with the Egyptian reader. Major accent signs are followed.

The Western Sephardic example is from Reverend Abraham Lopes Cordozo of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in New York. The scale is Western and the flow of the text carefully follows the words. The pace is steady, and the reader carefully follows the words; each trope sign has a melodic formula. The melodic range is moderate and in a recitation style.

These five examples show the diversity of Sephardic and Mizrahi communities in their rendering of the Torah. Cultural factors determine the type of vocal production, pronunciation, and melodic scale. Communities living under Arab rule and cultural influence (like Yemen, the Middle East, and the Levant) make use of *maqam*, while the Western Sephardic and North African regions use a Western scale. Clearly the geographic proximity of Spain and North Africa produces similarities, while the further East one travels the more Arabic is the sound of the music. Later we will see a similar demonstration with liturgical music.

Paraliturgical Songs

The “Process of Adaptation” (figs. 9 and 10) shows how new music is created through taking pre-existing music and changing the words. In this section various forms of a song are presented to show the origins and development of a liturgical song. The next section will compare several communal renditions of the singing of *Nishmat Kol Hai* from Shabbat Shacharit (the morning Sabbath service).

The creation of new music is typically considered a task that involves writing original music. Certainly in most contexts of Western music, in various forms, writing new compositions or new songs is the goal of composers and performers. In other cultural contexts the creation of new music comes through adaptation. In the Sephardic and Mizrahi traditions there is a distinct process of adapting new music that is used for liturgical purposes, for life-cycle events, and in the synagogue.

Adaptation proceeds in three steps. The first is taking a pre-existing song. In the example that follows an Arabic song is adapted to be used in a liturgical context (fig. 9). The text is in Arabic, and the music is in an Arabic style, though this process of adaptation can be used with music that is Spanish, Turkish, or Greek. The second step in the process of adaptation is to create a Hebrew text. This Hebrew text is set to the pre-existing music which stays the same. This genre of liturgical Hebrew poetry is called *piyyut* (pl. *piyyutim*). *Piyyutim* have an over fifteen-hundred-year history, dating back to 500 c.e. During the Golden Age of Spain, the tenth to the twelfth centuries, the cultural developments of the time, referred to above, influenced the *piyyut* as a poetic genre to include elaborate rhyme schemes and a consistent meter. The third step in the process of adaptation is to use a liturgical text in Hebrew (or in some cases Aramaic) instead of the Hebrew words of the *piyyut* (fig. 10). This is how new music is adapted into a liturgical context: an original Arabic melody is developed into a *piyyut*, and then becomes part of the liturgy through adapting the melody. In some instances the melody from an Arabic song may be directly brought into the liturgy, eliminating the second step.

An actual example of the process of adaptation from the Syrian tradition will show this three-step process. Step 1: an Arabic song, with an Arabic text and melody, *Hawwid Min Hina*, was written in the 1920s and sung by Zakki Murad (the Arabic text is on the white line of fig. 9). Step 2: the *piyyut* that was created in the 1930s by the Syrian Rabbi and Hazzan Moses Ashear became *Bo'i Berinah* (the Hebrew text is provided in a box in fig. 9 – a transliteration of the Hebrew appears in the grey lines). Step 3: the melody was then adapted to the liturgical text *Shav'at Aniyyim*, part of the Sabbath morning service (fig. 10).

