"Who Are These Miserable Jews?": Text, Translation, and Analysis of a Transnational Cantorial Polemic in Eighteenth-Century London

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Current scholarship concerning Ashkenazic music in early modern England is quite limited. While recent studies have given attention to the late eighteenth-century musical figures of Myer Leon and John Braham, who transitioned from synagogue singing to the English stage, very little has been written concerning the first half-century of musical life among London's Ashkenazim. This includes the advent of the synagogue ensemble in which Braham and Leoni began—the *meshorerim*.[1] Developed in East-Central Europe in the mid-seventeenth century and spreading westward, the Ashkenazic meshorerim practice involved several paid singers alternating vocal lines with the cantor, often featuring extended melismas and instrumentally-inspired vocal textures.[2] Yet the transmission of this known, transnational cantorial practice to England's Ashkenazic community is barely accounted for in contemporary scholarship.

What little is known demonstrates that this ensemble was volatile and controversial. At the time of the rededication of the Ashkenazi Great Synagogue in 1722, one cantor and two meshorerim were to be found on the synagogue payroll: Cantor Jehiel Michael ben R. Moses Joseph, Michael the Bass-Singer, and Samuel Meshorer of Schwersee, together comprising the traditional cantor–bass–*zinger* trio known from the Continent.[3] The Ashkenazic community's new

[1] See especially Uri Erman, "The Operatic Voice of Leoni the Jew: Between the Synagogue and the Theater in Late Georgian Britain," *Journal of British Studies* 56 (2017): 295–321.

[2] For more on the meshorerim, see Matthew Austerklein, "Rossi in Moravia: The Rise of Cantorial Professionalism in Czech Lands and Poland-Lithuania in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of Synagogue Music* 48, no. 1 (2023): 26–53, and Daniel S. Katz, "A Prolegomenon to the Study of the Performance Practice of Synagogue Music Involving M'shor'rim," *Journal of Synagogue Music* 24, no. 2 (1995): 35–79.

[3] See Cecil Roth, *The Great Synagogue of London, 1690–1940* (London: E. Goldston, 1950), 81–82. The typical meshorerim comprised a trio which included a bass and a second vocalist

takkanot (legal decrees) of that year attempted to abolish the ensemble as "an abuse of the patience of the community."[4] Yet the prohibition did not last for long; Michael the bass returned to the payroll shortly after the promulgation of the new ordinances, and the other *meshorer* stayed on as well, eventually enjoying promotion to the role of cantor.[5]

What accounts for this introduction and short-lived cancellation of the Ashkenazic meshorerim? While we lack many sources on the cantorate in London, a recently rediscovered polemic against London's Ashkenazic cantors situates this event in the broader context of Continental discourse surrounding Ashkenazic cantorial practice. The manuscript, *Ketav ḥakham 'aḥat 'asher kara tagar 'al ḥazzanei ha-'ashkenazim* (Essay of One Wise Person who Challenged the Ashkenazic Cantors; Jewish Theological Seminary MS 3582, fol. 12r–v), sheds light on the era of Ashkenazic musical innovation and its perception in the Sephardic community. This parody, probably transcribed by a Sephardic Jew in London after an oral performance of the work, depicts not only the transfer of the meshorerim practice to England in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, but the continuation of Continental Sephardic discourse about the embarrassing and impious nature of the emerging Ashkenazic soundscape, particularly in view of the English society in which London's Jews were trying to appear respectable.

Hamburg and the Winds of Cantorial Change

London's Jewish community was similar to those of Amsterdam and Hamburg, its mother communities along the North Sea. Jews moved to these port cities in the seventeenth century and were thus required to form a religious community *ex nihilo*, without reference to an established local custom.[6] The first Jewish settlements in these port cities, including London, were established by the Portuguese Sephardim, who succeeded in leveraging mercantile opportunities to win communal privileges and create communal stability. London's Sephardim were formally readmitted in 1655 through the efforts of the prominent Amsterdam rabbi Menasseh ben Israel and his successful intervention with England's Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell. The Ashkenazic Jews were latecomers to London by a generation, but like their Sephardic neighbors, also drew their community leadership from established port Jewish communities in Amsterdam and Hamburg. Their liturgical practices also

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with a higher range, called "meshorer" (Yid. *zinger*) or "tenor." On the Continent, this role would sometimes be taken by a high-voiced youth.

[4] Ibid., 82.

[5] Ibid.

[6] For more on the concept of "port Jews," see *Port Jews: Jewish Communities in Cosmopolitan Maritime Trading Centers, 1550–1950*, ed. David Cesarini (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2002).

followed those of the Hamburg community. Yet most of these Ashkenazic immigrants, like those living in Hamburg, were originally from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, largely poor and in search of both economic opportunities outside the ghetto and the overall security enjoyed by Jews in London. The experience of Ashkenazic Jews in London thus largely mirrored those of its fellow port cities of Amsterdam and Hamburg, where controversies around the transformation of cantorial music were already ablaze.

