



EL NORA ALILA (God of Might, God of Awe)— From Spain to the Four Corners of the Earth

Avner Bahat

The Golden Age of Hebrew Poetry in Spain
Moses Ibn Ezra
Yom Kippur—Nei'la
God of Might—The poem: Rhyming, structure, meter
Geographical Dispersion
The Music: Evidences in Notations
The Music: Recordings Transcriptions

THE GOLDEN Age of Judaism in Spain had witnessed the creation of Hebrew poetry unprecedented in both quantity and quality, unparalleled by anything since biblical times through to modern times. The Hebrew poetry in Spain has been influenced by Arab poetry in terms of rhyming, meters, forms and contents, encompassing secular and liturgical poetry.

The Hebrew poetry that flourished in Spain from the tenth to the fifteenth century was based on the Arabic system of poetics adapted to the Hebrew language. In secular poetry the meter was quantitative, i.e. there was a pattern of long and short syllables throughout a line repeated in all the lines of a poem (similar to the system used in classical Greek poetry). Under Arabic influence the Hebrew language here emphasized a difference between 'short' vowels (*shva*, *hataf*, and the conjunction *u*) and the regular vowels, considered as 'long.' (Hrushovski, 1981:63).

This system is relevant to the secular and paraliturgical poetry. Liturgical poetry, however, was based on a different system: the meter of the vowels.

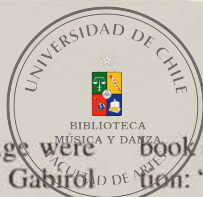
The Hebrew poets also employed a meter of 'long' syllables, avoiding the short ones altogether (*mishkal hatenu'ot*). [...] They developed a syllabic meter, based on a regular number of syllables per line (6 or 8), which allowed the free use of short vowels but disregarded them as syllables. (Idem).

The number of vowels per line was constant, and the short ones, *shva* and *hataf*, were not counted, so that these were actually syllables in the modern sense of the term.

One of the most common forms in Arab poetry is the *muwashshah*, or in Hebrew *shir ezor* (a girdle poem). This was a favorite form among Golden Age poets, used primarily in profane and paraliturgical poems, but occasionally in liturgical poetry as well.

The *muwashshah* or 'girdle poem' is an Arabic poem, which regularly alternates sections with separate rhymes and others with common rhyme. (Carmi, 1981:30).

The first poet to adapt Arab poetry features into Hebrew was Dunash ben Labrat (920–990). The



greatest poets at the pinnacle of Golden Age were Samuel Hanagid (993–1056), Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021–1058), Moses Ibn Ezra (1055–1135), Judah Halevi (1075–1141), Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164), and Judah Al-Harizi (1170–1235).

Moses Ibn Ezra (1055–after 1135), a consummate craftsman and the leading theoretician of the Spanish school, was born in Granada, where he was granted an honorific Arabic title. In 1090 the Jewish community was destroyed by the Berber Almoravids, and the members of his family dispersed. It is not known why Ibn Ezra, isolated and impoverished, remained in Granada. About five years later [...] he left to Christian Spain. For the next forty years he wandered through ‘the exile of Edom’ [meaning among the Christians], an embittered refugee in search of patrons. Towards the end of his life he composed his Arabic treatise *The Book of Conversations and Memories*. This unique work, based on Arabic poetics, is an invaluable source for the history of Andalusian Hebrew poetry. [...] He was the first to write homonymic poems, on the model of the Arabic *tajnis*. In his extensive liturgical poetry, he deftly wove together Jewish religious and Arabic secular elements. He came to be known as *Hasalah* (‘the supplicant’) in acknowledgement of his moving *selihot* [penitential prayers], many of which found a place of honor in synagogue rites (Carmi, 1981:104–5).

Yom HaKippurim or **Yom Kippur** (The Day of Atonement) is the most important and holiest occasion in the Jewish liturgical year. It is a day of fasting and constant praying. During the year, the Jew prays four daily prayers. *Yom Hakippurim* is the only day of the year where a fifth prayer takes place towards its end—the *Ne’ila* (closing) prayer, which is said as the sun is setting, and the Holy Ark is opened during parts of it.

With this prayer, the believers complete all the day’s prayers, which are all concerned with remorse and regrets, with asking absolution from God.

Along the years, numerous poems were incorporated into this prayer, and these vary between Ashkenazi and Sephardic congregations. The poem, which is the focus of this paper—God of Might, is common only among Sephardic congregations, the offspring of exiles from Spain in 1492. These congregations were dispersed along the Mediterranean shores as well as in several centers in northern Europe (Amsterdam, Hamburg, London, Vienna) and America. For historical reasons, the poem is also common among Jewish communities in Arab countries who have been influenced by Spanish Jews. Thus, for instance, the poem is included in a Yemenite prayer

book (*sidur Etz Haim*, Part III, 122) with the annotation: “It is customary among some to chant this *sliha* as well.”

The Hebrew text:

אל נורא עליקה
אל נורא עליקה
המציא לנו מחילה
בשעת הנעילה
מתי מספר קרואים
לך עין נושאים
ומסלדים בחילה
בשעת הנעילה
שופכים לך נפשם
מחה פשעם וכחשם
והמציאם מחילה
בשעת הנעילה
היה להם לסתרה
ותלצם ממארה
ותתמם להוד ולגילה
בשעת הנעילה
חון אותם ורחם
וכל לוחץ ולוחם
עשה בהם פליקה
בשעת הנעילה
זכור צדקת אביהם
וחדש את ימיהם
בקדם ותחלה
בשעת הנעילה



קרא נא שְׁנַת רְצוֹן
וְהִשָּׁב שְׂאֵרֵי־הַצֹּאן
לְאֶהֱלִיבָה וְאֶהֱלָה
בְּשַׁעַת הַנְּעִילָה

תִּזְכּוּ לְשָׁנִים רַבּוֹת
הַבְּנִיִּים וְהָאֲבוֹת
בְּדִיצָה וּבְצַהֲלָה
בְּשַׁעַת הַנְּעִילָה

מִיכָאֵל שֵׁר יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֵלֵיהֶוּ וְגַבְרִיאֵל
בְּשֵׁרוֹ נָא הַגְּאוּלָּה
בְּשַׁעַת הַנְּעִילָה

The following is a translation from the Hebrew (Source: *Book of Prayer* of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation, London, Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 294–5):

God of awe, God of might,
God of awe, God of might,
Grant us pardon in this hour,
As Thy gates are closed this night.

