The Development of the Role of the Hazzan Through The End of the Geonic Period

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

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Report on the Rabbinic Dissertation Submitted by Daniel Hillel Freelander
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Mr. Freelander began this study with the prime intention of understanding how, when, and with what consequences, creative music entered the synagogue service. The issue of keva' and kavvanah, so often raised with respect to prayer texts, was to be raised regarding prayer music. Thus he set out to explore the role of the hazzan in geonic and pregeonic society, to investigate the function of music.

The thesis reviews familiar material about the development of the hazzan from general synagogue beadle to a professional musician and precentor. Mr. Freelander's novel insight includes seeing his latter role as being modeled after the priestly role wherein a passive congregation relies on an intercessor. He then reviews the professional responsibility of the hazzan through the tenth century, and notes particularly the significant role played by the increasing complexity of prayer material and the rise of the piyyut as an art form demanding professional competence.

Once in a while the reader may quibble with an interpretation of the material, and feel that some sources have been accepted uncritically. Thus, for example, the tradition that explains the piyyut by religious persecution seems to have been accepted here in a somewhat forced fashion. Similarly, standard secondary source information such as the assumption of an ongoing choir at Sura or the tracing of Kol Nidre back to Yehudai have been incorporated here; even though the former claim is based on one report (Nathan Hababli) of an exceptional liturgical event, not the daily norm; and the latter is an interpretation of a responsum by Ginzberg chosen because it supported his general perspective on relations between Sura and Pumbedita. The material from Sefer HaEshkol on Yehudai is probably not to be taken as implying general support for a hazzan; even though nearly every music history book assumes otherwise.

The thesis' strength is that it raises such serious issues and prompts the reader to bother siding for or against the conclusions.

In sum, Mr. Freelander has summed up the challenges raised

by the rise of the hazzan as singer, the development of piyyut, trope, and "foreign melody." He has surveyed the literature that instructs us as to how Jewish authorities handled the veritable revolution in worship style introduced by these innovations. And, in a personal conclusion, he has challenged Jews today to be equally as responsive to what is perceived as an equally challenging era. For all of this, Mr. Freelander is to be commended.

Respectfully submitted,

Lawrence A. Hoffman
Rabbi

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I have long desired to complete my course of study at the College-Institute so that I could devote all my energies to a career of service to the Jewish community. My goal might have eluded me, and self-doubt might have overcome me, had it not been for the individuals who consistently reassured and encouraged me to continue striving towards those goals. Those individuals richly deserve mention as full partners in the process of my rabbinic education and personal growth.

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Finally, to my wife, Elyse Frishman, who made even the writing of this thesis feel like an extension of our honeymoon, my deepest love and thanks. She has created a Gan Eden in our home, a place to which I can always retreat for nourishment and support. Her intellectual instincts have guided me throughout the writing process, and her constant patience and warmth only reaffirm for me the fact that one day soon, she will be counted among the most respected and beloved rabbis of Israel. To Elyse, my rabbi and friend, I dedicate this work.

DANIEL HILLEL FREELANDER
New York City
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Chapter One

HAZZAN AND SHELIACH TZIBBUR IN THE TALMUD

The position of the hazzan within the synagogue has remained virtually the same since some time during the 6th century. Prior to this time, the term hazzan referred to a synagogue official with responsibilities quite different than those we generally associate with those of a hazzan today. The responsibilities presently assigned to the professional called the hazzan were originally the functions of the lay person known as the precentor or sheliach tzibbur. While the Talmud uses the term hazzan to describe a number of different officials with far reaching responsibilities, its presentation of the qualifications and responsibilities of the sheliach tzibbur is far more concise and uncontroversial. For various reasons which we shall examine later, the roles of hazzan and precentor were joined together at some points between the 4th and 6th centuries, and were later separated when the lay precentor was replaced by the professional hazzan, who soon shed his original synagogue function in favor of his new one.

The Talmud uses the word hazzan in conjunction with a wide range of synagogue officials and functions. The Mishnah's use of the term is limited to describing a particular functionary primarily within the Temple context. No authorities on the history of the hazzan suggest that any one individual actually fulfilled all the diverse responsibilities ascribed to him in the Talmud. Therefore, an appreciation

of the pre-geonic hazzan and his function within the various talmudic communities requires us to examine some of the recurring themes as they appear in the Talmud with regard to his role. The position of precentor or sheliach tzibbur in pre-geonic times is not the subject of controversy, and will require a far more simple presentation.

Scholars are divided over the origin of the word hazzan. Some derive it from the Hebrew root hazah, to see, as in hazon, vision. Others claim the term derives from the Assyrian hazzanu, which means overseer or director. In the El-Amarna letters dating to the 14th century B.C.E., "Hazanuti" is the term used for the governors' (overseers') place by Egypt over the cities of Palestine.[1] Hence, the mishnaic term hazzan haknesset (Yoma 7:1 and elsewhere) is usually translated as "overseer of the assembly."[2]

Even in the Temple in Jerusalem the hazzan had a significant role. Similar passages in Mishnah Yoma 7:1 and Sota 7:7, 8 demonstrate the hazzan haknesset's role in the Temple.

חזן הכנסת נוטל ספר תורה ונותנו . . . .

Another role for the hazzan in the Temple is described in Mishnah Sukkah 7:4, and although the hazzan is referred to in the plural, without the qualifying addendum haknesset, he appears to be the same individual referred to in the Yoma and Sota passages.

מ וליכין את לולביהן להר הבית והחזנים מקבלין אותם על גב האצטבא

In Mishnah Tamid 5:3 we find still another extension of his

role.

מסרום לחזנים, היו מפשיטין אותם את בגדיהם

The Yoma and Sota passages reveal a hazzan who is overseer of the property and utensils of the Temple who hands them to the officiants at the proper time. Sukkah shows the hazzan taking the lulavim the pilgrims have brought to the Temple and arranging them for later use by the priests. Mishnah Tamid shows the hazzan responsible for disrobing the priests, and caring for their robes during the priest's officiating. All five mishnaic references to the hazzan indicate that he was a general assistant to the priests who had specific, independent responsibilities within the Temple hierarchy.

The diverse responsibilities of the hazzan or hazzan haknesset,as the texts interchangeably refer to him, clearly date back to Temple times. This position is probably the only official Temple position which survived the destruction of the Temple and change from sacrificial worship to synagogue prayer almost intact. In both the ancient Temple and synagogue, the hazzan appears to have played a role similar to that of the contemporary shamash, overseeing all aspects of the synagogue's operations except the worship itself. This shamash or beadle was a jack of all trades who made sure that all was in place, so that appropriate worship could take place. The Talmud specifies some of the responsibilities of the pre-geonic hazzan/beadle as he emerged in various communities.