At the time of the founding of London's Great Synagogue in 1690, the soundscape of the Ashkenazic community of Hamburg-Altona was undergoing a dramatic transformation. This was partially due to demographic changes brought about by an increase in Polish-Jewish immigrants (including many cantors) following the Chmielnicki massacres (1648–49) and Swedo-Muscovite wars (1654–67).[7] With the influx of these Polish migrants came the norms of melismatic synagogue singing that had developed during the Golden Age of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.[8] Furthermore, increases in both secularization and the involvement of Jews in Hamburg's public musical culture (including attendance at its opera house) prompted renewed rabbinic concerns that engagement with the wider musical culture might contribute to religious laxity and moral decay. Cantorial leadership in Hamburg thus operated at the nexus of changing cultural norms among Ashkenazic Jews and challenges to rabbinic authority, partially instigated by musical exchanges with non-Jewish Hamburg society.

The dynamics of these changes were documented by Hamburg's Polish-born scribe and cantorial elder statesman, Yehuda Leib Zelichower. After a long career serving as a cantor in the German communities of Minden, Abterode, and Hamburg-Altona, Zelichower addressed the ills of the new cantorial generation in his *Sefer Shirei Yehuda* (Book of the Songs of Judah, 1697). While the book centers around the two pious Hebrew songs he composed, its true purpose is a theological reflection on the causes of the failed Sabbatean heresy, which the author participated in and witnessed in his youth.[9]

In the book's Hebrew commentary, Zelichower enumerates the impieties and musical excesses of his cantorial contemporaries and identifies them as

[7] The first evidence of Polish Jews in Hamburg-Altona dates to 1656, following the Swedo-Muscovite war (also known as the Northern War of 1655) when Vilnius's Jews fled westward. See Glueckel of Hameln (1646–1724), *Glikl, Memoires 1691–1719*, ed. and trans. Chava Turniansky (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 2006), 76, n. 96.
[8] Austerklein, "Rossi in Moravia," 43–53.
[9] Elisheva Carlebach, "Two Amens that Delayed the Redemption: Jewish Messianism and Popular Spirituality in the Post-Sabbatian Century," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, 82, nos. 3–4 (1992): 241–61.

among the primary causes for the continued exile of the Jewish people.[10] These excesses included the singing of Gentile songs at festive meals, the appropriation of theater and dance melodies, and paying Gentile beggars for music lessons.[11] Such practices reveal an Ashkenazic community openly borrowing from the music of Hamburg society, particularly the public opera house and the tavern.[12] Local cantors were unafraid to bring these popular melodies into both Jewish festive meals (*se'udot*) on the Sabbath and holidays and into the synagogue, scandalizing rabbinic authorities and traditionalists like Zelichower. For them, the cantor was a stand-in for the high priest of the ancient Temple, and his conduct should reflect that status; such profanations of the precise, mystical execution of prayer were among the great sins continuing the prolonged suffering of the Jewish people. Yet the contemporaneous crisis of rabbinic authority also meant that rabbis were often unable to prevent musical yet potentially impious cantorial candidates from being frequently elected to the office of ḥazzan.[13]

Jews of London's nascent Ashkenazic community, particularly its Hamburg-born merchant elites like Great Synagogue founder Benjamin Levy, would have been well-versed in these transformations of the cantorate. Yet the Polish cantorial culture that was spreading across continental Europe also brought with it another musical innovation from the East—the meshorerim—which scandalized both the Ashkenazic rabbinic elites and their Sephardic neighbors.

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[10] The book is ostensibly focused on two pious songs composed by Zelichower recalling the destruction of the Temple. Yet the majority of the *Shirei Yehudah* comprises two lengthy moralistic commentaries—one in Yiddish and one in Hebrew. The shorter Yiddish commentary offers general religious guidance for the layman, while the longer Hebrew section offers a distinct and detailed discourse on the lamentable state of piety and prayer, with a focus on the foibles of the author's fellow cantors.

[11] Cf. Yehudah Leib Zelichower, *Shirei yehuda*, 26b. Carolers going door to door singing for money was a normal occupation for the poor, students, and those otherwise in search of supplemental income in early modern Germany. For a detailed description of early modern caroling by the poor in Baroque Germany, see Tanya Kevorkian, *Music and Urban Life in Baroque Germany* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2022), 165–80.

[12] The role of the tavern in musical exchange between Ashkenazic Jews and non-Jews in Hamburg and beyond has not yet been addressed adequately in scholarship. For Ashkenazic Jews in Hamburg, the tavern was a site of business transactions, weddings, and festive meals, all of which involved cantors. An initial analysis of this phenomenon will be covered in my forthcoming dissertation: Matthew Austerklein, "The First Golden Age: The Genesis of the Professional Cantor in East-Central Europe during the Early Modern Period (1500–1750)" (University of Halle).