A comparison of text of the Arabic song and the Hebrew *piyyut* shows interesting details of cultural contact. The four-line text of the Arabic song *Hawwid Min Hina* is provided in transliteration with the Hebrew *piyyut Bo'i Berinah*, highlighted in grey in each line. Notice a few details. The rhyme scheme of *Hawwid Min Hina* contains two phrases in each line, for the first line *hina* and *'indina*, for the second *winta* and *ba'dina*. The Hebrew *Bo'i Berinah piyyut* follows the same rhyme sounds, *be-rinah* and *adinah* in the first line, and *atah* and *esh'conah* in the second. This is also true when comparing lines 3 and 4 of the Arabic and Hebrew texts. It is not by accident that the Hebrew *piyyut* models the rhyme structure of the Arabic, but is a deliberate attempt to make the Hebrew *piyyut* follow the Arabic text. Note too the assonance at the end of the first line: *ta'aala 'indina* in the Arabic sounds like *ya'alah adinah* in Hebrew. Once again there is a conscious attempt to reflect the Arabic text. The third step in the process of adaptation is provided here with the application of this song to the liturgical text *Shav'at Aniyyim*, which appears in the Sabbath morning liturgy in the *Shacharit* portion of the service just before the *Kaddish* that precedes the *Borchu*. It does not appear in the Ashkenazi liturgy. (The Hebrew text is provided in a box toward the top; the transliteration of each line with a translation, in gray shading appears below each line.) The melody of an Arab song is then adapted into the liturgy through this three-step process.

Ashir Lakh Eretz Khemdah (fig. 11) is a *piyyut* from the North African tradition. This *piyyut* is an adaptation of an Arabic song and is sung here by Emil Zrihan with the Andalusian Orchestra of Israel. Zrihan is a recognized singer of Arabic and Spanish songs. This *piyyut* extols the virtues of the land of Israel with a song sung to the land. The first four lines appear in a configuration with the two clauses in the first line, and an indented clause in the second line; this configuration is repeated. The rhyme of the clauses in lines 1 and 3 are a pair, as also lines 2 and 4. These four

lines are the chorus, sung at the beginning and between verses. The remaining lines are the first verse; there is a second verse that does not appear in this presentation. The first verse expresses a yearning to God, and refers to Moses through implication as the shepherd who could only see the land of Israel from a distance. The music is in a common Arab style with three musical textures: the singer, the instruments, and the drums. The drums establish a rhythmic pattern that is repeated throughout. The singer sings the melodic line, which is echoed and at times repeated by the instrumentalists. Notice that the chorus is an attractive melody with a steady beat. The verse is different; it contrasts with the chorus as it grows more exciting. The first two lines of the verse are repeated, as are the last three lines. On the second repetition of the last three lines the singing is more intense. The singer sings louder, at the top of his vocal range, he has more melodic embellishments, and notes are held longer. This type of excited singing in the Arab tradition leads towards ecstasy, called *saltana* in Arabic. This excited singing adds to the character of the musical interpretation of this *piyyut*.

Liturgical Song

Looking again at the map of regional clusters (fig. 3), we will not be surprised to see the similarities of Sephardic and Mizrahi traditions in liturgical music as well. In viewing the traditions along the Mediterranean, the Western Sephardic tradition, as previously noted, is influenced by Western culture though the use of Western scales and music. At the other end of the spectrum, the Levantine traditions make use of Arabic music and *maqamat*. The North African tradition is somewhere between the two: it uses Western scales, but with the freedom of Arab music; this is called Andalusian. Region determines the cultural influence as heard in the liturgical music of Sephardic and Mizrahi communities.

The text that is sung here is *Nishmat Kol Chai* (fig. 12). It is where the Sephardic or Mizrahi cantor begins leading prayers in the Sabbath morning service. This text states that every living creature will pray to God. Prior to this, in Sephardic and Mizrahi services, a congregant proficient in reading the prayers leads the earlier sections of the liturgical service. For each example here different musical styles influence the music and singing.

The Western Sephardic singing of *Nishmat Kol Chai* is taken from the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in New York City. The choral singing is hymn-like in that the melody is harmonized; this is the only Sephardic tradition that has a choir. Since Spanish and Portuguese synagogues were located in Western European and American cities (like Vienna, Hamburg, London, Amsterdam, New York) they were in proximity in the late nineteenth century to Ashkenazi synagogues that used choirs. In an effort to remain up-to-date, Spanish and Portuguese synagogues used choirs so that their congregants would not seek out other synagogues for worship. In this rendition of *Nishmat Kol Chai* the scale is Western, the rhythm is a steady and regular pulse, and the melodic range is moderate. The congregation is expected to sing-along.