The talmudic hazzan/beadle functioned as a kind of supervisor and superintendent at prayer meetings, as we see in this passage from Sukkah 51b:

וחזן הכנסת עומד עלוה, והסנהדרין בידו, וכיון שהגיע לענות אמן, הלה מניף בסודר וכל העם עונין אמן

Among his many roles in the synagogue were those that ensured that the normal activities of worship could take place. Yet, surprisingly, the hazzan is hardly ever cited as a leader of worship. Tosephta Sukkah 4:11, 12 reveals a community wherein the hazzan had the responsibility of announcing the beginning of Shabbat and holidays by climbing to the roof of the synagogue or the highest place in the city, and blowing a horn so all the residents could hear.

כיצד שלש להבטיל את העם מן המלאכה, חזן הכנסת נוטל הצוצרות ועלה לראש הגג גבוה שבעיר, נוטל לקנות . . . .

In this way he made sure that the congregants knew to stop their work, and to return home or to the synagogue in time to light the fire. Probably the fire refers to the fires and lights the populace had to light in their homes so that they would have heat and light during the Sabbath or holiday.

The hazzan is also cited as the individual responsible for attending to the lamps of the synagogue, an obvious "beadle" function (Ma'aser Sheni 56a).[3]

נקיי הוה חזן במגדל . . . מן דהוה עתיד קנדילו הוה שליק שבת בבית מקדשא ונחית ומדליק ליו

Another source, this one mishnaic, points out that in some communities it was also the hazzan's responsibility to

teach the young children to read (Shabbat 1:3).

החזן רואה היכן התינוקות קוראים אבל הוא לא יקרא

In the commentaries to the Mishnah, Maimonides and Bartinoro disagree on his exact function in this case, Maimonides claiming that he merely assisted the school teacher by working with the children, and Bartinoro viewing the hazzan as the teacher himself.

Whatever the specifics of his role, the hazzan was an honored synagogue official in many communities. The populace accorded him a prominent seat within the synagogue, as we note in PT Sukkah 55b:

ובימה של עץ באמצע וחזן הכנסת עומד עליה

There may have been other reasons for the hazzan to sit on the bimah in the middle of the synagogue, for, as we note in a number of other Palestinian Talmud sources, the hazzan's responsibilities also included removing the Torah scrolls from the ark and opening them to the correct place for the weekly reading.[4] Evidently, he was also responsible for raising up the Torah for all to see, according to the interpretation of Shimon ben Yakim:

כתיב: ארור אשר לא יקים את דברי התורה הזאת. וכי יש תורה נופלת? שמעון בן יקים אומר זה החזן שהוא עומד.

(PT Sota vii, 21d)

Even though the hazzan was responsible for opening the scroll of the law to the correct place, he was generally not allowed to read from the scroll. That was the jurisdiction of the members of the congregation who functioned in the rotating, voluntary role of sheliach tzibbur, which we shall discuss

later. We do, however, find one reference to a community where, with the permission of the congregation, the hazzan was permitted to read the law.

חזן הכנסת לא יקרא עד שאמרו לו אחרים

(Tosephta Megilla III)

The above notwithstanding, we can generalize that the role of the hazzan within the synagogue was more akin to that of the modern synagogue shamash or beadle than to the role of the contemporary hazzan. In fact, some variants substitute the term shamash for hazzan in at least two of the quotations cited above. (See footnote 3.)

Some talmudic citations refer to functions of the hazzan totally unrelated to the operation of the synagogue. Baba Mezia 93b refers to the hazzan as overseer of the city, hazzan mata, who seems to function as a kind of night watchman.

יעקב אבינו חזן מתא הוה? דאמר ליה ללבן נטרי לקנטיחתא ותירתא כחזן מתא

The reference is aggadic in nature, but indicates that the authors knew of such a position. A similar role is assigned to the hazzan in Shabbat 56a, which refers to the hazzan as the town sheriff and town crier.

A totally different perspective on the talmudic role of the hazzan is expressed in PT Berachot 7d and Mishnah Makkot 3:12. In both these references we find the hazzan as official of the judicial system. The PT Berachot passage sees

him as an overseer of the court by whose word court sessions were opened:

. . . . אמרו לרבי זינון החזן אמור התחיל, ואמר התחילו

Even more unusual is the role assigned by the Mishnah passage, Makkot 3:12:

כיצד מלקין אותו? חזן הכנסת אוחז בגדיו . . . וחאבן נתונה מאחריו, חזן הכנסת עומד עליה, ורצועה של עגל בידו כפולה אחד לשנים . . .

Here it was the hazzan's responsibility to execute punishment on the convicted prisoner. First he stripped off the prisoner's clothing, without any care, according to the text, as to whether he tore the clothes or not. Later in the same passage, the hazzan stands upon a rock placed behind the prisoner, with a whip in his hand, and issues the stipes ordained by the court as punishment to the prisoner. There seems to be no connection between this role and the hazzan's synagogue role. Evidently, in different communities the term hazzan carried greatly different connotations.

It is clear, however, that the hazzan did perform different roles in each community. In some communities the individual who served as hazzan (probably in the synagogue context) also served the community as preacher, judge, and schoolmaster. The following quote from the famous story about Levi bar Sisi appears both in Genesis Rabbah 81:2 and, as quoted here, in PT Yevamot 13a.

בני סימונייא אותן לגבי רבי אמרין ליה בעה תתן לן חד בר נש דריש, דיין, וחזן, סופר מתניין ועבר לן כל צורכיו ויהב לון לוי בר סוסי

The residents of Simonia requested that the rabbis send them one person who could function in all the roles described

above: preacher, judge, hazzan, and scribe. They are sent Levi bar Sisi with high recommendations; in a short time, however (perhaps not unexpectedly), he fails to fulfill their expectations and is relieved of his responsibilities. If individuals did indeed function in such a variety of capacities in smaller communities, they must have been extraordinary men.

One talmudic passage in the Palestinian Talmud (Berachot 12d) indicates that the hazzan did in fact also lead the prayers in the synagogue.

. . . ואשכחין לחזנא דאמר האל הגדול הגבור והנורא האביר והאמיץ, ושיתקו אותו. אמרו לו: אין לך רשות להוסיף על מטבע שטבעו חכמים בברכות.