[13] On secularization and the crisis of rabbinic authority in this period, see Shmuel Feiner, *The Origins of Jewish Secularization in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, trans. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 29–47.

Figure 1 Etching (1700) by Dutch artist Pieter van den Berge of Cantor Yeḥiel Mikhel ben Nathan of Lublin, a controversial figure who served in the Great Synagogue of Amsterdam and introduced meshorerim to the service. (University of Amsterdam, Ros. B 4-12)

Cantorial Controversy in Amsterdam

Zelichower's *Shirei Yehudah* was published with the approbation of Amsterdam's Ashkenazi rabbi, Rabbi Moshe Yehuda ben Kalonymus Cohen (d. 1706). Rabbi Cohen may have been particularly moved to approve of this work of cantorial religious exhortation because of winds of cantorial controversy blowing in his own city. It was not even a decade later that his

community became embroiled in a scandal involving two rival cantorial factions.

The cause of this issue was the appointment in 1700 of a new cantor at Amsterdam's Great Synagogue—the "Great Singer," Cantor Yeḥiel Michel ben R. Natan of Russia, formerly the cantor of Lublin (see Fig. 1). Scholars point to the source of this conflict as the Polish cantor's introduction of the meshorerim to the synagogue service. But it also appears that this conflict may have been rooted in a struggle between German and Polish Jews. The rival faction supported the incumbent cantor, whose Bavarian cantorial family had served in the Great Synagogue since its dedication in 1671.[14] A terrible climax was reached in the fall of 1709, as reported by Rabbi Jacob Emden in his autobiographical *Megillat Sefer*:

> At that time the community was torn by fierce dissension caused by the notorious incident of the two hazzanim Reb "L–" & Reb "Y–." Many lives had been ruined and much money lost over this quarrel of several years. . . . Indeed the situation had reached such an impasse that on Shabbat Shuvah (1709) . . . the two factions disputing which of the two aforementioned hazzanim should officiate in the Great Synagogue came to physical blows. They threw and pushed lecterns at one another, and it seems they intended to cause fatal injury to each other. For our many sins this synagogue, a miniature Temple, became a den of terrorists on that particular Shabbat, a time when the rabbi should have been exhorting the congregation to repent. But because of the great trepidation and terror that affected the aforementioned Rav on that particular occasion, he became seriously ill and, returning to his house, he never recovered, for he was struck by a fatal illness.[15]

Though R. Emden was sympathetic to the Polish cantor's supporters, the stress-related death of the rabbi on one of the holiest days of the year was too much for the community to bear. The use of a bass singer was banned, and the Polish interloper departed Amsterdam shortly afterwards.

The tensions that led to airborne lecterns on the High Holidays were not limited to local feuds in the Ashkenazic community of Amsterdam. Scandalized by the form and aesthetics of his Ashkenazic neighbors in that city, an anonymous critic published a scathing broadsheet entitled *Sheloshah tzo'akim*

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[14] The appointment of R. Yeḥiel Michel followed the death of the head Ashkenazic cantor, R. Leib Gazzen, who had served in the synagogue since its dedication in 1671. The second cantor, R. Wolf b. Leib Gazzen, originally of Hamelburg, had officiated as the second cantor, and served alongside his new Polish counterpart throughout the latter's tenure (1700–10). R. Wolf's son, R. Aryeh Leib, was cantor of the second Ashkenazi synagogue from its inception in 1685. With the arrival of R. Yeḥiel Michel, the tensions between the newcomer and the incumbents over leadership reached a fever pitch. For more on the generations of Amsterdam's early cantors, see D. M. Sluys, *De oudste Synagogen der Hoogduitsch-Joodsche Gemeente te Amsterdam (1635–1671)* (Amsterdam: Joachimsthal's Stoomdrukkerij, 1921), and Aron Freimann, *Lebensbilder berühmter Kantoren*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Rochelsohn, 1927), 92–95.

[15] Adapted from Jacob Emden, *Megilat Sefer: The Autobiography of Rabbi Jacob Emden (1697–1776)*, trans. Sidney Leperer (Baltimore, MD: Shaftek Enterprises LLC, 2016), 75–76.

ve-'einan na'anin (Three Cry Out and None are Answered), inveighing against Polish and German cantors.[16] The broadsheet criticizes these cantors for their ignorance, impiety, wild gestures, musical indulgences, and frivolous conduct with their cantorial assistants. It contrasts these behaviors with the measured and pleasant prayer leadership of the rest of the Jewish world, including cantors in North Africa, Turkey, Italy, Persia, India, and the Sephardic diaspora.