1. We who few have been from yore,
Raise our eyes to heaven's height,
Trembling, fearful in our prayer,
As Thy gates are closed this night.

2. Pouring out our soul we pray,
That the sentence Thou wilt write
Shall be one of pardoned sin.
As Thy gates are closed this night.

3. God our refuge strong and sure
Rescue us from dreadful plight;
Seal our destiny for joy
As Thy gates are closed this night.

4. Grant us favor, show us grace;
But of all who wrest the right
And oppress, be Thou the Judge,
As Thy gates are closed this night.

5. Generations of our sires
Strong in faith walked in Thy light.
As of old renew our days,
As Thy gates are closed this night.

6. Gather Judah's scattered flock
Unto Zion's rebuilt site.
Bless this year with grace divine,
As Thy gates are closed this night.

7. May we all, both old and young,
Look for gladness and delight
In the many years to come,
As Thy gates are closed this night.

8. Michael, Prince of Israel,
Gabriel, Thy angels bright,
With Elijah, come, redeem,
As Thy gates are closed this night.

In his anthology of Sephardic Cantillation (Levy, 1980) Yitzhak Levi provides a Ladino translation:

Dió temerozo de ovra
Dió temerozo de ovra
Apareja a nos perdonança
En hora de la neilá.

Varones cuenta llamados
A tí ojos alçan
Y se escalientan de retembla
En hora de la neilá.

Vierten a ti sus almas
Arremata sus revellos y sus renegamiento
Y aparejales perdonança
En hora de la neilá.

See a ellos por cuviert
Y escápalos de maldición
Y séllalos por loor y gozo
En hora de la neilá.

Agracia a ellos y apiada
Y todo apretán y pelaze
Haz en ellos juzgo
En hora de la neilá.

Membra justedad de sus padres
Y renova sus días
Como avante y en pricipio
En hora de la neilá.

Apregon a ellos ano de veluntad
Y haz tornar restante de las ovejas
Y Aholivá y Aholá
En hora de la neilá.

Merescadex a anos muchos
Padres y hijos
Con gozo y alegría
En hora de la neilá.



Mikhael mayoral de Israel
Eliahu y Gavriel
Albercead agora la rehmición
En hora de la neilá.

The acrostic of the poem in Hebrew (אל משה חזק הם) means "God Moses strong innocent." The hymn is structured as a muwashshah, i.e. girdle poem: The opening verse with its single rhyme serves as a guide for the common rhyme—LA—as well as a refrain which is repeated throughout the verses. Its first line is repeated twice and its last line—*be-sha-at ha-ne-ila*—is the closing line of every stanza.

The verses themselves, numbered from 1 to 8, have each an individual rhyme for the first two lines, the third rhymes with the guide, and the fourth is identical to the guide.

As for the meter, it is a syllabic meter, which means an equal number of syllables, ignoring all the moving *shvas* and *hatafs*. The number of syllables is usually five, but there are exceptions. Already in the refrain, the line before last contains six syllables:

EL NO-RA ALI-LA—5
HAM-TSI LA-NU MECHI-LA—6
BESHA-AT HA-NEI-LA—5

In the next verses we shall note here only the lines containing more than five syllables:

Stanza 3, line three:

VECHOT-MEM LEHOD UL-GI-LA—6

Stanza 7, line two:

HA-BA-NIM VEHA-A-VOT—6

Last stanza, first three lines:

MIC-HA-EL SAR YIS-RA-EL—6
E-LI-YA-HU VEGAV-RI-EL—7
BAS-RU NA HA-GEU-LA—6

This relates only to the number of syllables as they are counted grammatically. In practice, however, as the chanting is performed, the short vowels do get their time, and the picture changes, as exemplified in the refrain:

EL NO-RA A-LI-LA—6
HAM-TSI LA-NU ME-CHI-LA—7
BE-SHA-AT HA-NE-I-LA—7

And in some of the verses, where the number of syllables is higher anyway, as noted above, the problem is even worse. For instance:

E-LI-YA-HU VEGAV-RI-EL—7

is actually:

E-LI-YA-HU VE-GAV-RI-EL—8

Or:

BAS-RU NA HA-GEU-LA—6

is actually:

BA-S-RU NA HA-GE-U-LA—8

Hence the varying rhythm throughout the poem is adjusted to the number of syllables actually sung. As for the pronunciation and accentuation, we must not apply our own modern terms, based on our contemporary accentuation patterns, to the chanting of this poem. There's no point in searching for a Sephardic or an Ashkenazi (i.e., penultimate or ultimate) accent. The singers are doing their best, to the best of their knowledge, to adapt the lyrics to the traditional melody, and only rarely try to accentuate as is customary in contemporary Hebrew.

THE MELODY

Melodies are in Jewish traditions generally used very flexibly for various texts, so that on the one hand a certain melody can serve a number of different texts, while on the other, one text may be sung to different melodies. In our case, the melody seems to be born with the text, because throughout its geographical dispersion we find it being sung to the same melody, albeit with many variants.