The author of this passage uses the word hazzana, an Aramaic form, instead of the more common hazzan, indicating, as Zunz and Kohut suggest, that this passage was probably interpolated at a date after the completion of the Palestinian Talmud into the text itself. They cite manuscripts that omit the passage completely.[5] If this one appearance of the hazzan as worship leader and reader really is a later interpolation, then our original hypothesis that the talmudic hazzan had totally different responsibilities and functions than those of the voluntary sheliach tzibbur, receives quite conclusive support.

During the time of the Second Temple, the Jewish people were represented before God by the priests who offered sacrifices for the lay people. The priests occasionally also recited prayers while they offered the sacrifices. With the

rise of the local Ma'amadot and synagogue, Jews would gather in their local synagogues to pray, and select one of their members to lead them in the prayers. This was an office of honor that could be held by any member of the community capable of reciting the very short and simple forms of prayers used at that time. This position is referred to in talmudic sources by various titles, including Ba'al Tefillah (leader of prayer), Koreh (reader, usually of Scripture), and Mitpallel (he who prays). He is also known as yored lifney hatevah, he who descends before the ark, since the prayer leader evidently led the congregation from a position lower than that of the congregants.[6]

The most widely used term which refers to the precentor/prayer leader is sheliach tzibbur, messenger or representative of the congregation. He was chosen and sent by the congregation to the special place in the synagogue reserved for the prayer leader to lead them in their recitation of the prayers. There is some debate concerning the exact role of the sheliach tzibbur in worship, both in the Talmud and in contemporary scholarship. Some see him simply leading the congregation in its prayers, functioning only to ensure that the proper prayers were recited. Others view him as successor to the Temple priest who served as intercessor for the people, and others view him as successor to the ancient prophets who offered special prayers for the community in time of stress and special need. More discussion of these conflicting roles of the sheliach tzibbur will follow later

in this chapter.

Alongside the rosh haknesset and the hazzan, the sheliach tzibbur helped ensure that proper worship took place in the community, but unlike the other two functionaries, the precentor remained a voluntary, lay position through the end of the talmudic period. While some communities did appoint individuals to serve permanently as the functionaries of their synagogues, be they lay persons or "professionals," the responsibilities of the sheliach tzibbur continued to be shared by the members of the local communities.

Throughout the talmudic period it was considered a great honor to serve as sheliach tzibbur. Chapters 23 - 25 of Talmud Taanit contain the stories of many famous rabbis who served various communities as precentors. Such well known figures as Honi haMeaggel, Rabbi Hiya and Rabbi Akiva are cited as having served in the sheliach tzibbur position. The high status that service as precentor carried with it is evident from the wording of Rosh HaShannah 17b, where the Almighty Himself is likened to a sheliach tzibbur.[7]

The precentor had three basic responsibilities within the framework of the daily service. First he would recite the fixed opening benedictions; secondly, he had to improvise prayers according to the needs of the hour; and finally he would close with the appropriate formulas.[8] On the days when Scripture was to be read, it was the sheliach tzibbur's responsibility to serve as koreh, Torah reader. It is likely that almost all congregants were able to read from the

Pentateuch and the more widely used parts of the Prophets, and were also familiar with the sing-song chant to which the Scriptural portions were sung. On days when less well known portions of the Scripture were read, scholarly men were sought to read them.

Apparently, during the early Amoraic period, Jewish literacy was at an extremely high level. In some communities the custom developed that numerous congregants would be called up, each to chant a short portion of that day's Pentateuch or Prophetic reading, while the koreh merely stood by in case the layman made a mistake.[9] It is easy to understand, then, why the position was able to remain unprofessionalized. As long as many congregants remained familiar with the prayers and Scriptural readings, many were available to serve in the role of sheliach tzibbur.

We should note, however, that all prayers had to be recited from memory, since numerous talmudic references assert that it is forbidden to write down prayers. (Shabbat 61b, 115b, Tosephta Shabbat 13)[10]

כותבי ברכות כשור פי תורה

Not only,then, did the precentor have to be familiar with the prayers and able to improvise and create his own prayers, but he also had to memorize the format of service, except for the Scriptural readings. As congregations grew attached to particular prayers originally improvised and created by their precentors, they requested the sheliach tzibbur to repeat those prayers as part of the daily liturgy of their community. The length and complexity of the prayers began

to grow as the community demanded more and more of these improvised prayers which were becoming fixed features of their worship, and thus the responsibilities and complexity of the precentor's role also increased. This growth in liturgy would eventually lead to the replacement of the lay sheliach tzibbur by the professional chazzan/precentor in the 6th century, a professional who had the time to memorize this growing liturgy.[11]

The role of the precentor was so essential to a community's worship that it necessitated the formulation of the minimal requirements for a sheliach tzibbur. The general categories are set down in Mishnah Taanit 2:2:

עמדו בתפילה מורידין לפני התיבה זקן ורגיל ויש לו בנים, וביתו ריקם כדי שיהא לבו שלם בתפילה

The precentor had to be mature, conversant (with the prayers), have children and an empty house. This bias toward a married, poor person was probably not intended to disenfranchise the rich or single Jew, but rather to ensure that he who leads the congregation is not preoccupied with issues of finding a wife or managing his money while he should be concentrating on prayer.

Rabbi Judah bar Ilai, in the early 2nd century C.E. added specificity to the definition offered by the Mishnah. In Talmud Taanit 16a we read:

ר' יהודה אמר מטופל ואין לו וישלו יגיעה בשדה, וביתו ריקם, ופרקו נאה, ישפל ברך ומורוצה לעם וישלו נעימה וקולו ערב, ובקי לקרות בתורה ובנביאים וכתובים ולשנות במדרש בהלכות ובאגדות ובקי בכל הברכות כולן

The precentor must have a job and heavy family obligations, but not enough money to meet all those obligations, so that he would be personally involved in the prayers for sustenance and prosperity he was leading. He should do labor in the fields, so that he will give full concentration to the prayer for rain, so vital in a farming economy. His house should be empty, containing few worldly possessions, so that he is forced to live from the regular harvest of his fields.[12] His youthful years should have been spent decently, and he should be "modest, acceptable to the people, skilled in chanting with a pleasant voice, who possesses a thorough knowledge of Scripture, and who is conversant with the Midrash, Halachot, Agadot and all the Benedictions."[13]

This Baraita informs us that such a person should be preferred as sheliach tzibbur, even if elders or great scholars are present and available for the honor. Likewise (in Taanit 24a) we hear of Rav coming to a community that needed rain. He orders a fast, and the local precentor leads the regular prayer service with such great fervor that when he reaches the line "He causes the rain to fall," rain actually falls. When Rav asks him what he does for a living, the precentor responds that he is a teacher of young children. Here we see the sheliach tzibbur leading the congregation's prayers as a volunteer, but with such piety that his prayers are answered even before the great Rav's prayers and fasting are. Piety and sincerity were clearly more important than reknown in the selection of a precentor.