One of the central ideas at stake in this critique is that of "music" itself. The vulgarities of Ashkenazi cantors are contrasted in *Sheloshah tzo'akim* with the image of Temple Levites, who sang *'al pi ha-musikah*—"according to music." This term was in use by both Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews to refer to several concepts, including the specific use of Western musical theory and practice, as well as the more general principle of regular, measured singing.[17] Both of these would have had a particular significance in the Sephardic community. Portuguese Jews had worked to reconstruct their musical tradition over the previous century through a combination of recruitment of Mediterranean cantors from the Sephardic diaspora and the adaptation of Baroque music from the middle- and upper-class Christian cultures with which they did business. The regular, measured, and self-consciously acculturated style of the Portuguese Jews stood in contrast to the apparently folk-like, melismatic style of an Ashkenazic service purportedly lacking in order, decorum, and piety.

Though the author of *Sheloshah tzo'akim* omitted his name, it is likely that he was a Portuguese Jew, looking with horror upon the wanton cantorial culture of his nearby Ashkenazic brethren in Amsterdam. This possibility is reinforced by the similarity between the anonymous author's critique and that of another Sephardic critique of Ashkenazi cantors that was copied a decade later by an eminent Portuguese Jew in London.

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[16] Three copies of this broadsheet are known: one in the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana (Ros. Ebl. D-7), one at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and a manuscript version in private hands. The copy in the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana shows a watermark similar to a Dutch paper from Utrecht ca. 1695. The broadsheet was also reprinted and expanded in early eighteenth-century Prague as *Toḥekha le-ḥazzanim*, held in the Bodleian Library in Oxford (Opp. 8º 1073). This latter version is the most likely candidate as the source against which Cantor Yoel Sirkis of Leipa penned his cantorial apologetic pamphlet, *Reiaḥ niḥoaḥ* (Fürth: Seligmann Reiss, 1724). Another Hebrew manuscript, *Sefer maqor Barukh Katan* (Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Mich 500, Neu. 2142) dates to 1750 and includes the original *Sheloshah tzoakim* transcribed alongside an apologetic commentary by Cantor Barukh b. Elkana Naumburg. These facts alone contradict Haberman's assertion that *Sheloshah tzoakim* dates to the early nineteenth century. See Abraham Meir Haberman, "Proclamation against Amsterdam's Cantors from the Beginning of the 19th Century" [Heb], *Kibutzei yachad: ma'amarim u-reshimot l'ḥeker sifrut Yisrael ve-tarbuto* (Jerusalem, 1990), 279–83.

[17] The Polish-born cantor Yoel Sirkis, who served in a small community in northern Bohemia, identified *musiqah* with North African and Turkish Jewish traditions rather than Ashkenazi ones. The term "musiqah" was used by Jews to describe learned music, often in the context of Greek philosophy as inherited through medieval Arabic thought, and occurs in Ottoman treatises on music. See more on this term in Austerklein, "Rossi in Moravia," 39–43.

Ashkenazim in the Sephardic Gaze

Before the founding of a dedicated Ashkenazic prayer space at Duke's Place, London's Ashkenazic Jews joined their Portuguese brethren at their small synagogue in Creechurch Lane. The Sephardic Jews looked down upon these unwashed masses of immigrant *tudescos* ("Germans"), excepting the most devoted members of their community, which included the Polish-born Samuel Levy (their sexton) and the wealthy Hamburg merchants Benjamin and Michael Levy, the former of whom served as their *shoḥet*. The Sephardic community ordinances of 1678 nevertheless forbade Ashkenazim from even being called to the Torah or saying Kaddish, though this was ultimately rescinded.[18] As in their sister community in Amsterdam, Portuguese Jewish leaders attempted to resettle the waves of new Ashkenazic immigrants outside of their community, yet to no avail. Despite their milquetoast tolerance for the Ashkenazim, the Sephardim saw these indigent and largely poor co-religionists as a threat to their image as a "responsible middle-class group of harmless patriots."[19]

The Ashkenazim opened a separate prayer room in 1690 in the upper floor of a house in Duke's Place (then known as Broad Court), which soon came to be called the "Great Synagogue"—the same name as that given to the main Ashkenazic synagogue in Amsterdam. The advent of a separate Ashkenazic synagogue came with little objection from the Portuguese Sephardim, except when members of their own community attempted to join the Ashkenazic upstarts. The Sephardim built their own new synagogue at Bevis Marks in 1701; they dubbed it the *Esnoga*, a name adapted from Amsterdam's grand Sephardic synagogue, and the building was modeled after that synagogue as well. That both London synagogues were named after their parallel institutions in Amsterdam demonstrates the relationship between the two port cities and their Jews, and it also signals similar intra-religious tensions.