There are some references to the fact that the melody serves other texts as well. For instance, referring to the melody used in Jerusalem, Yitshak Levy notes "in Egypt this melody is used for singing *Adon HaSlihot* (Lord of Forgiving)" (Levy II: 259, no. 204). Israelites in India segue from this song directly into *HaMavdil Bein Kodesh LeHol* (He who Separates the Profane from the Sacred) employing the same melody. In the Salonica version, the singer segues into *Adonai Melech* (Lord is King) continuing in the same melody.

God of Might is sung by Sephardic Jews across four continents, from India and Kurdistan to the USA.

The present study is based on 33 printed versions from the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as 56 recorded versions, originating in 25 different countries, as transcribed by me. It should be noted that many more recordings exist, but for our purposes the



geographical dispersion of the present sample is sufficient to reflect the characteristic Jewish dispersion.

Recordings were found in the following sources:

The National Sound Archive of the Department of Music at the National Library in Jerusalem—14 (code—NSA).

The Feher Jewish Music Center at Beth Hatefusoth—10.

Records—16.

Piyut Website—16.

Written sources:

Edwin Seroussi (Seroussi, 1988: 334)—7.

Yehezkel Braun (Braun: 64)—1.

Idelsohn (Idelshon II: 110, IV: 224, V: 97)—6.

Yitzhak Levy (Levy II: 259–264; IV: 410; IX: 125; X: 236)—17.

Adaqi-Sharvit (Adaqi; Sharvit: 86)—1.

Cardozo, Abraham Lopez (Cardozo, 1987: 75)—1.

In these versions the melody was repeated 17 times and occasionally, when the first refrain was sung twice—first by the soloist and then by the choir—it was performed 18 times (examples from Iraq, Turkey, Lihya, Kurdistan and Cochin).

Between these two extremes one may find, for instance, versions which include only the first verse (Greece), only the last verse (New York), only the seventh (Djerba), the first and last only (Florence, Leghorn, Rome and New York), or any selection of other verses, between two to seven of the song's eight verses. The importance of the seventh verse has already been mentioned, being a kind of blessing. And indeed, some of the versions change the order and include it at the end, or sometimes as an addition at the end of the entire song, in which case it is sung twice, thus causing the melody to be repeated 19 times.

THE SONG'S SCOPE

The printed versions usually only include the opening refrain, because it provides the basic melody. That is the case in Seroussi's transcriptions. When the first or the two first verses are included, the purpose is to indicate that they are sung to the same melody as the refrain (as in the case of Sharvit and Braun's versions). Out of Levy's 17 recordings, 14 provide only the refrain while three include the first verse as well. Out of Idelsohn's six transcriptions, three provide only the refrain, two others include the first verse and one provides the seventh verse. It should be noted that this verse, which is a kind of blessing ("Tizku LeShanim Rabot"—may you have longevity) is highly significant, and is often repeated at the end of the entire song.

The versions transcribed by me from recordings paint a different picture: some recordings are partial while others are more complete. It is reasonable to assume that testimonial recordings made at the researcher's request provided only the refrain or a snippet of the song, whereas performance recordings provided a fuller version, which suggest the customs of a specific tradition. Thus in our transcribed versions, only three provide just the refrain, while the fuller versions contain all the verses, with the refrain performed after every verse, so that the full picture is:

R-1-R-2-R-3-R-4-R-5-R-6-R-7-R-8-R.

THE MELODY UNIFORMITY

About twenty-five years ago, as I recorded the first ten versions of the song, I was already struck by the fact that all the melodies were actually variants of the same basic melody. As the versions accumulated it became ever clearer.

The reason for this is probably that the song is liturgical. Our experience suggests that paraliturgical poems are quite common around the globe, generally sung to a multitude of different melodies. For instance, most Jewish communities, Sephardic and Ashkenazi alike, sing a Sabbath song by Dunash Ben Labrat—*Dror Yikra LeVen Im Bat*—but its melodies are many and varied. In contrast, a melody of a liturgical poem seems to have been preserved in its original form.

What is the melody's origin? We can never know, because its annotation only began in the 19th century, and its recordings only in the 20th century. A far-reaching hypothesis is that it originated in the poet himself. In other words, that the poet created the melody with the words, and that's how it was disseminated—lyrics and melody as a single unit. However, even if that's not the case, and the melody was composed by someone else, or already existed and was joined with the lyrics, the joining of the two must have taken place at a time close to the creation of the poem, as we haven't found any other melody to which this poem is sung that is totally different. Later the poem wandered along with the wanderings of the



Jews: following the Exile from Spain the exiles were scattered across the Mediterranean region, encompassing three continents: Southern Europe, Western Asia and North Africa. Some exiles have found their way into North and Western Europe, so that Spanish Exile communities are found in Amsterdam, Hamburg, London and Bayonne, and eventually in the Americas too.

In the east, the wanderings of the exiles brought the melody into the eastern Jewish communities of Iraq, Persia, Georgia, Kurdistan, India and Yemen.

The following is a list of versions according to geographical distribution (numbers preceding the slash represent the recorded versions transcribed by me; the numbers after the slash represent printed versions):

Europe:

- Italy—Florence 2/2, Leghorn 1, Rome 1
- England—London 1/2
- Bulgaria—Plovdiv /1
- Gibraltar—1
- Georgia—2
- Germany—Hamburg /1
- Holland—Amsterdam 5
- Greece—Larissa 1, Corfu 1, Yanina 1, Salonika 1/1
- France—Bayonne 1/1, Paris /1
- Romania—Bucharest and Karajova /1
- Switzerland—Lausanne 1

Asia:

- Buchara 2
- India—B'nai Israel 1, Cochin 1
- Turkey 1/2
 - Smirna 1/
- Israel—Jerusalem 7/3
- Kurdistan—4 Amadia 1, Zaku 1
- Iraq—1/2
- Persia—Shiraz 1
- Yemen—4/, Shar'ab 1

Africa:

- Algeria— /1
- Libya—2
- Tripoli—1
- Morocco—2/3, Meknes 1, Tangier /1, Casablanca /1, Marrakech /1
- Tunisia—Djerba 1

America:

- United States—New York 1/ 5, Boston 2

As for singing customs: usually a cantor and a choir or audience perform the song, with the most common division being the cantor beginning with the refrain, and the choir repeating it. Then the cantor sings the verses and the group repeats the refrain. In some communities the audience sings the entire song, verses and refrains. In a few cases (Shiraz, Persia), the refrain is not repeated after every verse but is only sung at the beginning.