A number of other credentials for the precentor are found scattered through the talmudic literature. Hulin 24b and Tosephta Hagigah 1:4 both suggest that maturity, as evidenced by a fully grown beard, is a basic requirement for the office.[14] In the Palestinian Talmud, Sukkah chapter 3, Judah HaNasi specifies that maturity means that the precentor may not be less than 20 years old. Tosephta Megillah 3:30 adds that one may not lead the congregation in prayer unless he wears a clean, proper garment, and that even crippled and deformed Jews are entitled to "descend before the ark."

In most cases it was the local community that set the requirements for the individual who would serve as its sheliach tzibbur. It is interesting to note that in only one place, Taanit 16a, is a pleasant singing voice cited as a requirement for the precentor. Evidently, vocal ability was not a basic issue in the selection of a sheliach tzibbur.

Most Amoraic literature reveals the sheliach tzibbur as communal reader who leads the congregation in its prayers. As he led them, the congregants were also responsible for saying the prayers by themselves.[15] Other evidence suggests, though, that the congregation may not have been particularly active in the prayer process, leaving most of the "praying" to the precentor. In Sukkah 38b, we read that the precentor would say a particular prayer and the congregation would answer amen. Rashi, commenting on the line הוא אומר הללויה suggests that the precentor led the congregation in a kind

of responsive praying: He would say "Halleluyah" and the congregation would respond by repeating "Halleluyah."

A second reason to believe that the congregation listened more than it prayed is the longstanding tradition of chazarat hashatz. While not referred to by that term in talmudic times, it is clear that the sheliach tzibbur would repeat the Tefillah after the worshippers completed reciting it. Most scholars agree with the talmudic sages in Rosh HaShanah 34b, and contend that his repetition was instituted for the members of the community who did not know the Tefillah from memory. They would listen to the precentor recite it, and then acknowledge that he had indeed said the prayer for them by answering "Amen" at the end. In their debate with Rabbi Gamaliel in Rosh HaShanah 34b, the sages take the position that the precentor only prays in order to free the unlettered from their responsibility to recite the Tefillah. Gamaliel, on the other hand, maintains that the precentor prays on behalf of the entire congregation, not just on behalf of those who cannot pray themselves.

תניא אמרו לו לרבן גמליאל לדבריך: למה צבור מתפללין?
אמר להם: כדי להסדיר שליח צבור תפילתו
אמר להם רבן גמליאל: לדבריכם למה שליח צבור יורד לפני תיבה
אמרו לו: כדי להוציא את שאינן בקי
אמר להם: כשם שמוציא את שאינן בקי, כך מוציא את בקי

Rabban Gamaliel seems to imply that an individual Jew need not pray himself if he has appointed a precentor to

act as his representative in prayer. The sheliach tzibbur, Gamaliel claims, fulfills our obligation to pray at the same time as he fulfills the obligation of those unfamiliar with the prayers. It is understandable how the position of intercessor developed for those who could not pray themselves, even in a tradition that allowed all Jews access to the Almighty without an intercessor. But it is most surprising to recognize that the normalized situation became one where the sheliach tzibbur came to serve as intercessor for the entire community, not just for the unlettered.[16] No wonder the requirements and significance of the office grew. The accepted position was that God listened not to the individual's prayer, but to the prayer of the precentor who the individual had delegated to represent him.

This reality destroys the notion that the sheliach tzibbur was an independent creation of the synagogue. More likely, the people saw the precentor as the successor to the priest in the Temple who offered sacrifices to God on behalf of the populace. The daily tamid offering was brought by the officiating priest on behalf of all Israel. The Tefillah was viewed as having been instituted in place of (bimkom or k'neged) the tamid offering: as the Talmud puts it (Ber. 26b): תפילות כנגד תמידין. The community saw the person who led the Tefillah as a substitute for the priest.[17] This confusion marked the entire transition period from Temple to synagogue "when new halachic responsibilities and structures were grafted onto older forms."[18]

A counter position is offered by Louis Finkelstein, who claims that the origin of the synagogue lies in "the prophetic prayer meetings of the first commonwealth," and that the "position of the leader of the congregation is sufficiently akin to that of the early prophet when he besought the Lord for those who came to him."[19] He shows that the prophetic role did include petition on behalf of the unfortunate individual, and the entire community. Finkelstein views the sheliach tzibbur as performing a role within the community that has little to do with his praying for those who cannot themselves pray. Rather, he represents all those who choose to let him represent them, who come to him voluntarily.

We can find mishnaic backing for Finkelstein's position. Taanit 2:1 states that when a sheliach tzibbur prays, he does so for the entire community he is representing, even if they are praying themselves. The Mishnah in Berachot 5:5 goes even further, condemning the entire community of a precentor that errs in prayer, as though they had erred themselves.

המתפלל ישעה, סימן רעלו, ואם שליח צבור הוא--סימן רע לשולחיו, מפני ששלוחו שלאדם כמותו

The entire community, those who can and those who cannot pray, are represented before God by the single sheliach tzibbur they select.

In any case, the fact remains that his power came not from any special abilities of his own, but from the fact that the community delegated him to be its representative.

One must reject the notion that the sheliach tzibbur functioned only on behalf of those who could not offer their own prayers. One must also reject notions that the precentor had any special divine powers, or that he merely led the congregants in their own prayers. The talmudic sheliach tzibbur embodied the collective will of the community. The power of his prayers was directly equivalent to the intentions of the individual worshipper the precentor represented before God in prayer.

Endnotes

to

Chapter One

1. Schlessinger, "Hazzan," Jewish Encyclopedia (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904), vol. 7, p. 284.

2. The assembly (Knesset) here refers to the local Maamadot, which sent representatives to Jerusalem to participate in the Temple sacrifices as representatives of the local community and Maamad. The local Maamadot, which eventually developed into synagogues, would gather together at the time when the sacrifice in Jerusalem would take place, and read selected portions of the Torah. To organize and lead each local maamad, each selected a rosh haknesset and a hazzan haknesset.