The cantorial controversies of Amsterdam and Hamburg spilled over into the London Jewish community in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, when the Ashkenazic cantorial trio of cantor–bass–*zinger* made their debut and could be heard by any curious Portuguese Jew or Englishman who entered the Great Synagogue on Shabbat.[20] The Continental Sephardic critique of Ashkenazic musical practices was likewise transferred to London, as seen in a two-page manuscript copied by Solomon da Costa Attias (1690–1769), a

[18] Derek Taylor, *British Chief Rabbis* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2007), 52–54.
[19] Ibid., 53.
[20] A new Ashkenazic worship space, called the Hambro synagogue, was formed in 1706 following a schism in the community. See Yosef Prager, "The Early Years of London's Ashkenazi Community," *Yerushaseinu* 5, 5771 (2011): 23–26.

successful broker from a prominent Portuguese Jewish family who had emigrated to London from Amsterdam as a young man. Attias came of age during the cantor wars of the Amsterdam Ashkenazim and the polemics of *Sheloshah tzo'akim.*

Attias records, in his personal book of manuscripts and religious texts, a two-page polemic called *Ketav ḥakham 'aḥat 'asher kara tagar 'al ḥazzanei ha-'ashkenazim* (Jewish Theological Seminary MS 3582), which comprises the open letter of a Sephardic sage against Ashkenazic cantors (see Appendix). An earlier version of the same critique can be found in the Ets Ḥaim Library in Amsterdam (EH 47 E 49, ppp. 37–40). The earlier Ets Ḥaim manuscript is copied in a single hand among several poetic parodies for the holiday of Purim; it was likely written down by Solomon's relative, Abraham da Costa Abendana, in Amsterdam at the beginning of the eighteenth century.[21] Abendana was a cantor himself and was an unsuccessful candidate in the 1708 cantorial competition for the office of ḥazzan in the Esnoga in Amsterdam.[22] His early version of the same critique is instead titled *Bat qol qoret la-ḥag al ḥazzanei ha-'ashkenazim (*"A divine voice making mockery of the Ashkenazi cantors").[23] However, Attias's version of *Bat qol* is is not simply a copy of Abendana's. His contains alternate spellings, parenthetical alternate wordings, and a number of editorial additions to the earlier version. The sheer volume of emendations makes *Bat qol* highly unlikely as written material from which Attias copied the manuscript. The variants instead belie an oral transmission of the original parody which Attias copied down from memory, including uncertainly-remembered words in parentheses and adding his own editorial flourish to the humorous text.

The theme, language, and style of this intracultural criticism in both versions directly echo the concerns of the Amsterdam broadsheet *Sheloshah tzo'akim*; both focus on the impious vocal showmanship of cantors and their assistants, particularly the bass, who distort the meanings of the prayers. The author similarly praises the cantors of the Ottoman Empire (*malkhut Yishma'el*) and the Sephardim, contrasting their "pleasant" songs with the debauched prayer services of the Ashkenazim.

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[21] See "EH 47 E 49," https://etshaimmanuscripts.nl/items/eh-47-e-49/ (accessed June 28, 2024).
[22] Cf. David Franco Mendes, *A Portuguese Chronicle of the History of the Sephardim in Amsterdam up to 1772* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), 103. I am indebted to Paul Feller-Simmons for referring me to this record of Abendana's cantorial pursuits. For more on the Sephardic cantorial culture of Amsterdam, see his article in this issue, "Sounding the *Nação*: Eighteenth-Century Italianate Music, Aural Conversion, and Acoustic Community Formation at the Amsterdam Sephardic Synagogue."
[23] For the conflation of "*Lahag*" with mockery, see the Babylonian Talmud Tractate Eruvin 21b.

Even clearer is the concern of the author of *Ketav ḥakham* that the Ashkenazic cantors were opening the Jews to ridicule by their non-Jewish neighbors:

> And both *Satan* and the nations judge Israel by them,
> And laugh and mock and criticize and respond and say:
> "Who are these miserable Jews?
> Their cantors in their synagogues scream like the cry of the wounded!"

This quotation encapsulates the intracultural threat of early modern Ashkenazic cantorial practice. The Portuguese Jewish community had done its best in the two generations following resettlement in England to become respectable, developing a culture becoming of their significant (if provisional) place in the merchant class of English society. The emphasis on *Yehudim* ("Jews") in the polemic stresses this factor most of all—that the collective image of the "Jews" has been jeopardized by the scandalous aesthetics and impieties of the Ashkenazic synagogue.

The source below thus reveals a Sephardic world embarrassed by their Ashkenazic brethren, from their original conflict centers of Amsterdam and Hamburg to their new and emerging sister communities in London. The well-heeled Attias has heard a memorable version of this cutting parody in London, during the precise era in which the loud, unruly meshorerim begin to shout out of the Duke's Place synagogue down the road from his own community in Bevis Marks. His remembered and expanded version of this humorous letter gives new insight into the transfer of controversial, transnational Ashkenazic cantorial practices from the Continent to London's Jewish quarter in the early eighteenth century, opening a new window into the genesis of Anglo-Jewish musical traditions. And it marks a watershed moment in the history of the "music libel against the Jews" in which the libel, for perhaps the first time, is promulgated by one group of Jews against another.[24]

The manuscript of *Ketav ḥakham* (1717) has been reproduced below, with differences from the earlier version, *Bat qol* (ca. 1703), indicated in the footnotes. I owe thanks to the editor, Rebecca Cypess, for suggestions that improved this translation immensely.