As for the refrain: the first line is usually repeated twice, both lyrics and melody, but in some versions the first line is not repeated, so the structure is not aab but abc. These versions usually originate in the east: Yemen, Babylon (Idelshon, 92), Georgia, Kurdistan, Zaku, Buchara, Cochin, Shiraz (Persia), Morocco (one of the four versions), Greece (two) and Rome.

In our transcription all the verses of all of the recordings were transcribed, and indeed it turns out that the opening melody used for the refrain serves for all the poem's verses, although in some cases there are minor variations which are probably a personal variant of the particular soloist singing that particular verse. Therefore the enclosed notations represent generally the refrains only.

For lack of space, we can only present here a fraction out of the eighty versions we have collected and notated; these are typical versions, which represent the entire range. Generally, the refrain and the stanzas are sung to the same melody. In other cases, where there is a difference between the refrain and stanzas, one of the stanzas was included. The music was not transcribed in the absolute pitch but converted for comparison purposes. Some of the recordings include an instrumental accompaniment, by organ in the West, and by 'ud and percussion in the East, and by guitar in a single case. For our purposes, however, the central issue is the melody, so the instrumental accompaniment has not been notated. In one case the singing was in two voices, and that of course was notated. In another case, in Georgia, part of the song was sung in the local language; it was done after the entire song was sung in Hebrew, as a kind of addition of the locals. In two cases, it was specified either in writing or in conversation, that this melody is also used for another hymn.

In the following table (Reproduced with author's permission), Edwin Seroussi (Seroussi, 1988: 334) presents seven versions printed in the 19th century: 1) Vienna; 2) Florence; 3) Paris; 4) Jerusalem; 5) London; 6) Bayonne; 7) Hamburg.



1 El no-ra-a-li-la ham-tzi la-nu me-chi-la be-scha-at ha-ne-i-la.

2 El no-ra-a-li-la ham-tzi la-no me-hi-la be-scha-at ha-ne-i-le

3 El no-ra-a-li-lah Ham-tzi la-nu me-chi-lah Be-scha-at ha-ne-i-lah.

4 El hō-re-ā-li-la
 4 El hō-re-ā-li-la Ham-tsi la-nu me-hi-la be-sa-at ha-ne-i-la

5 El no-ra-a-li-lā ham-tsi la-nu me-hi-la be-sa-at ha-ne-i-la.

6 El no-ra-ā-li-lah ham-tsi la-nu me-hi-lah, be-sa-ath ha-ne-i-lah

7 (no text in original) © sic

The first four versions are notated in triple meter, the fifth switches from triple to duple, and the last three are duple. They are supposedly all in F major, with the opening note being either C or A and the ending always on F.

The Hamburg version, which presents the basic melody, is recorded in the Birnbaum Collection (HUC Birnbaum Collection Mus. Add. 14 no. 4a), and reproduced by Seroussi (Seroussi, 1996: 77) as follows:

Hamburg

El no-ra a-li-la El no-ra a-li-la ham-tzi la-nu me-chi-la be-sa-at ha-ne-i-la

He writes about it:

The melody is simple, moving in a narrow ambitus of a perfect fifth. It contains three motifs (a, b, c) [...] and its

form is aabc [...]. When singing the opening line and refrain, the first hemistich is repeated. The simplicity of the melody is enhanced through the use of the same rhythmic pattern in each motif and through the syllabic setting of the text (Seroussi, 1996:77-78).

If we regard this version as the basic one, the following few examples represent minor variants, with the opening tone being A or C or F, but always ending on F. In most versions the motif B (third bar) is identical.

The Lausanne version is taken from the CD Concert de Musique Liturgique Suisse á la Synagogue de Lausanne (Doron Musique DRC 3003-09):

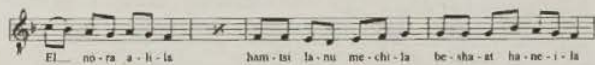
Switzerland—Lausanne

El no-ra a-li-la ham-tzi la-nu me-chi-la be-sa-at ha-ne-i-la



Yitzhak Levy notated thus the Salonica version (Levy, II 209):

Salonica



In the Bulgarian version, reproduced in Levy (Levy, II 208), the refrain is repeated twice with minor changes:

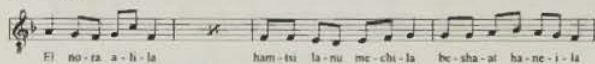
Bulgaria



The London version is common also in the small community of Gibraltar, and it is reproduced identically by three sources:

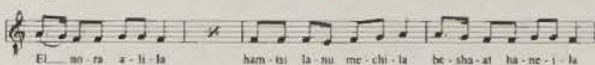
1. Yitzhak Levy (Levy, IX 211)
2. A recording from the Bevin Marks synagogue as performed by Rabbi Eliezer Avinun in 1964 (NSA Yc 2398)
3. As performed by Cantor Abraham Benito with the Chorus Conductor Yaakov Hadida (NSA Yc 107).

