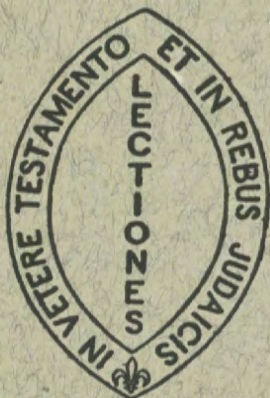


# THE RELATION OF THE HYMN DIES IRAE TO THE SYNAGOGUE PENITENTIALIA

READ AT VIENNA

BY

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# EDITOR'S NOTE.

The wording of the Dies Irae is based on the *Responsory* of the Mass for the Dead:

quid ergo miserrimus, quid dicam vel quid faciam?

The author was probably also 'influenced by earlier hymns and poems in the same subject.'<sup>(1)</sup> There is no evidence that he knew Hebrew. On the other hand the triple rhyme is unusual.

(1) On the whole subject see F. J. E. Raby *A History of Christian Latin Poetry* (Oxford 1927) 445-450.

## The Hymn Dies Irae

Dies Irae, Dies Illa, that stirring Church hymn, designed to rouse the sinners' conscience, is one of the most notable poems of Christianity. The text first became known through the publication of the Roman Missal after the Council of Trent in 1567. The spirit of genuine piety, the deep humility, the dread of the divine judgment, no less than the fervent longing for the divine grace, elements which predominate so strongly and which are a special feature of this poem, have combined to endow it with very great popularity in the Church. It is described in the liturgy as a Sequence.<sup>(1)</sup> The severe and awe-inspiring resonance of its Latinity—though admittedly not classical—and its characteristic rhythm, have contributed to making it famous. Gericke, in his *Church History*, states that the triple rhyme of this poem "strikes the inmost soul with terror as with three resounding strokes of a hammer." It has well been termed the "ornament and jewel of the Roman Church."<sup>(2)</sup> In the year 1840, Pastor F. G. Lisco, of Berlin, collected various German versions of this hymn: of these there are no fewer than forty, as well as numerous fragments. Moreover, there are also very fine adaptations by Ebeling, Schlegel, Fichte and Bunsen.<sup>(3)</sup> There is also a version by a Count von Bernstorff, composed on his last sick bed and under the influence of his imminent death.

As we read these strophes, which are so full of reverence and humility, we find that, with the exception of a few purely christological passages, the thoughts are very familiar to us Jews. In so far as they are derived from the Prophets or the Psalter, we have no cause for surprise that the Church has made them corner-stones in her liturgy. Old friends pass before our gaze. *Dies irae, dies illa* comes from Zephaniah I, 15: *Solvat saeculum in favilla*, from Malachi iii, 19 (E.V., iv, 1).

- (1) Sequences are songs which were introduced into the Church liturgy in the tenth century by the Benedictine Monk, St. Notker Balbulus. They follow an "Alleluia" and are sung to the same tune as the preceding hymn. In the Greek Church certain "Odes" correspond to the "sequences." (M. Neale, *De sequentiis epistola critica*, ap. Herm. Adalb. Daniel, *Thesaurus Hymnologicus*, V. 24).
- (2) "Uno omnium consensu sacrae poëseos summum decus et ecclesiae latinae κειμήλιον est pretiosissimum" (Daniel, *Thes.* 11, 112).
- (3) See Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology*, p. 297, where English versions are mentioned.

## The couplet

*Quantus tremor est futurus,  
Quando iudex est venturus*

is from Ps. xcvi, 13, *כי בא לשפוט הארץ*, (where, incidentally, the feelings of terror apply only to the heathen, while the whole of nature and the pious and righteous are filled with joy, cf. Ps. xcix, 1). We have, however, reason for further investigation when we meet verses of which the content is not to be derived directly from the Bible but which may be paralleled from the Rabbinic literature and from the *piyyuṭim* of the early Middle Ages. At once we seem to see cases of dependence, if not on Jewish texts, at least on Rabbinic tradition. Such an instance is to be noted in the description of the sounding of the trumpets to summon the dead from their graves and appear before the throne of God, or when we hear, moreover, of the "Great Book," in which all the deeds of man are recorded and for which man is to be judged:

*Tuba mirum spargens sonum  
Per sepulchra regionum  
Coget omnes ante thronum.  
Liber scriptus proferetur,  
In quo totum continetur,  
Unde mundus judicetur.* (Strophes 5, 6).