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[24] See Ruth HaCohen, *The Music Libel against the Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

APPENDIX

SOLOMON DA COSTA ATTIAS, ESSAY OF ONE WISE PERSON WHO CHALLENGED THE ASHKENAZIC CANTORS (1717)

Source: Jewish Theological Seminary, MS 3582 (Adler MS 2248), fol. 12r–v.

נכתב על יד הבחור שלמה בלא"א יצחק דה קושטא עטיאש בלונדרש היום יום רביעי עשרה ימים לחדש אייר בשנת התע"ז לפ"ק

Colophon [1a]: *Written by the young man Shlomo, son of my father, Isaac da Costa Attias, in London, today, Wednesday on the tenth of the month of Iyyar, the year 5477* [April 21, 1717].

The Text of the Essay of One Wise Person who Challenged the Ashkenazic Cantors	**העתק כתב חכם א׳ שקרא תגר על חזני האשכנזים:**
In the house of Israel I have seen an outrage:[25]	בבית ישראל ראיתי שעוריה
the performance of a service which was strange and foreign,	עבודת עבודה שהיה זרה ונכריה
desolate and ruined,[26]	שמה ושאיה
stumbling in judgment.[27]	פקו פלילי[ו]ה[28]
Such are the incensed cantors who perform the service of the Lord, time and again.[29]	המה החזנים המעשנים עבודת ה׳ עשרת מונים[30]
New ones, latecomers, who revered not our early ancestors.[31]	חדשים מקרוב באו לא שערום אבותינו הקדמונים
They make melodies	מנגנים ניגונים
that are unfit for the service of the Lord,	אשר לעבודת ה׳ אינם הגונים

[25] Hosea 6:10.
[26] Is. 24:12.
[27] Is. 28:7.
[28] EH 47 E 49 has the correct spelling פלילה.
[29] Lit. "ten times."
[30] JTS MS 3582 has המשנים, yielding "cantors who *alter* the service of the LORD."
[31] Deut. 32:17.

treated by them as bawdy songs.[32]	להם נחשבים כשיר עגבים[33]
And both *Satan* and the nations judge Israel by them,	והשטן והאומות בהם לישראל מונים
And laugh and mock and criticize and respond and say:	ומצחקים ומלעגים ומלעיזים ואומרים ועונים[34]
“Who are these miserable Jews?	מה אלה היהודים האומללים
Their cantors in their synagogues scream like the cry of the wounded!”	חזניהם בבית תפלתם זועקים צעקת חללים
The cantor holds his cheeks	החזן אוחז בלחיים
with his two hands,	בשתי ידים
and screams unto the heavens.[35]	וצועק עד לשמים
And they place next to him a fitting helper,[36]	ומעמיד בצדו עזר כנגדו[37]
the bass singer	משורר ב"ס
moaning like an ox with a huge, dark voice,	הומה כשור בקול עב וגס
approaching unto the heights, like the clamor of battle.[38]	זה פונה מעלה מעלת רעש סואן[39]
And God will look down upon this in straitened abode**.**	וזה אל ארץ יביט צר ומעון
And they conceived of revelry, debauchery, and madness;	והגו צחוק והוללות ושיגעון[40]
the mind cannot tolerate	ואין הדעת סובלת

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[32] Ezek. 33:32

[33] EH 47 E 49 has חגבים, “like the song of *grasshoppers*.”

[34] EH 47 E 49 has only ומצחקים, “and laugh.”

35 This is a practice which appears to have emerged in Eastern Europe and is observable among Polish singers. It became a distinct feature of cantorial singing as Polish Jews traveled westward, and is possibly due to a combination of acculturation in musical practice and the building of many seventeenth-century Polish synagogues with stonemasonry and Italian church architecture, thus possibly requiring vocal manipulations found in analogous Christian houses of worship. See Austerklein, “Rossi in Moravia,” 50–52.

36 Cf. Gen. 2:18.

37 EH 47 E 49 reads only ומעמיד כנגדו, “and they stand beside him.”

38 Is. 9:4; Translation with Rashi, “the clamor of victory.”

39 EH 47 E 49 is different in this and the previous line, which ends בקול עב – “with a huge voice,” then: זה פונה מעלה מעלה רעש סואן וגם – And this approaches the very heights, [like] the clamor of battle.