London

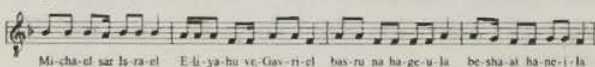


The Babylonian version, performed by Yehuda Ovadia (Piyut Website) makes do with a fourth range, but in the eighth stanza, which is presented here as an example for all the stanzas, it extends to a fifth:

Babylon



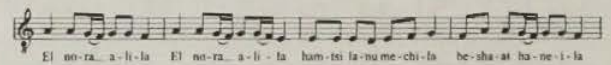
Babylon 8



The Kunkan region of Northern India, with the city of Bombay in its center, was home to the Jews called B'nai Israel. Most of this community is now resettled in Israel. Their version is most probably influenced by the Babylonian tradition, since in the 19th century there was a massive immigration of Iraqi Jews into the region. The following version was

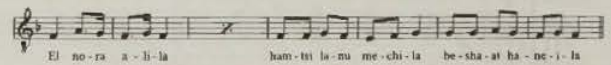
performed by brothers Haim and Danny Kolet and Moshe Vaskar (recorded at Beth Hatefutsot, 1982):

India—Kunkan



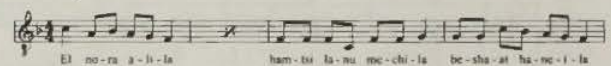
The following Jerusalem version also suffices with the fifth range. It was recorded by Yitzhak Levy (Levy, II 204), who comments that the same melody is used for singing the hymn *Adon Haselihot*.

Jerusalem

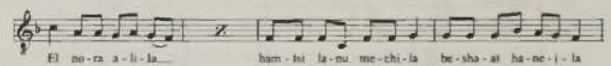


In the following version, from Turkey (Piyut Website), the refrain is sung twice, first by the soloist and then by the group, and there are some minor variations between the two:

Turkey

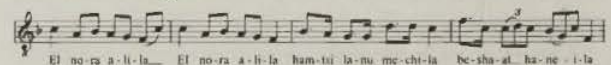


Choir



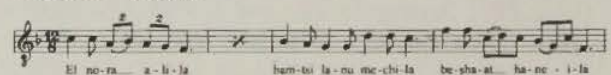
The following are several versions from Italy, which are more embellished, and some are in triple meter. The first is the Florence version, as performed by Cantor Fernando Belgrado, who was for many years the chief cantor of Florence's central synagogue. (From the LP *Canti del Tempio Israelitico di Firenze 2*.) The range extends to an octave and lets the tenor express his full vocal force:

Florence—Belgrado



The version of Hizkiya Nizani (Umberto Genazani), a Florentine who immigrated to Israel in 1938, when the anti-Jewish Fascist laws were passed, is very similar, but its meter is triple. The ending is identical. (From the collection of Leo Levy, CD AMTI 0102, *Italian Jewish Musical Traditions*):

Florence—Nizani





The Leghorn version from the Leo Levy Collection (NSA Y 172-4) is more ornamented and has a range of sixth:

Leghorn

El no-ra a-li-la El no-ra a-li-la ham-ti la-nu me-chi-la be-sha-at ha-ne-i-la

The Jewish community of Rome has an ancient and singular tradition of its own, but this melody is part of the Sephardi Jewish tradition. Here the Roman version is performed by Cantor Alberto Funaro and reproduced on the CD Canti Liturgici Ebraici di Tradizione orale secondo il Rito spagnolo di Roma:

Rome—Fonaro

El no-ra a-li-la ham-ti la-nu me-chi-la be-sha-at ha-ne-i-la

In Georgia too, the refrain is reduced to a fourth, but in the stanzas (represented here by the eighth one) the range extends to a fifth, and the meter is flexibly modified to accommodate the text (Piyut Website). Towards the ending, when all the stanzas have been sung in Hebrew, there are two additional stanzas in Georgian, and that is the only case in the entire array of our recordings where part of the hymn is sung in the local language:

Georgia

El no-ra a-li-la ham-ti la-nu me-chi-la be-sha-at ha-ne-i-la

Stanza 8

Mi-cha-el sar is-ra-el E-li-ya-hu-ve-Gav-ri-el ha-se-ru na-ha-ge-u-la be-sha-at ha-ne-i-la

The Jewish Portuguese community in Amsterdam has been among the most resplendent and wealthy of Spanish exiles. Its grand synagogue was inaugurated in 1675 and has been in constant use until the present day. The community is currently much smaller than it used to be, because the Nazis annihilated many of its members and others have emigrated, mostly to the Americas, and a few to Israel. The following are several versions of Amsterdam Jews, which seem to have had a great influence on the American versions. The first two are reproduced in a double CD scheduled to be released by Beth Hatefutsoth in the summer of 2006. The soloist is Cantor Daniel Halfon accompanied by a choir.

The first version is the simplest, but the stanza (reproduced here is the eighth stanza) is more ornamented than the refrain:

Amsterdam

El no-ra a-li-la ham-ti la-nu me-chi-la be-sha-at ha-ne-i-la

Stanza 8

Mi-cha-el sar is-ra-el E-li-ya-hu-ve-Gav-ri-el ha-se-ru na-ha-ge-u-la be-sha-at ha-ne-i-la

The second version is more embellished and repeats twice with a small difference at the end. We shall later see the version of Cardozo from New York, which is almost identical, showing the conservation of tradition after immigrating to the US:

Amsterdam 2

El no-ra a-li-la El no-ra a-li-la
ham-ti la-nu me-chi-la be-sha-at ha-ne-i-la be-sha-at ha-ne-i-la

The next version is freer in rhythmic terms (transcribed from the CD Tov Lehodot: Voices from the Dutch Liberal Community (LJG 2003-1):