3. Some variants use shamash instead of hazzan. See Maaser Sheni 56a.

4. See also reading in PT Megillah 75b.

5. Max Schlessinger, "Hazzan," JE, vol. 7, p. 285, cites Kohut Aruch Completum and Zunz Ritus, p. 36 as examples.

6. Ismar Elbogen, "Over Lifeny HaTevah," JQR 19 (1907), pp. 229-249.

7. Rosh HaShannah 17b
מלמד שנתעטף הקב"ה כשליח צבור והראה לו למשה סדר תפילה

8. A.Z. Idelsohn, Jewish Music in its Historical Development (New York: Schocken Books, 1929), p. 103.

9. Ben Zion Wacholder, "Prolegomenon," in The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue by Jacob Mann (New York: Ktav, 1971), pp. xi-ixxxvi.

10. Evidently, the early prayers contained words of Torah and the Divine name, but the Rabbis, in their discussion concerning the kinds of labor permissible on Shabbat, agree that while one may save a Torah scroll from fire on Shabbat, one may not similarly save written Benedictions or amulets containing God's name or verse of Scripture. Therefore, lest God's name and His words be burned in a fire on Shabbat, the Rabbis forbade the writing down of any and all prayers.

11. See chapter 2 of this thesis.

12. Rashi suggests that beito reikav means that the potential sheliach tzibbur should have experienced the anguish of frustration, not always having success with his business endeavors, and therefore more sensitive to the daily plight of the members of his community.

13. Translation by Henry Malter, Taanit (Philadelphia: JPS, 1928), p. 113.

14. Tosephta Hagigah 1:4
נתמלא זקנו ראוי ליעשות שליח צבור לעבור לפני התיבה

15. Mishnah Rosh HaShannah 4:9
כשם ששליח ציבור חיב, כך כל יחיד ויחיד חיב

16. Isaiah Sonne, "Synagogue," Interpretor's Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), vol. 4, p. 490.

17. Macy Nulman, "Sheliach Tzibbur," Concise Encyclopedia of Jewish Music (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975), p. 222.

18. Gerald Blidstein, "Sheliach Tzibbur: Historical and Phenomenological Observations," Tradition 20, No. 1, Summer, 1971, p. 69.

19. Louis Finkelstein, "The Origin of the Synagogue," Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, 1928-29, p. 59.

Chapter Two

NEW ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE HAZZAN THROUGH THE TENTH CENTURY

By the end of the 5th century the two major Jewish communities of Babylonia and Palestine had developed basically similar outlines for their worship services. The specific content and wording of the Jewish worship service differed in the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, and even within each Talmud itself. Religious practices followed regional custom, especially when the law was vague or self-contradictory. While the Talmud records the arguments of various rabbis, each attempting to have his own practice accepted as the "official version," it became apparent that even when rabbinic consensus was reached no sanctions were levied against those communities that chose to maintain their own traditions, as long as those traditions fell within the general guidelines set by the Mishnah.

The leadership of the synagogue worship service also varied widely, as we noted in chapter 1. The chief characteristic of worship leadership during Amoraic times was its participatory, voluntary nature. Various parts of the service had to be led, and the president of the congregation would ask one of the assembled worshippers to fulfill one of the three defined worship functions: poreis al Shma (lead the congregation in the Shma and its blessings); over (or yored) lifnei hateva (lead the congregation in the Tefillah); or koreh (read to the congregation from the

Scriptures.)[1] The second of these functions, leading the congregation in the Tefillah, was the most important; the leader's recitation cleared the worshippers of their obligation to say the Tefillah. Sheliach tzibbur is the term usually used to designate the leader of the Tefillah, but as we noted, it might also refer to the poreis or koreh as well. In some communities, it is clear that three different individuals fulfilled these roles. In others, one man served as poreis, while a second and more prominent person served both as leader of the Tefillah and as Scripture reader.

The limited number of prayers were remembered by memory. Melodies were often added to the prayer texts as a device to help the community and its leaders to remember the prayers. "Congregations were more apt to notice melodic deviations than textual ones."[2] Musical ability and a pleasant voice began to be cited as a requirement for the position of sheliach tzibbur in a congregation. But even the musical device could not counter the problem that the community could not keep up with the growing number of prayers in the liturgy. To complicate matters, the communities were no longer familiar with the biblical Hebrew used in the prayer texts and Scriptures, and this led to the greater difficulty of memorizing almost meaningless words in a foreign language. One can imagine a congregational president's frustration as he asked one member after another to lead them in prayer, only to hear each decline the honor.

Communities that possessed any number of scholars solved this problem by allowing the position of sheliach tzibbur to become one largely restricted to the scholarly classes. In communities that lacked scholars, the synagogue president often turned to the only other professional in the community who might have known all the prayers, the hazzan. We noted that the hazzan of the Amoraic period was primarily a sexton of the synagogue, but because he was present at all worship services, and cared for the Torah scrolls, rolling them to their proper place for reading, he was often the only member of the community who remembered all the prayers and their appropriate chants. It is easy to comprehend how, out of necessity, the small community might ask its hazzan to serve as precentor.

Thus, the simple synagogue beadle, the hazzan, became entrusted with the crucial role of precentor on a regular basis. This confluence of two talmudic roles became canonized in the Geonic period. Little is known about the two-century long period stretching from the end of the Amoraic/Talmudic period until the establishment of the Geonate; it is usually referred to as the Saboraic period. The emergence of the Gaon as religious and social leader of the Babylonian Jewish community occurred sometime during the late 6th or early 7th century. Little is known about the early Geonic period, but data becomes available with the ascent of Yehudai as Gaon of the academy at Sura in 757.

Information about the Geonic period is largely contain-

ed in the Responsa literature preserved by communities to whom the Geonim wrote and recorded in compendia by later authors. The Responsa issued by the Geonim at Sura and at its rival academy of Pumbedita, were primarily answers to halachic questions raised by the various diaspora communities. Evidently, the diaspora communities accepted the Babylonian Geonim as lawful successors to and interpretors of the Babylonian Talmudic tradition. The Babylonian academies did not, however, hold influence over the Palestinian community, which still accepted the authority of the Palestinian Talmud. Eventually a Palestinian Gaonate was established, but few of its decisions have been preserved. Our primary source of Palestinian liturgical customs from this period comes from Massechet Soferim, usually ascribed to 8th century Palestine. Though there were Geonim later, the Geonic period can be viewed as ending with the demise of Hai Gaon in 1038.