The North African rendition of *Nishmat Kol Chai* employs the same melody as heard in the Western Sephardic version. The scale is Western, the melodic range is moderate, but the Middle Eastern influence of a free melodic line guides the singing with a rendition that is freer when compared to the Western Sephardic version. This shows the Spanish influence on North African Jewry but, as heard here, the music is interpreted differently.

The Turkish version of *Nishmat Kol Chai* provided here is sung by Cantor Isaac Azose from Congregation Ezra Bessaroth in Seattle, Washington. The scale is a *maqam*, the rhythm is steady

but freely interpreted. This is an example of the Middle Eastern influence, but not as fully as in the Levant. In effect, the Turkish tradition blends Western and Middle Eastern influences, as heard here.

The Levantine presentation of the *Nishmat Kol Chai* by the Syrian community is the most elaborate. As with the cantillation example, the Levant tradition makes use of the widest melodic range and of the most musical embellishments. Cantor David Shiro from the Syrian tradition in Brooklyn sings in *maqam bayat*. The melody is based on an Arabic song. The style is clearly Middle Eastern and the rhythm is free, with a great deal of embellishment. Western and Middle Eastern influences are heard here.

Conclusion

Liturgical music of the Sephardi and Mirachi Jews is quite diverse. They share a similar history, and in some cases a regional proximity, resulting in musical traditions both similar and distinct. The Mizrahi Jews often lived in neighborhoods where they were self-contained, governing their own schools, synagogues, and other aspects of religious life. Typically men left the community daily for business purposes, and interacted with the local communities. During Ottoman rule the Turkish coffee house was an important cultural nexus where Jews, Arabs, and Christians socialized, heard poetry and music. Various musical traditions thus influenced these communities. The Western Sephardic communities in England, Amsterdam, and the Americas were all in metropolitan cities, with a vast array of Western high cultural influences. Being in these locales significantly influenced the formality found in them. It is also important to stress that the similarity of religious practice, through the use of a similar prayer book and related cultic practices, stems from the centrality of rabbinic literature. Although the Jews of these regions have different streams of cultural influence they follow the religious practices codified in the *Shulchan Arukh*, the codification of Jewish law. There are regional differences but the core practices are quite similar. This shows that the religious text and order of the *siddur* is stable and faithfully transmitted, but music is not governed by these religious dictates.

While A. Z. Idelsohn saw the diversity of liturgical music as an emblem of a homogenized past, scholars today have a different view. The musicologist Amnon Shiloah is critical of Idelsohn, stating that the Palestinian folk song that is at the heart of the originating layer is never provided. Shiloah further states that since oral traditions are in constant contact with local musical cultures the differences of traditions need to be considered as much as the similarities.⁵ Edwin Seroussi, in his entry on “Jewish Music” in the *New Grove*, sees Idelsohn’s efforts as having a strong ideological agenda.⁶ Writing in the 1920s Idelsohn was swept away by the influence of nationalism, and he was searching for an underlying aspect of cultural unity in the Jewish people. Seroussi stresses the importance of a consideration of both the past and present looking at each community on its own terms. Rather than positing a common origin to Jewish traditions the differences reflect the rich history of these communities.

ENDNOTES

1. See Lawrence Hoffman, *The Canonization of the Synagogue Service* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1979).
2. Often in rabbinic literature the meaning of the biblical text is changed to suit the purposes of the discussion.

3. A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development* (New York: Henry Holt, 1929) 71.
4. These five regions cover the Sephardi/Mizrachi community. See Avigdor Herzog, "Masoretic Accents," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem and New York: Macmillan, 1971-72) 11:1098-1112, for a description of cantillation in various Jewish communities around the world.
5. Amnon Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Traditions* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001) 96-109.
6. Edwin Seroussi, "Jewish Music," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 2001) 13:24-112.

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