40 EH 47 E 49 reads ושגעון [!]והוא צחוק והללות - “and it is revelry, debauchery, and madness.”

such an act of folly.	מה מעשה האולת[41]
And they have desecrated God's name with this,	וגורמים חילול ה׳ בזה[42]
saying that the LORD's altar may be disgraced (defiled) and treated with scorn.[43]	באמרם שלחן ה׳ מנוול (מגואל) ונבזה[44]
[Rather,] this is fitting for the worship of the LORD:	הזאת היא לה׳ עבודת הראויה[45]
To be in fear and trembling,	להיות בפחד ורעדה
with melodious voice	בקול נעימות
and with appropriate song and praise.[46]	בזמירות ושירות שכלם[47] מתאימות
But these Jewish cantors	ואלה החזנים היהודים
bray like rams and he-goats.	שואגים כאילים[48] ועתודים
And it is fitting for us to reflect lest our service becomes worthless.	וראוי לנו להתבונן היות עבודתינו נפסדים[49]
Let us lie down in our shame,	נשכבה בבשתינו
let our disgrace cover us,[50]	ותכסנו כלימתינו
for, on account of our sins,	הלא בעונותינו
does there not remain to us in our exile	לא נשאר לנו בגלותינו
only prayer, which is in place of the [sacrificial] service	רק התפילה שהיא במקום הע[ב]ודה
in the House of the Testimony [i.e., the ancient Temple]?	בבית התעודה
For how shall we raise our heads and lift our faces	ואיך נרים ראש ונשא פנים

41 EH 47 E 49 reads only מעשה האולת, "this act of folly."
[42] EH 47 E 49 reads וגורמים חלילה בזה, "they do something forbidden with this."
[43] Mal. 1:7. Words in parentheses are evidence that Attias could not recall from memory. He therefore writes alternative possibilities where he is not able to record the original definitively.
[44] EH 47 E 49 reads מגואל.
[45] EH 47 E 49 (BKQ) reads הזאת היא התפילה לה׳ הרויאה—"Rather this is the prayer fitting for the LORD."
[46] Cf. Song of Songs 4:2. Although the biblical quotation refers to twins or pairs, our author uses the related meaning of "suitable."
[47] EH 47 E 49 reads שכולם.
[48] EH 47 E 49 reads כאלים.
[49] EH 47 E 49 reads נפקדים, yielding the full line: "it is fitting for us to reflect so that our service is well-protected."
[50] Jer. 3:25

with the prayers of these cantors,	בתפלות אלו החזנים
who chirp and mutter and roar and moan like doves?	המזפזפים ומהגים ושואגים והומים כיונים
They lifted up their voices,	נתנו קולם
and do not know their right from their left.	ואינם יודעים בין ימינם לשמאלם
They are the ones who lengthen the exile and erode the world.[51]	הן הם מאריכי הגלות ומכלי עולם[52]
For each man goes astray—the simpleton, the ignorant, and the fool—	כי כל איש שוגה ופתי ועם הארץ ובור[53]
when one of them has a voice, he is made into a prayer leader	כשיש לו קול נעשה שליח ציבור
and goes down before the ark.	ולפני התיבה[54] יורד
And if he does not fear or tremble,	ואם לא ירא וחרד
and does not understand the LORD’s ways and his Torah,	ואין מבין בדרכי[55] ה׳ ותורתו
coming to approach to do his service,	קרב לגשת לעבוד עבודתו
and offers wasted prayers	ועובד עבודות אבודות[56]
and ruined offerings,	וקרבנות חרבנות[57]
and sacrifices and odors that are unacceptable,	וזבחים וניחוחים לא נכוחים[58]
improper melodies,	וניגונים לא הגונים
and songs	ושירים
like the crackling of thorns,	כקול הסירים
hymns that are hymns of (making) mockery,	ותהלות תהלות (מהתל) והתלות
shouted praises,	ושבחות צווחות

[51] Cf. M. Sota 3:4
[52] EH 47 E 49 reads העולם.
[53] EH 47 E 49 omits ובור—“and the fool.”
[54] EH 47 E 49 reads תבה.
[55] EH 47 E 49 reads מפשטי “the laws [of the LORD].”
[56] EH 47 E 49 reads אסורות, yielding “and offers forbidden service”.
[57] EH 47 E 49 reads חורבנות.
[58] EH 47 E 49 reads נכונים.

reproachful jubilations,	ורננים רינונים
and grievous gifts;	ומנחות אנחות[59]
a gift of remembrance that recalls sins.[60]	מנחת זכרון מזכרת עונות[61]
For he shall hear the sound of song,[62]	כי ישמע קול ענות[63]
diverse and dissembled voices,	קולות שונות ומשונות
deep tones, shriveled sounds (*alt.* scorched and shriveled),[64]	תהומות צנומות (ב"א שדופות צנומות)
[then] thin, O so thin ones,[65]	דקות דק על דק[66]
[all] incorrect in the eyes of the LORD.	בעיני ה׳ לא יצדק
And all of these cantors are our agents, but not of the Merciful One.[67]	וכל כהאי (כי האי) חזנא שלוחי דידן ולא דרחמנא[68]
Does God hear and answer a cry such as this?	הכצעקתו[69] ישמע אל (ויענהו) הנוטע אזן ישמעהו
Will the One who forms the eye look upon one who shows him ([alt.] and will see him)?	היוצר עין יביט למראהו (ויראהו)
He who lifts his face—will He desire it?	הישא פנים הירצהו
Will He listen to his joyful song?	היאזין אל רנתו[70]
Will he respect Abel and his offering?[71]	הישע אל הבל ואל מנחתו[72]
For I praise the Jews	ושבח אני את היהודים