All the available Geonic Responsa of the 7th-10th centuries, including Seder Rav Amram Gaon, use the terms hazzan and sheliach tzibbur interchangeably.[3] It appears that what began as a stopgap measure in response to the community's inability to fulfill its religious obligations, had become a permanent and mandatory institution by the beginning of the Geonic period. The 5th and 6th centuries witnessed the emergence of professional precentors, each still referred to as sheliach tzibbur. Louis Ginsberg attempts to differentiate between the professional sheliach tzibbur and

the voluntary sheluach tzibbur. While his argument is cogent when applied to the earlier literature, he admits that the later Amoraim used the two terms interchangeably.[4] Certainly, between the terms sheliach or sheluach tzibbur and hazzan no differentiation exists in Geonic literature.

It appears that emergence of a professional precentor was originally a Babylonian custom. In Palestine, by contrast, we see as early as the 3rd century the appointment of a lay assistant to the sheliach tzibbur.[5] As the number of prayers grew and it became more difficult for the main precentor to memorize and to recite them according to their order, two assistants were assigned to stand on each side of the sheliach tzibbur, one on his right and one on his left.

וכוצא בו אינו מן המובחר שימוד החזן יחידי לפני התיבה,
אלא שיעמדו עמו אחד לימינו ואחד לשמאלו כנגד האבות.
(Soferim 14:14)

These men served as prompters, to assist the precentor in recalling the order or melodies of the prayers. While it is unclear whether the assistants were assigned on a permanent basis or were rotated from day to day, their function involved more than service as an honor guard for the precentor; by Geonic times it had become a hard and fast rule in both the Babylonian and Palestinian communities that no precentor be allowed to read unless he had at least one assistant at his side.[6] In chapter 4 of this paper we will discuss the existence of a cantorial choir in Bagdad during the Geonic period. It is reasonable to assume that these two assistants

to the precentor were the forerunners of the Tomechim and Mesayim who not only reminded the precentor of melodies and texts, but also served as a background choir while the sheliach tzibbur chanted the service. There is no textual basis for this assumption, but numerous drawings from the Medieval period picture the hazzan being accompanied by two singers, one at his right and one at his left.[7] This would seem to be a likely and logical development of the role of the two prompters, appointed in recognition of the precentor's inability to keep up with the growing liturgy.

The Babylonian authorities addressed the same problem by suggesting that the hazzan stand by while the sheliach tzibbur (here they are clearly two separate individuals) read the Scriptures and prayers.[8] If this was indeed a responsibility of the early Babylonian beadle, then it is not surprising that he became familiar with the prayers and Scripture readings, eventually emerging as one of the few individuals who knew them all. In time, however, both the Babylonian and Palestinian communities came to accept the concept of a professional precentor known as hazzan, and of prompters or assistants to the precentor, known as tomechim or mesayim.

With the addition of the role of sheliach tzibbur to his position as beadle, the social and religious status of the hazzan was raised considerably. No longer was he seen as a lowly synagogue functionary in the eyes of the congregants; now he represented them in prayer, and served as an

intermediary between them and God. The office of hazzan became one that many clamored for. Geonic and post-Geonic records indicate that scholars of high repute frequently took on the position of hazzan in order to support themselves.[9] This would have been below the dignity of such men in the period before the two roles were combined.

For the first time, the hazzan emerged as a creator of liturgy. In a later chapter we shall discuss his role in the development of the piyyut, but we know that much earlier in the history of the synagogue it was the sheliach tzibbur's responsibility to improvise prayers between the recitation of the fixed ones. Both Zemach Gaon and Yehudai Gaon attribute the development of the m'eyn sheva prayer to the early hazzanim.[10] Apparently, with rabbinic approval, the hazzanim introduced modifications to the worship service. These innovations became accepted local customs, and were later declared legal by the Geonim.

Already in talmudic time we read about the precentor's responsibility to read prayers aloud as a substitute for those members unable to recite them themselves. This primary function continued long after the printing of the prayerbooks; what had begun as a way for those with poor memories to clear themselves of their obligations had become institutionalized. Since the precentor was considered a representative of the entire community in prayer, hazzanim were sought who could best empathize with the plight of the community and thus best plead its case before God. Hence, every

community had its own unique set of requirements and credentials for its hazzan.

This tendency to view the hazzan's prayer as fulfillment of the individual congregant's obligation was often carried to an extreme. One anonymous Geonic responsa noted that the sheliach tzibbur read all 100 blessings listed at the beginning of Amram's prayerbook, prayers that covered every possible kind of action that the congregant might participate in during that day.[11] The hazzan would actually fulfill few of the blessings himself within 24 hours, and therefore the blessings were seen by some as wasted. Both this responsa and a later one by Maimonides strongly object to this abuse of the hazzan's role as representative of the community, reciting blessings in anticipation of the congregant's action itself.[12]

The hazzan's prayer was considered greater than the individual's prayer, but not because of any special powers innate to the sheliach tzibbur himself. Ben Baboi explains:[13]

שיחיד מוציא את עצמו, ושליח צבור ירד ומוציא את הרבים ידי חובתן

While the individual frees only himself from his obligation with his prayers, the precentor frees many from their obligations. At the same time that he frees thosewho are not capable of making their own prayer, he frees those that are knowledgeable. Another unattributed Geonic responsa states that no one except the community's official precentor should go before the ark:[14]

ואסור לפני התיבה לירד אדם כ"א שליח צבור

One additional role belonged to the hazzan. In many smaller communities he served as both reader and preacher because he was often the only knowledgeable Jew in town. While in larger communities the roles of the preacher who expounded on the text and the precentor were distinct and separate positions, these larger communities had the advantage of many local scholars who could serve as preacher. The hazzanim in the small towns were forced to become familiar with existing rabbinic interpretations and legends surrounding the biblical text. They also became masters at improvising new stories based on words and images drawn from the text, thereby contributing to the growth of Aggadah.[15] This newfound talent would account for the significant number of small-town hazzanim who were to become involved in the development of the piyyutim.

Yehudai Gaon, head of the Academy at Sura from 757-761 is one of the earliest Geonim whose responsa are preserved. He was known as one of the leading precentors of his time. Yehudai is also credited with codifying part of the liturgical musical tradition and with his strong support of the new practice of hiring professional hazzanim in place of lay readers.[16] Because the new position had become such a prestigious one, the Geonim responded to the jealousy that erupted each time a congregation would seek a new hazzan by demanding that communities each elect a permanent, paid hazzan. Amram is credited with claiming that:[17]

יותר ראוי להיות ש"ץ שכור לפי שבמקום שהוא שכור וברור מן

הקהל . . . שאין אחר הזון ראשי לפלוש רגלו ולתפלל

ואם הי הנדבה הרושות נתונה לכל . . . יעלה מי שאינו הזון

Evidently, some large communities even elected a chief hazzan to coordinate all the activities of the hazzanim in the city. Hai Gaon in a letter, asks about an old schoolmate of his, Nahum the reader, who was needed in Bagdad as the new chief hazzan, referred to in the letter as mukdam.[18] Both Babylonian academies accepted and saw promise in the new position of the hazzan.