Amsterdam 3

El no-ra a-li-la ham-ti la-nu me-chi-la be-sha-at ha-ne-i-la

As mentioned above, the version of Abraham Lopez Cardozo (Cardozo, 1987: 75) from the Portuguese community of New York reproduces the Amsterdam tradition almost unchanged, only a bit more ornamented:

New York—Carduzo

El no-ra a-li-la El no-ra a-li-la ham-ti la-nu me-chi-la be-sha-at ha-ne-i-la

New York—Carduzo Stanza 8

Mi-cha-el sar is-ra-el E-li-ya-hu-ve-Gav-ri-el ha-se-ru na-ha-ge-u-la be-sha-at ha-ne-i-la

Jews exiled from Portugal in 1497 found refuge in the South-Western regions of France, and since then burgeoning communities were established in Bordeaux and Bayonne, having strong trading and cultural ties with the Amsterdam Jewish community. The following is a personal version from Bayonne,

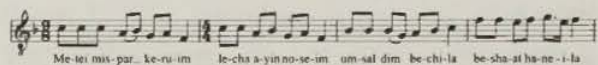


where the range extends beyond the octave (NSA, Y213-22):

France—Bayonne



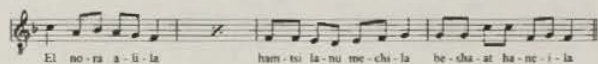
Stanza 1



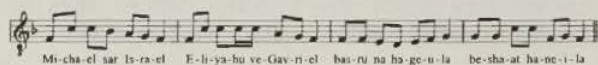
In the US, communities of Spanish exiles exist in several cities. In fact, the first Jews to arrive in North America were descendants of Spanish exiles, and they have established the first Jewish community in New Amsterdam (later renamed New York) already in 1654.

The following is an example from Boston, taken from Joel Cohen's CD, *The Sacred Bridge* (Erato D160905):

Boston

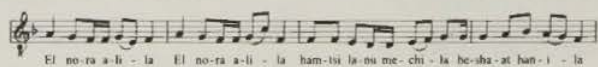


Stanza 8

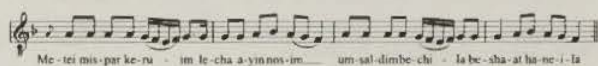


The version of the Beth-El Congregation in New York, as recorded on the CD *Temple Beth El* (Got House): *The High Holy Day Musical Tradition*, cantor David Montefiore, the accentuation of the words varies a little, due to the Ashkenazi pronunciation of the Hebrew:

New York—Beth El



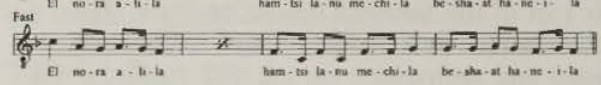
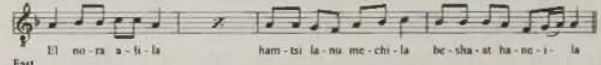
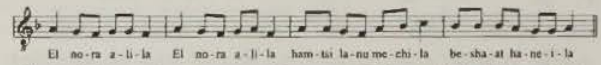
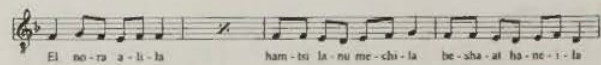
Stanza 1



In the version of the B'nai Jeshurun congregation in New York (CD *Congregation B'nai Jeshurun: TekiYah—Echoes of the High Holy Days*), the refrain is first sung slowly a few times, with minor variations. The first time the ending is on D, while the next two end on A. Then the singing becomes

faster and more rhythmic, in a jazzy, syncopated and asymmetric beat:

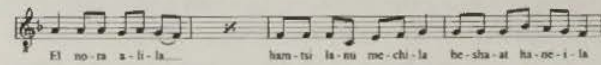
New York—B'nai Jeshurun



The farther we travel from Spain southward and eastward, we find versions that stray away from the basic melody found in Europe and the West. An important principle, which we have traced in many communities, particularly in the East, should be mentioned here: what identifies a melody, with all its variants, is not the scale or the mode, but the course of the tune. To European ears this may occasionally sound as a minor or some other mode, but for the actual singers it usually does not make any difference: it is the progression of the melody which determines its identity. Therefore, in the following examples, the opening or closing sound may vary from what we've seen so far, using a D (seemingly minor) or E or C.

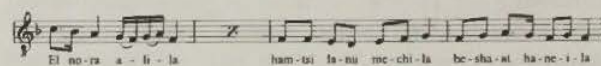
The following examples from Jewish communities in Greece illustrate this point: The Saloniki version of Yaakov Zadikariu (NSA Yc1167) is similar to the ones presented so far, and in particular to the one reproduced above from Yitzhak Levy's book. Further into the recording, Zadikariu comments that this melody is also used to sing the phrase *Adonai Melech Adonai Melech etc.*

Greece—Saloniki



The version of the Larissa congregation, performed by Yitzhak Mesan (NSA Yc 337) still seems to sound as F major:

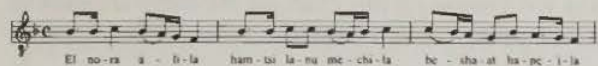
Greece—Larisa





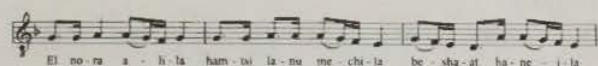
Three singers from the Yanina congregation in Greece, including a woman, perform the next version (NSA Y 204-16):

Greece—Yanina



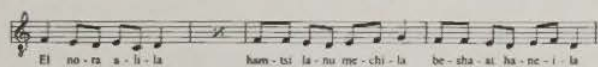
Menachem Haim from the Corfu island community recorded the following version (NSA Y 275-32):