[59] EH 47 E 49 omits "improper melodies" through "grievous gifts."
[60] Num. 5:15
[61] EH 47 E 49 reads מקריבים מנחת זכרון מזכרת עוון—"They bring a gift of remembrance, recalling sin. This more accurately quotes the verse in Numbers (5:15).
[62] Cf. Exod. 32:18. Cantors are here compared with the people who sinned by worshiping the golden calf.
[63] EH 47 E 49 reads בו ישמיע קול גבורות—"Therein one shall hear a mighty sound."
[64] Cf. Gen. 41:23. This evokes a traditional critique of Ashkenazic cantors in which they have dramatic changes in vocal style and dynamics—very loud and then very soft. It is here depicted with imagery from Pharaoh's dream of the seven thin cows in the Joseph story.
[65] Cf. *Yah eili*, the traditional Ashkenazic piyyut for Festivals following the reading from the Prophets.
[66] EH 47 E 49 reads תנומות צנומות סדקות דק על דק—sleepy, shriveled, cracked ones, ever so thin.
[67] Cf. Kiddushin 23b.
[68] EH 47 E 49 reads וכל כי האי חזנא.
[69] EH 47 E 49 reads הבַצעקתו.
[70] EH 47 E 49 reads היאזין אל אל רנתו—Will God listen to his joyful song?
[71] Cf. Gen. 4:5.
[72] EH 47 E 49 reads הישע אל אל הבל ואל מנחתו.

in Muslim lands and the Sephardim;	במלכות ישמעאל וספרדים[73]
they choose cantors	בוחרים חזנים
who are the most important and proper,	היותר חשובים ומהוגנים[74]
men of truth, god-fearing and perfect,	אנשים אמת יראים ושלמים
understanding and wise,[75]	נבונים וחכמים
who serve the LORD with fear and trembling,	עובדים את ה׳ ביראה ואימה[76]
with pleasantness and melody,	בנחת ונעימה
and who sing the words of the prayers	וזומרים (ומזמרים) המלות בתפלות[77]
and are fit to pray in assemblies.	והם ראויים להתפלל במקהלות
Them the LORD chose to perform services	ובהם בחר ה׳ לעבוד עבודות[78]
and to recount wonders,	וימלל (למלל) גבורות
and make praises heard.	וישמיע (ולהשמיע) תהלות
For how shall we leave the sage with whom God has graced us, and who has everything,	כי איך נעזוב את החכם אשר חננו אלוהים וכי יש לו כל
and choose [instead] the fool, an ignoramus with a voice.	ולבחור בסכל ההוא העם הארץ אשר יש לו קול[79]
Now we shall entreat from our God,	עתה נבקשה מאלהינו
that he shall speedily rebuild the Temple,	שיבנה בית המקדש במהרה בימינו
and return the priests to their service, and the Levites to their song and praise, and Israel to their homes.[80]	וישובו הכהנים לעבודתן ולויים לשירם ולזמרם וישראל לנויהם
And they shall remove these cantors from themselves,	ויסתלקו החזנים מאליהם[81]
and distance themselves from this service,	ויורחקו מלעבוד ויבדלון

[73] EH 47 E 49 reads וספרד—“and Spain.”
[74] EH 47 E 49 reads חשובים והגונים—“important and proper.”
[75] From the liturgy introducing liturgical poetry on festivals and high holidays, מסוד חכמים.
[76] EH 47 E 49 reads עובדים את ה׳ באימה—“who serve the LORD with trembling.”
[77] EH 47 E 49 reads ומזמרים המלות והתפילות—“who sing the words and the prayers.”
[78] EH 47 E 49 reads בם בחר ה׳ לעבוד עבודתו—“them the LORD chose to perform his service.”
[79] EH 47 E 49 omits העם הארץ.
[80] From the Festival Musaf service, אלוהינו ואלוהי אבותינו מלך רחמן.
[81] EH 47 E 49 reads מאלהם.

and stop such voices	והקולות יחדלון
and restore the matters as before.[82]	וישובו הדברים כבתחלה
Then will our mouths be filled[83]	ואז ימלא פינו
with joy and praise.[84]	רנה ותהלה[85]
Amen, *selah*.	א"ס: עכ"ל:

[82] EH 47 E 49 reads כבתחילה.
[83] A single ר appears after a short space at the end of this line.
[84] Ps. 126:2.
[85] EH 47 E 49 reads ואז ימלא לשוננו רינה ותהלה/ יראו עינינו ויגל לבנו—"And then our tongues will be filled with praise and joy / our eyes shall see and our heart shall delight."