This bears such a striking resemblance to our *וְנִתְּנָה הַתּוֹקָה*, with its *ובשופר גדול יתקע* that we are almost driven to postulate for its author some knowledge of our New Year liturgy, even when due allowance is made for many phrases and sentences taken from the New Testament. These, in their turn, have been influenced by Jewish tradition, preserved in the *Pesikta* and Talmud.<sup>(1)</sup>

(1) Affinities of this kind would naturally not occur to Christian scholars. Dr. P. Jessen (*Darstellung des Weltgerichtes bis auf Michelangelo*, Berlin, 1883) describes the Last Judgment as the keystone of Christian teaching and the most prominent artistic problem of the Middle Ages. But he thinks that all the representations are to be traced back to Mat. xxv, 31f. (the Son of Man on the Judgment seat like a shepherd dividing the sheep from the goats), and Revelation xx, 20f. (the dead appearing before the Judgment seat). In both places, however, the plain religious idea, the simple arresting conception that men—that every man—is answerable to the omniscient Judge, is obscured by other elements, e.g., in Revelation, by descriptions of Satan and Hell. Against what is said to the contrary by Harnack and other Christian theologians, it is necessary to note this: in the Gospel writings we meet, as we do in our own liturgy, with the divine seat of Judgment. But in the Gospels, we meet much else besides, by which the simple religious meaning of the metaphor is complicated and its dramatic effect weakened.

For the sake of convenience, the English version of *וְנִתְּנָה הַתּוֹקָה* (continued p. 4)

There are other passages in which the penitent, submissively and with contrite heart, prays for grace and describes himself as unworthy and laden with guilt:

*Oro supplex et acclinis  
Cor contritum quasi cinis,  
Gere curam mei finis.*

(Str. 17).

and

*Ingemisco tanquam reus,  
Culpâ rubet vultus meus,  
Supplicanti parce, Deus.*

(Str. 12).

is here given, together with Mr. H. M. Adler's note about its composition, from pp. 146 and 242 of the New Year *Mahzor*, in *Service of the Synagogue*, A. Davis and H. M. Adler, London, 1922 (ix ed.):—

We will celebrate the mighty holiness of this day,  
For it is one of awe and terror.

Thereon is Thy dominion exalted and Thy throne is established in mercy,

And Thou sittest thereon in truth.

Verily it is Thou alone who art judge and arbiter,

Who knowest and art witness;

Thou writest down and settest the seal,

Thou recordest and tellest;

Yea, Thou rememberest the things forgotten.

Thou unfoldest the records, and the deeds therein inscribed proclaim themselves;

For lo! the seal of every man's hand is set thereto.

The great trumpet is sounded;

The still small voice is heard;

The angels are dismayed;

Fear and trembling seize hold of them as they proclaim,

Behold the Day of Judgment!

The host of heaven is to be arraigned in judgment.

For in Thine eyes they are not pure;

And all who enter the world dost Thou cause to pass before thee as a flock of sheep.

As a shepherd seeketh out his flock and causeth them to pass beneath his crook,

So dost Thou cause to pass, and number, tell and visit every living soul,

Appointing the measure of every creature's life and decreeing their destiny.

This meditation was composed, or at least reduced to its present form, by R. Meshullam ben Kalonymos, who flourished in Mayence about the year 1000 C.E. There is a well-known legend as to its origin, which is recounted in a MS. attributed to R. Ephraim of Bonn, who lived in the latter part of the twelfth century. It tells of one Rabbi Amnon of Mayence, and relates how the Archbishop of that Court continually urged the Rabbi to change his faith, and how, exasperated at length by his repeated refusals, he ordered his hands and

(continued p. 5)

Such passages are strongly reminiscent of the introductory *Yosher* prayer for the second day of New Year (see Davis and Adler, *Service of the Synagogue*, New Year volume, p. 190).