Natronai Gaon felt the need to attempt to clarify the roles of professional and lay readers in the synagogue. Some communities, including those with professional hazzanim, had retained the practice of beginning their service with a member of the congregation leading them in the Shma and its blessings; then the official precentor would follow with the Tefillah and the Scripture reading. Natronai claims that the precentor should also serve as the poreis al Shma.[19]

שליח צבור לפרוס על שמע. ולירד לפני התיבה כמשמעה

This signaled the end to yet another lay institution of Jewish worship, and gave the professional precentor absolute control over the conduct of the worship service.

While the responsibilities of the hazzan became clearer throughout the Geonic period, the guidelines used for choosing a precentor became more and more muddled. As each rabbi and community added to the list of credentials necessary by a candidate, already outlined by Rabbi Judah bar Ilai in Mishnah Taanit (see chapter 1), it became difficult to find

any individuals who really qualified for the position. Moreover two of the basic responsibilities of the job, a pleasant voice and knowledge of the correct melodies, were rarely considered by employers. This often led to great disappointment on the part of the community.[20] Those communities that did listen to a precentor's voice in advance, often listened for volume of sound rather than for quality, for they were more concerned that the hazzan's voice be heard above the loud talking that took place during his chanting of the service.

Most communities adopted a similar hierarchy of credentials for prospective hazzanim. Ethical qualities were preferred to wisdom, and wisdom to voice. Age was the first problem any candidate had to overcome, since age was determined according to the length of one's beard. Rav Natronai Gaon was asked if a seventeen year-old youth who had not yet been able to raise a beard might serve as precentor and release the congregation from its obligation. Natronai responded that even a person of 13 years and one day could fulfill that mitzvah.[21]

ויש נערים שהגיעו לשמונה עשרה ולשבע עשרה ולא נתמלא זקנים, מהו שיעשו ש"ץ? אפילו בן שלש עשרה וירום אחד בלא אפשר נעשה ש"ץ.

A strange responsum by Rabbi Hai Gaon indicates that the credentials of the precentor outlined in the Mishnah carried more weight than even the principle of teshuvah. A man who had sinned during his youth, yet done full repentance, could not serve as sheliach tzibbur during fast days.

He was allowed to serve on other days, but on fast days the precentor was required to be exceedingly pure, in order to represent the community properly in their supplications before God.[22]

Both Yehudai and Sherira have similar opinions concerning the viability of a precentor who does not understand the meaning of the prayers he recites. Even if he has a beautiful voice and is well loved by the congregation, Yehudai insists that:[23]

ודאי תלמיד חכם עדיף לפי שהוא מבין מה שידבר, וזה קולו ערב אני מדבר כשורה.

Similarly, Sherira reminds his readers that a precentor who does not understand the prayers cannot release them from their obligation; since he doesn't understand what he is saying, he certainly cannot adequately represent their true feeling before God.[24] Hai and Natronai take the position that a hazzan who makes mistakes in his prayers should be removed, or at least silenced by the congregation.[25] It is interesting to note that these Geonic opinions cross century and academy lines. The general unanimity between the Sura and Pumbedita schools, and the lack of any substantial change in opinion over the three centuries the Geonate existed indicates that the hazzan's position was well established and non-controversial by the time of the rise of the Geonate.

Little has been preserved concerning the hazzan's financial arrangements with the community. According to the Jewish music historian, Alfred Sendry, the early hazzan received

no regular wages. He was provided with free living quarters in the synagogue structure itself, voluntary food gifts from wealthy members of the community, and often supplemented this meager existence with an outside trade or artisan skill.[26] This arrangement dates back to the period when the hazzan still served primarily as beadle of the synagogue. Later, when the hazzan became the professional precentor, he was accorded a fixed salary. Three sources are cited for his salary. Part came from the families of the children he tutored, part from a special tax on the wealthy members of the community, and part from a fixed tax, levied on all family heads in the town. Hai Gaon states that a hazzan's salary should be based on his abilities, and should also be exempt from communal taxes. Israel Abrahams notes in his study of Medieval Jewry that a controversy arose during the 11th century concerning the propriety of including the hazzan among those exempt from communal taxes.[27] Other synagogue officials who did not enjoy such an exemption were cited as having raised the issue; either they were jealous of the hazzan's authority and popularity within the community, or they too desired a similar tax exemption.

An 11th century responsum issued by Isaac ben Jacob Alfasi reviews the common procedure of taxing all the members of the community in order to raise the monies for the cantor's salary.[28] An unnamed community wrote to Alfasi, asking how to treat a member of their community who refused to contribute towards this communal fund. Alfasi responded that

it was an obligation of all members to contribute towards the hazzan's salary, since the precentor prayed for all the members of the community, not just for those who paid their share. Alfasi suggested that the community stop speaking to the individual who refused to pay, thus in essence excommunicating him from the community. Given the gravity of the sanction Alfasi suggested they impose, one can assume that communal taxation to support the hazzan was a widely accepted custom by the end of the Geonic period.

S.D. Goitein's description of the Egyptian Jewish community based on Geniza materials dating from the 10th-13th centuries, adds to our understanding of the status of the hazzan within the Jewish community around the time of the end of the Geonate. Goitein describes the competition between the Palestinian and Babylonian oriented congregation in Egypt, noting that the "Babylonians tried to impart splendor to their service by entrusting the Scripture reading to excellent cantors."[29] The Palestinian influenced congregations probably retained lay readers for the Scriptures long after their Babylonian counterparts had given that responsibility to their professional hazzan.

The hazzan was among the highest ranking officials in the Egyptian Jewish community. He ranked second only to the muqadam, the religious and political head of the community. Some Geniza documents suggest that in smaller communities the hazzan also served as muqadam. Almost all communities had their own professional cantor, and some had more than one. Various Geniza responsa attributed to Mai-

monides note several hazzanim officiating simultaneously at one Sabbath service.

The Egyptian hazzan shared many of the functions of the talmudic hazzan/beadle, suggesting that the lack of discussion of that particular role in Geonic literature is an unintentional omission. Throughout the Geonic period, the hazzan continued to fulfill the beadle's responsibilities as well as the precentor's. The Egyptian hazzan often served as schoolteacher, ritual slaughterer, synagogue administrator and tax collector.[30] Like the Babylonian hazzan mentioned by the Geonim, he often served as preacher and explained the Scriptures to the congregation. For this task he often made use of the Arabic translation of the Torah made by Saadiah Gaon.

