

Prof. Amnon Shiloah (1928–2014)

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Amnon Shiloah passed away in Jerusalem on 12 July 2014. He was a professor of Musicology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a renowned scholar of Arabic and Jewish music and music theory. He authored major works such as *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings*, *Music Subjects in the Zohar* (published by the JMRC), *Jewish Musical Traditions*, *The Dimension of Music in Islamic and Jewish Culture*, *Music in the World of Islam: A Socio-cultural Study*, and many other important books and articles. He will be greatly missed by his many students and colleagues around the world.

Born in Lanus, Argentina in 1928 to a family of Jewish immigrants from Syria, Shiloah returned with his family to Syria in 1931. In 1942, as a teenager, he undertook the dangerous journey of leaving Syria for Mandatory British Palestine/Eretz Israel through the Golan Heights. He joined the Meir Shfeya boarding school of Aliyat Hano'ar in northern Israel, where he began his musical studies. In 1947, he enrolled at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he studied Hebrew and Arabic Literature as well as Bible, graduating in 1951. He continued his music studies at the Jerusalem Music Academy, majoring in flute (1951–53). After graduating, he joined the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra (then the Kol Israel Orchestra) in 1953–55 and 1958–60. At the same time, he began his career as a radio broadcaster for Kol Israel, and as a music critic for the journal *Masa*.

In 1955, Shiloah moved to Paris to specialize in the study of flute at the Conservatoire, while embarking on his studies in Musicology at the same institution (1955–58). In 1960, he was awarded a scholarship from the French government toward a PhD in Musicology and Oriental Studies at the Sorbonne, from where he graduated in 1963. His thesis on the medieval treatise *Kamāl adab al-ghinā'* by al-Ḥasan al-Kātib was published in 1972 (*La perfection des connaissances musicales* [Paris: Gueutner, 1972]). Following his return to Israel, he became director of the Department of Folklore at Kol Israel, a post he filled from 1965 to 1968, marking his definitive move to the study of oral traditions. At this same time, he also joined the newly established Department of Musicology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He was appointed senior lecturer in 1969 and became chairperson of the Department in 1971–74. He became a full professor in 1978, and professor emeritus in 1997.

During his long career at the Hebrew University, he filled several administrative posts, such as head of the Institute of Languages, Literatures & Arts (1980–84) and provost of the Rothberg School for Overseas Students (1985–89). He also served as president of the Israel Musicological Society (2001–2003). At the international level, he also enjoyed a distinguished career, serving as a board member of the International Musicological Society (1977–82) and as a member of the program committee for this institution's international conferences.

Shiloah received many prestigious prizes and distinctions, including the Jerusalem Prize for research achievements in the study of Jewish ethnomusicology (1986); the Prix des Muses for the French translation of his book *Jewish Musical Traditions* (1996); the Grand Prix de l'Académie Charles Cros, for the best French translation of

a book in the field of music for his *Music in the World of Islam* (2003), and an honorary life membership at the European Seminar in Ethnomusicology (1995).

As a teacher, Shiloah contributed to the fields of Jewish ethnomusicology, especially the study of Judeo-Arabic and Sephardic traditions in Iraq, Morocco, and the Balkan Peninsula as well as to the study of Arabic music theory and practice (especially of Bedouin traditions) and Israeli art music. He also was a prolific writer. His *The Theory of Music in Arabic Writings (c. 900–1900)* (Répertoire international des sources musicales, Henle Verlag, Munich, RISM, series B/X, 1979 and series B/Xa, 2003), condensed three decades of unrelenting bibliographical and paleographical research on music treatises in Arabic script (Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, etc.) in libraries thorough Europe, Israel, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Russia, and Uzbekistan. These volumes, an obligatory tool for any student of music under Islam in the past and present, reveal an intellectual universe that is well beyond the modern Western concept of “music theory.” These treatises, duly described in detail, elucidated with copious notes and compared to each other by Shiloah, reveal an encompassing vision of music as an integral component of human knowledge, informing and overlapping with the most diverse disciplines, such as linguistics, history, philosophy, medicine, magic, alchemy, astrology and mathematics. It also traces the pedigree of the musical treatises in Arabic characters, comparing them with pre-Islamic and especially classical Greek and Latin sources on music. An interpretative synthesis of the findings in Arabic music theory manuscripts combined with contemporary sources from the Arab world can be found in another of Shiloah’s major publications, *Music in the World of Islam: A Socio-cultural Study* (London, 1995; which appeared also in French, Hebrew, and Arabic). For all these contributions, he has been recognized internationally as a leading authority on Arabic music. The reception of Shiloah’s work in the Arab world was hampered at times by political animosity. Yet, his work is cited frequently in Arabic sources, and has been reviewed with respect by many Arab scholars.

His scholarship on Jewish music was summarized in his *Jewish Musical Traditions* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1992), which is an expanded English version of a Hebrew course of the same name (*Hamoreshet hamusikalit shel kehillot yisrael*) that Shiloah directed and co-authored with several other scholars, and which was published by the Open University of Israel (Tel Aviv: Open University, four fascicles, 1985–87). Shiloah’s approach to Jewish music combined his expertise on historical sources from the Arabic-speaking Jewish realm regarding the affective powers of music and its uses in ritual contexts with his exclusive ethnographic experience among the contemporary Jews of the Islamic lands who immigrated to Israel. Of particular importance is his work with the small enclave of Greek-speaking Jews that survived the Holocaust.

Besides the RISM volumes and his books, Shiloah published many articles on diverse aspects of Arabic and Jewish music in the past and present in the most prestigious journals, such as *JAMS*, *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, *Ethnomusicology*, *Acta Musicologica*, *Pe’amim*, and *Yuval*, as well as in the major music encyclopedias, such as *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (1971, and especially the new 2007 edition to which Shiloah contributed over seventy new entries), *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1974), *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1976, 1994), as well as *The New Oxford History of Music* (2001).

Shiloah’s list of publications includes over two hundred and fifty items in five languages (Arabic, English, French, Hebrew, and Russian), including twenty books, edited works, recordings, and articles—the result of fifty years of intensive work. An

exhaustive list of his publications can be found in his *festschrift*, *Ben 'ever le-'arev*, Vol. 4, ed. Joseph Tobi (Haifa University Press, 2008).