אֲתִיבִי לְחַנּוּךְ בִּלְבָב קְרוֹעַ וּמְרַמָּה  
וְנִעְתִי בְּאַנְחֹתֵי אֵיף לְעַבְדֵי לִפְנֵיךְ  
כִּי אֵין מַעֲשִׂים לְזִכּוֹת בְּעִינֶיךָ

Nevertheless, all these ideas and metaphors were so widely used in homilies and prayers through the centuries, that it is possible to regard the examples cited as due to coincidence.

A literary connexion, does, however, seem probable, if not certain, between the poetry of the Church and that of the Synagogue, when we discover that many Latin strophes agree, not only in content but also in form, with strophes in the Hebrew *Selihoth*. We observe in each the same three-fold rhyme, almost the same length of line and, in the same literary form, almost the same content: these similarities are surely more than coincidences.

Among the *Penitentialia* of the Synagogue, there are some to which the term *Shelishiyyah* is applied, because they are composed in strophes of three lines. Certain strophes of these *Selihoth* approximate very closely to strophes of *Dies Irae*, so closely, in fact, that in many lines it is hard to resist the impression that one is reading a Latin translation or close paraphrase of the Hebrew or, at least, that the Latin poet had some acquaintance with the Hebrew hymn:—

*Shelishiyyah* for the Morning Service of the Day of Atonement by Zebadyah.<sup>(1)</sup>

אָדוֹן דִּין אִם יִדְקֶדֶק  
בְּחֶקֶר פֶּעַל אִם יִבְדֵּק  
נֶבֶר לִפְנֵיךְ לֹא יִיָּדֶק

feet to be mutilated. The Festival of the New Year was then at hand, and the Rabbi, dying from the effects of his wounds, was at his own request carried into the Synagogue. When the *Hazzan* was about to recite the *Kedushah*, Rabbi Amnon stayed him, saying, "Pause that I may sanctify the most holy Name." He then began the hymn וְנִתְנָה וּשְׁמֵנוּ קִרְאָה בְּשִׁמְךָ. R. Meshullam ben Kalonymos was said to have published this poem as a memorial of the martyr, and it has formed a portion of the New Year's Service among the Jews observing the German and Polish ritual since that period.

(1) This is not in Davis and Adler: it will be found in D. A. de Sola, *The Festival Prayers*, vol. iv., p. 240, London, 1860.

דָּפִי תָמִיד בְּצִבְאָה מְעֻלָּה  
הֵן בְּמִלְאֲכֶיךָ מְשִׁים תְּהִלָּה  
וְאַתָּה כִּי שׁוֹמֵרָה בְּמִים עוֹלָה

תָּשׁוּב עַל הָרָעָה תִּנְחַם  
זֶה דְּרָכְךָ חֲנֻם מִרְחָם  
בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הָרָבִים עָלֵינוּ רַחֵם

*Judex autem cum sedebit,  
Quidquid latet, apparebit,  
Nil inultum remanebit.  
Quid sum miser tum dicturus?  
Quem patronum rogaturus  
Quum vix justus sit securus?  
Rex tremendae majestatis,  
Qui salvandos salvas gratis  
Salva me, fons pietatis. (Str. 6-8).*

There is another *Shelishiyyah* which may here be noted, although the lines are shorter in length than those of *Dies irae*: but the rhyme is three-fold and certain parallels may be observed between the subject-matter of the Hebrew and Latin poems. This *Seliḥah* occurs in the usual *penitentialia* for the Eve of New Year, according to the Ashkenazic rite<sup>(1)</sup> and the acrostic is Solomon: the author is the famous Solomon ibn Gabirol:—

שְׁמִימִתִּי בְּרַב יְנוּנִי  
בְּיוֹם וְשָׁמֶר יְדוּנִי  
מָה אֹמֵר לְאֹדוּנִי

(Cf. *Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?*)

צוּר קִנֵּן בְּעֵדִנִי  
וּמַעֲזוּנִי פִּדְנִי  
וְתוֹרַחְךָ לִמְדִנִי

(1) It will be found on p. 2 of David Asher's edition of the *Selihoth* (with English translation), London, N.D., or on p. 40a of E. L. Blücher's edition (with German translation), Pressburg, 1853: for bibliographical details, see item 655, p. 433 of vol. III of I. Davidson's *Thesaurus of Mediaeval Hebrew Poetry*, New York, 1930.

