

Three Early Modern Hebrew Scholars on the Mysteries of Song. Don Harrán.
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As clearly pointed out in the introduction, this volume consists of the study of the major writings on Hebrew music and practice produced in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Italy, an edition of the Hebrew texts, and an annotated English translation. First, a sermon titled *Higgayon be-kinnor* (Contemplation on the lyre) by the Mantuan rabbi, philosopher, and poet Judah Moscato (ca. 1530–93), concerning the spiritual values of music and the study of its theoretical features as a tool of spiritual growth; second, a *she'elah* (a legal question) and the *teshuvah* (legal opinion) that Leon Modena (1571–1648)—intellectual, polymath, and spiritual leader of the Jewish Natione Italiana of the Venetian ghetto—provided around the year 1622/23 about the legitimacy of music; and, finally, the selected portions from a long treatise (*Sefer shiltei ha-gibborim* [The book of the shields of heroes]) by the Mantuan Jewish physician

Abraham ben David Portaleone (1542–1612). These three texts represent the highest point in a specific Hebrew tradition of thought on music, the expression of three very different approaches toward music (spiritual, legal, and scientific), and three texts derived directly from the Mantuan Jewish milieu, one of the most culturally vivid and advanced under Gonzaga rule.

In 1623 the musician and composer Salomon Rossi, a member of the Gonzaga court, published *Ha shirim asher li-Shelomo* (Songs by Solomon), a collection of madrigals and instrumental compositions set on the texts of some Hebrew prayers (especially psalms) and thought to be performed in the synagogue liturgy. Rossi's works—polyphonic and with instrumental intermezzi—represented not only a major departure from the traditional Jewish music repertoire—most of which was monodic and exclusively vocal—but also a major challenge to the rabbinical tradition that had banned the use of musical instruments during the Sabbath and other major festivals and that considered polyphony wholly incompatible with the fulfillment of religious duties, which could be done solely and exclusively by the individual's recitation and intelligible pronunciation of every single segment of the synagogue lectionary. Long before the publication of Rossi's works, around the year 1605, Leon Modena, actively involved in and a promoter of a number of initiatives aimed at introducing forms of learned music in the synagogue service, had been heavily criticized by some of his co-religionists (especially Moises Coimbram) who considered the introduction of music into the synagogue service a major violation of the law—a step toward assimilation. Modena provided Rossi's edition of the Songs not only with a challenging *she'elah* and an additional official document (not included in this volume) signed by the members of the Venetian *beit-din* (rabbinical court) acknowledging Rossi's authorship and copyright (perhaps the first document of this kind in Western music history), but also with the solution to the main technical obstacle of how to combine together in the same page the Hebrew text and the music notation, moving contrariwise, the first from right to left, the second from left to right: dividing the Hebrew words into syllables and putting each one of them in connection with the music notes. While not explicitly mentioned in the introductory section to Rossi's score, and even though the legitimacy of music is not the core of their analyses, Moscato's and Portaleone's represent an essential cultural and ideological response to Rossi's and Modena's work, being a first systematic approach toward music as a concept and a discipline, a coherent attempt to make music (*practica* and *speculativa*) part of the broader cultural Hebrew spectrum and to provide Jewish readers with a seat of technical terms, many of which are transliterations from Latin or the Italian vernacular.

The volume on the whole is extremely accurate, the English translation is generally very faithful to the Hebrew text, and there is a rich set of footnotes, mostly of a philological-linguistic nature and concerning the sources used by the authors. The book is an essential tool for all those who want to study in detail one of the crucial chapters in the history of Jewish music. Don Harrán passed away on 15 June 2015. May his soul be bound in the bond of life.

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