Greece—Corfu



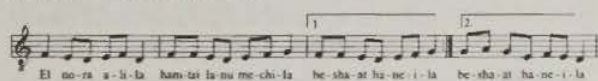
The following versions were recorded from North Africa. Two identical versions from the Tripoli congregation in Libya, one by Zion Badash and the other by Yehuda Hayoun (both from Piyut Website), seemingly in D minor:

Lybia—Tripoli



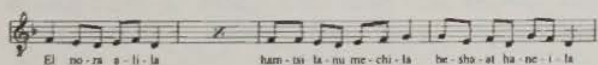
Shalom Levi's version from Morocco (NSA YC 2123-47) is very similar to the above:

Morocco—Shalom Levi



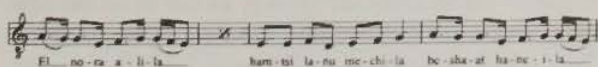
The Casablanca version (Levi II 213) is also very similar:

Casablanca



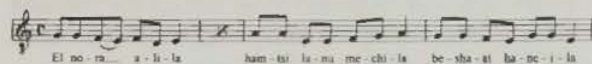
The following version was recorded in a Kiriath Shmona synagogue, near the Lebanese border, by singers originally from the city of Meknes in Morocco (an Israel Radio recording). Here the melody ends on E:

Meknes



In the Tunisian island of Djerba there is a very ancient Jewish community, who traditionally see themselves as exiles from the First Temple period, but they too have inherited the Sephardic legacy.

Djerba



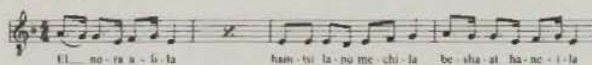
Traveling eastward to the Middle East region, the first version of the Basin family, originating in Iraq, is very similar to the Djerba recording (an Israel Radio recording). Reproduced here are the refrain and last stanza, which extends the range by one additional note:

Irak—Basin



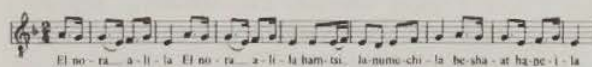
Two famous cantors, both among the teachers of Sephardic-Jerusalemite legacy, perform an identical version. One is Nissan Cohen Melamed (1906–1983), who was born in Persia and brought to Jerusalem at age two (from the LP IMI 2003); the other is Ezra Barnea, the director of the Renanot Institute of Jewish Music (from the CD Lemoshe Tefila). Ezra Barnea notes that the melody is in maqam siga.

Jerusalem



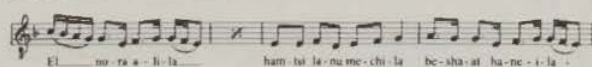
Their version is almost identical to that notated by composer Yehezkel Braun (Braun 1980: 66); the difference being that Braun notated the melody with an up-beat, in order to adapt the Hebrew to the Sephardi accent prevalent in Israel.

Jerusalem—Braun



The version of Moshe Havusha (Piyut Website), who also mentions the maqam siga, is slightly more ornamented but almost identical:

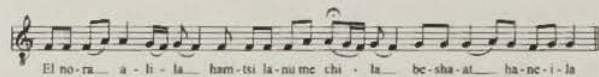
Jerusalem—Havusha





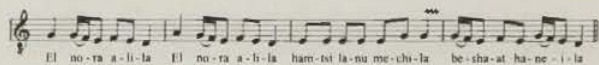
In 1952, Johanna Spector recorded in Jerusalem the following example performed by Shukri Zakar, who came to Israel from the Shiraz congregation in Iran (NSA Y 87-5). The rhythm is free and the entire melody spans only three tones, but its progression proves that it is a variant of the melody that traveled with the Jews exiled from Spain:

Persia—Shiraz



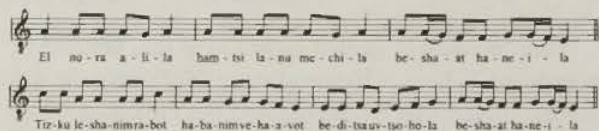
Kurdistan is an ethnic region divided between three countries: Iraq, Turkey and Iran. Jewish communities existed mainly in the region of Northern Iraq. All the examples were recorded in Jerusalem by Jews of Kurdistan origin. The first is relatively simple and rhythmic (NSA Yc 869-3), performed by Nahum Nahum, Haim Simon and Hai Sasson:

Kurdistan



The second version is performed by a group of cantors (Piyut Website), where the refrain spans only a fourth, while in the stanzas, performed by a soloist, the range extends to a sixth. Reproduced here are the refrain and the seventh stanza, which includes the blessing “Tizku Leshanim Rabot” (May you be blessed with longevity).

Kurdistan

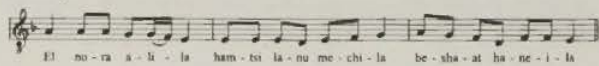


Another group from Kurdistan, the Baruch family with friends (an Israel Radio recording from 1978), presents a similar version. The refrain is repeated twice, first by the soloist and then by the entire group with minor variations:

Kurdistan



Group

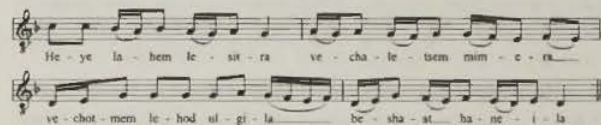


Esther Gerson-Kivi recorded the example from the Zakho congregation in Kurdistan in 1968. The singers are Nehemia and Eliyahu Hudja (NSA Y726-8), and their version is more ornamented. Here too, the stanzas (in this example the third) are sung in a wider range than the refrain:

Kurdistan—Zakho

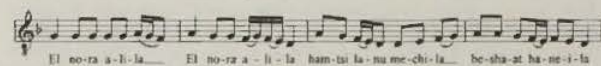


Stanza 3



The following example comes from Sulaimaniya (recorded by Johanna Spector, performed by Ezra Mordechai, NSA Y 36-24). Here too, the first stanza presents an extension of the melody:

Kurdistan—Sulaimaniya



Stanza 1



Another version from Kurdistan is a highly personalized example, with a totally free rhythm and the singer from the Amadia congregation presents a mode that includes an augmented second. However, this variant also bears the marks of the Spanish melody:

Kurdistan—Amadia



While the city of Bucharra in Uzbekistan is not the country's capital (Tashkent is), it gave its name to the entire community of Uzbekistani immigrants who began to arrive in Israel already in the late 19th century, and were collectively labeled as Bucharrians. Two versions were recorded from this community, both in triple meter. The first is by Ezra Malakov (Piyut Website), with the refrain supposedly in D minor, but the eighth stanza presented here indicates that there are additional notes and the scale is not so clear.



Buchara—Malakov

El no-ra a - li - la ham-ti la - nu me - chi - la be - sha - at ha - ne - i - la

Buchara—Malakov 8

Mi - cha - el sar - ts - el E - li - ya - hu ve - Gav - n - el ba - se - ru na - ha - ge - u - la be - sha - at ha - ne - i - la

The second version is the only one in two voices. First the soloist sings the melody and when the group responds, the voices split, mostly in parallel thirds. Performed by David Elazarov, Yosef Haimov, Mordechai Rahaminov and Moshe Nimigarov, this recording was made by the Israel Radio in Jerusalem in 1979:

Buchara

El no-ra a - li - la ham-ti la - nu me - chi - la be - sha - at ha - ne - i - la

El no-ra a - li - la ham-ti la - nu me - chi - la be - sha - at ha - ne - i - la

The Cochin congregation in the Karalla region of Southwestern India is a distinct and separate entity from the B'nai Israel congregation in the Bombay area (see above). The immigrants from Cochin were recorded in Jerusalem (on the CD Synagogue Songs in the Tradition of the Jews of Cochin). The opening soloist sings a free-rhythm melismatic version. When the group repeats the refrain, the version is less ornamented, but still preserves the basic melodic lines. Also included is the seventh stanza, which begins and ends in F, but the melodic formula is similar.

Cochin—Cantor

El no - ra a - li - la ham-ti la - nu me - chi - la be - sha - at ha - ne - i - la

Cochin—Choir

El no - ra a - li - la ham-ti la - nu me - chi - la be - sha - at ha - ne - i - la

Tiz - ku le - sha - nim ra - bot ha - ba - num ve - ha - a - vot be - di - tsa - u - ve - tso - ho - la

The final versions originate in Yemen. The Jewish community of Yemen is among the most ancient, as Jews have arrived in Yemen already during the First Temple period, i.e., hundreds of years BC. They

strictly avoided contacts with the gentiles around them and cultivated their own culture and music regardless of the surrounding influences. They did however maintain close contacts with other Jewish communities, such as in Babylon, Egypt, India and Palestine. That means that the poem arrived in this community along with its melody, but their variant is clearly the most independent.

Three versions are presented here. The first is performed by Yehiel Adaqi (1903–1980), who was born in Yemen and arrived in Israel in 1927. Here he was a cantor and a teacher and raised a generation of disciples (from his LP Mitzhalot Teiman):

Yemen—Adaqui

El no - ra a - li - la ham-ti la - nu me - chi - la be - sha - at ha - ne - i - la

Aharon Amran was also born in Yemen and brought to Israel as a young child. Amran is a prolific performer and recorder of songs and hymns from the Yemenite tradition. His version (Piyut Website) is very similar to the former, which suggests their common origin:

Yemen—Amran

El no - ra a - li - la ham-ti la - nu me - chi - la be - sha - at ha - ne - i - la

Uri Shevach is a young, Israel-born singer, from a family of Yemenite Jews. Shevach accompanies his singing with a guitar. His version (recorded by the Israeli Radio) is based on that of his two predecessors, but the special mode of his singing must be noted. Reproduced here are the refrain and the seventh stanza:

Yemen—Shevach

El no - ra a - li - la ham-ti la - nu me - chi - la be - sha - at ha - ne - i - la

Shevach—7

Tiz - ku le - sha - nim ra - bot ha - ba - num ve - ha - a - vot be - di - tsa - u - ve - tso - ho - la be - sha - at ha - ne - i - la

CONCLUSION

A song written during the Golden Age in Spain has been sung and is still being sung today in many Jewish communities of descendants of Spanish exiles. Hebrew poetry, which is based on Arab poetic forms, became a significant and integral part of the Jewish annual liturgical songbook. The integration of this poem into the ritual of the Day of Atonement—the most central date in the Jewish year—probably helped to preserve its original version and strong links with tradition, and thus explain the recurrence of the basic melody in Jewish congregations the world over, albeit with some modifications and variations.

The eighty versions underlying this paper certainly do not exhaust the existing vast diversity, offering future researchers an opportunity and a challenge. They do, however, suggest the phenomenon of unity through diversity.

The closing hymn for the Day of Atonement prayer book, God of Might, God of Awe, created by Moses Ibn Ezra, is commonly performed in all the congregations of Spanish exiles, throughout their dispersions across four continents. Through them, Jewish congregations in the East who weren't originally Spanish exiles learned the poem and incorporated it into their songbooks. The poem's lyrics were scribed into the liturgical books and thus preserved in writing. The melody was passed on by ear from generation to generation, notated for the first time only in the 19th century. All the transcribed and recorded versions mentioned here attest to a basic melody to which the hymn was sung. As the melody wandered away from its origin, it attained different variants and the characteristic performance formats of the various communities, as well as personal modifications by the various cantors performing it; these were local and personal contributions based on the same common ground—that basic melody.



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