*Iuste iudex ultionis  
Donum fac remissionis  
Ante diem rationis.*

It should be remembered that this *Seliḥah* was composed for the Eve of the New Year Festival, which is called in Hebrew *Yom had-Din*, Day of Judgment, and that its Latin counterpart prays to the Upright Judge for forgiveness of sins "on the day of judgment."<sup>(1)</sup>

The question is, therefore, which is the original and which is the derivative?

One fact needs no emphasis. The poets of the Synagogue were daily familiarized, both by their prayers and by their close study of Rabbinic literature, in all its branches, with the Scriptures and the biblical conceptions of God as Lord of the whole world, of His strict judgment, of His inexhaustible grace. Therefore, so far as the content of their poems is concerned, they would never need to be dependent on borrowings from other faiths. On the other hand, it is quite certain that for many centuries before the time of Thomas of Celano (the author of *Dies Irae*), pious singers in the Church had similarly worked through the entire cycle of ideas which occur in our poem. The Church poets, in consequence, possessed their own tradition and so far as such ideas are concerned, it is superfluous to envisage any direct loans by them from Hebrew poems. Krumbacher has shewn that the Byzantine poet Romanos, who lived either in the sixth or in the eighth century,<sup>(2)</sup> made use of the same thoughts as the theme of a hymn replete with deep religious emotion. In this Greek hymn, also, the appearance of God in judgment, the trepidation of all creatures, man's dependence on divine grace, are vividly depicted. There, too, we meet the "opened books," by means of which all that is secret is revealed:

καὶ βιβλοὶ διανοίγονται

καὶ τὰ κρυπτὰ δημοσιεύονται<sup>(3)</sup>

The problem, however, is not, on the whole, a problem of the subject-matter or of its elaboration. To establish an historical literary dependence, both the initial *motif* and the form in which a theme is developed are essential. Now agreement, such as we

- (1) In the *Mahzor* of Aragon, this admonitory poem is introduced into the Liturgy for the Day of Atonement (Zunz, *Ritus* 109), but in Germany, where, as we have seen, *Dies irae* was composed, it belongs to the *Penitentialia* of the Eve of New Year.
- (2) Compare M. de Boor *Lebenszeit des Dichters Romanos*, Byz. Zeitschrift ix (1900) 633-640.
- (3) The "ode" is published in the *Proceedings* of the kön. bayerischen Academie der Wissenschaften 1898, philos. und hist. Klasse, Band 11, p. 169. It contains strophes similar to many of the choruses of Aeschylus. The verses are not rhymed.

have found, between the Latin hymn and the Hebrew *Seliḥoth* is intelligible only if the one poem is inspired directly—and not at second hand—by the other.<sup>(1)</sup>

The following facts may be useful in explaining the affinities.

Mohnicke, in his great work<sup>(2)</sup> has shewn that the author of *Dies Irae* was the Monk Thomas of Celano. Thomas lived circa 1221 in Mainz, where he was the *Custos* of a Monastery. A few decades earlier there lived, also in Mainz, the famous Rabbi Amnon, the author of ונתנה הוקף, that hymn of praise and repentance, rich in mysticism and in legendary lore (see p. 3, note<sup>(2)</sup>). Its subject is the "dreadful day of judgment."

כִּי הוּא נֹרָא וְאִיּוֹם

וְבוֹ תִּנְשָׂא מַלְכוּתְךָ<sup>(3)</sup>

The overwhelming impression produced by this poem cannot have been confined to Jews. For it was the work of a distinguished author and both he and his tragic history must have been well-known to the leaders of the Church in Mainz<sup>(4)</sup> in view of the efforts made for his conversion to Christianity. All this may well have given so learned and pious a man as Thomas the idea of composing a similar hymn, based on the same familiar clichés, for the use of the Church.<sup>(5)</sup> But the form of the three rhyming lines was

- (1) The conformity is a little less easily recognisable in the above examples than in the German adaptations which are sharply distinguished by the force of the rhyme both from the Latin model and from each other. Here are renderings of one verse from two of the best translations for comparison (*Quantus tremor est futurus, quando index est venturus, cuncta stricte discussurus*):  
Prof. Ebeling (composed in 1800). Fichte (composed in 1813).  
Ach, vor jenen Ungewittern Angst ergreift die Creaturen  
Die der Welten Bau erschüttern Wie sie in azurnen Fluren  
Werden alle Frevler zittern. Sehn des nahenden Richters Spuren.
- (2) *Kirchen und Literatur-Historische Studien u. Mittheilungen*, I, 1824.
- (3) Ginsburger (*Révue des Etudes Juives*, XL 241) dates Rabbi Amnon's death in 1200, but it is not known whence he gets his information. All that is certain is that Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn, from whom Rabbi Isaak 'Or Zarua' cites the legend of Rabbi Amnon's death by martyrdom, was roughly a contemporary of Thomas of Celano. Considering that Kalonymos ben Meshullam (who lived, likewise in Mainz, in the twelfth century) is said, in the legend, to have been responsible for the publication of the hymn which the martyred R. Amnon revealed to him in a dream, the death of R. Amnon must be assigned to an earlier period.
- (4) Rabbi Amnon had friendly relations with high dignitaries of the Church, and it was their attempt to make him waver in his faith which drove him to his death. As he died, he composed the hymn of submission to the Judge of the World.
- (5) The introductory Strophes, which are to be found in one version, are probably later additions.

probably inspired by the Jewish *Penitentialia*. Zunz,<sup>(1)</sup> includes Zebadyah, the author of the *Shelishiyyoth Adon Din*, cited above, and 'Elohim 'en biltekha, among the *Šeliḥah* poets who lived before 1140, that is to say, long before the time of Thomas. But if any doubt be felt about the date of these two *Šeliḥoth*, the greater antiquity of other Hebrew three-lined *penitentialia* is beyond dispute. The point is precisely illustrated by the *Šeliḥah* שוממתי ברכ יגוני cited above. As already stated, the acrostic forms the name *Shelomoh* and the classical style of its composition support its ascription to Solomon ibn Gabirol, as Davidson, (cited p. 8, note 3), recognizes. It would, therefore, belong to the eleventh century. It contains the phrase מה אומר לאדני, on which *Quid sum miser tunc dicturus* would seem clearly to be based. In its origin, this is biblical,<sup>(2)</sup> the use of biblical texts is a favourite device of Gabirol, which he employs with great artistic effect in several of his best poems. In the *Šeliḥah* before us, such a text is attached to each strophe. The following lines may underlie strophe 12 of the Latin:

אמללתי ונאלמתי  
בזכרי אשר אשמתי  
בשתי וגם נבלמתי  
*Ingemisco tanquam reus*  
*Culpâ rubet vultus meus*  
*Supplici parce Deus.*

Both Abraham ibn Ezra (xi century) and Moses ibn Ezra composed three-lined *Tokhahoth*.

There is a still older three-lined *Šeliḥah* by R. Gershom b Judah (אשפוך שיחי, *Minḥah of Yom Kippur*, de Sola, vi, p. 177) which belongs to the beginning of the eleventh century. It would, therefore, be safe to say that Thomas of Celano adopted the form of *Dies iræ* from Hebrew models. These gave him his inspiration and also, in some measure, influenced his train of thought. So much may be regarded as certain, even though many strophes are to be traced back directly to the New Testament or the Sibylline Oracles<sup>(3)</sup>

A. KAMINKA.

(1) *Literaturgeschichte d. Synagoga. Poesie*, Berlin, 1865, p. 257.

(2) It is not an exact citation, but cf. Josh. vii, 8: Gen. xlii, 16.

(3) I would like at this juncture to make the further suggestion that *Neuma* (Notes, in mediaeval ecclesiastical Latin) which has hitherto remained philologically unexplained, should be traced back to the Hebrew נעימה. Compare יתנו נעימות (= זמירות) (Singer, p. 39, line 7) and הקורא בלא נעימה (Megillah 32a). (See Rupertus, ob. 1135, in *de divinis officiis*; Dufresne, *Glossarium* s.v. *Neuma*: "est vocum emissio, modulatio").