Goitein claims that the hazzanim often lived within the synagogue compound, and received donations of food as was the case with the late talmudic hazzan. This "parsonage allowance" supplemented monies the hazzan received for performing life cycle events. Goitein does not mention any fixed salary for the hazzan, but it seems unlikely that the Geonic precedent of paying hazzanim a fixed salary would not have taken root in Egypt.

The high standing and popularity of the hazzan is attributed to the austere religious situation of the time. The singing precentor offered one of the few diversions to daily life. The Egyptian responsa reveals that the cantor's singing ability and musical knowledge were respected far

more in Egypt than had been the case in Geonic Babylonia. Knowledge of the nusach and of the particular melodies used by each individual community was a chief standard by which new hazzanim were evaluated and chosen. The Egyptian community continued the Babylonian tendency to add more and more requirements to the list of credentials a potential hazzan should possess. Most hazzanim in Egypt were prepared for their careers while they were still children. Goitein cites a document that speaks of a hazzan in a small town promising to tutor a young man for three years in order to prepare him for the profession of hazzan.[31]

The Egyptian hazzan, as revealed through the Geniza documents, followed the trend of the continuing growth in the position and status of the hazzan within the Jewish community. The developments cited as part of the Geonic period do not demonstrate a radical change from talmudic times; rather, this key position within the synagogue became stronger and further developed. We have demonstrated that the hazzan's position became professionalized because of a decline in knowledge among most of the Jewish community. His popularity and stature must be attributed to more than the fact that he represented the community in prayer before God. His liturgical creativity and musical innovation as demonstrated both in his roles as paytan and composer, were the key factors in furthering the people's love for the hazzan. These two roles will be examined in depth in the next two chapters.

Endnotes

to

Chapter Two

1. Ismar Elbogen, "Poreis al Shma," JQR 19 (1907), p. 711.

2. Salo W. Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews (Philadelphia: JPS, 1958), vol. 7, p. 125.

3. Seder Rav Amram, ed. & trans. David Hedegaard, p. 7.

4. Louis Ginzberg, Ginzei Schechter (New York: JTS, 1929) vol. 2, p. 548.

5. PT Megilla 4a.

6. Rav Tzemach Gaon, Teshuvot HaGeonim #9. Also, Pirke deRav Eliezer, ch. 44.

7. Idelsohn, Jewish Music, p. 104.

8. Israel Abrahams, Jewish Life in the Middle Ages (Philadelphia: JPS, 1958), p. 104.

9. Alfred Sendry, Music of the Jews in the Diaspora (New York: Yoseloff, 1970), p. 231.

10. Rav Tzemach Gaon, Otzar HaGeonim, ed. Lewin, vol. 1, p. 72. נוהגין אצלינו. החזנין בערבי שבתות ובערבי ימים טובים להתפלל אבות וגבורות ואח"כ אומרים . . . .
The text continues by listing the m'eyn sheva blessing which serves as a replacement for the remainder of the required blessing of the Tefillah on Shabbat.

11. Otzar HaGeonim, ed. Lewin, vol. 1, p. 139; also cited in Baron, Social/Religious History, vol. 7, p. 81.

12. Solomon B. Freehof, "The Structure of the Bircos HaShachar," Hebrew Union College Annual 23, part 2 (1950-51), pp. 339-355.

13. Ginzberg, Ginzei Schechter, p. 548.

14. Otzar HaGeonim, ed. Lewin, vol. 5, p. 27.

15. Baron, Social/Religious History, vol. 7, p. 83.

16. Abraham W. Binder, "Hazzan," Studies in Jewish Music, ed. Irene Heskes (New York: Bloch, 1971), p. 140.

17. Teshuvot HaGeonim, ed. Meuller, p. 84.

18. Hai Gaon in Jacob Mann, Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature (New York: Ktav, 1972), vol. 1, p. 122.

יוסף החזן הגדול . . . כי נאספר הזקנים והוא עכשר המודם
על כל החזנים אשר בבבל יכנר עולה בכנסת . . . .

19. Otzar HaGeonim, ed. Lewin, vol. 1, p. 79

20. Sendry, Music, p. 229.

21. Seder Rav Amram, ed. Frumkin, pp. 280-281.

22. Otzar HaGeonim, ed. Lewin, vol. 5, p. 28.

23. Ibid., p. 27.

24. Ibid., p. 28.

25. Seder Rav Amram, ed. Hedegaard, p. 116, citing Natronai; also, Otzar, vol. 4, p. 58, citing Hai.

26. Sendry, Music, p. 229.

27. Abrahams, Jewish Life, p. 45.

28. Alfasi, Responsa (Warsaw, 1884), no. 281, pp. 83-84.
יורנו רבינו אשראנבן זה חייב לשלם מה שקבל עליו לשלם או לא? . . . ואמר לו: אין חייב לשלם להם ומי שהוא בנידוי ולא התנו שלא לדבר עמו אדם!

29. S.D. Goitein, A Mediterranean Society (Berkeley: University of California, 1971), vol. 2, p. 52.

30. Ibid., p. 115.

31. Ibid., p. 220.

Chapter Three

THE HAZZAN AND THE PIYYUT

No study of the medieval hazzan would be complete without an examination of his role as composer and performer of piyyutim. Similarly, a history of the growth and development of the piyyut would be incomplete without an appreciation of the role played by the emerging hazzan in the development of this literature. Piyyutim were the "highly stylized poetic formations of prayers...not in the usual rabbinic beracha prose."[1] Often, though not always, they expressed the same basic themes as the more standard prayers into which they were inserted or replaced. The rise of the piyyut as a liturgical form parallels closely the rise of the hazzan as a key figure in Jewish worship. Both developed during the same time period in generally the same geographical location. This makes it difficult for us to distinguish between the hazzan's influence on the piyyut and the piyyut's influence on the hazzan. The fact that each contributed to the other's growth will become clear in the course of the next few pages.

Both the piyyut and the first professional precentors emerged first in Palestine. The earliest piyyutim, although anonymous, were probably written during the late Tannaitic period, although the form itself did not become highly stylized, and thus recognizable as piyyut until the time of Yose and Yannai. These early poetic forms of prayers existed at the same time as the prayers that would eventually become fixed as the official liturgy was being written and changed.

Some controversy exists among scholars concerning the existence of these early piyyutim, especially since none have survived in writing. Ezra Fleisher argues that "since the fixed prayers do not contain any piyyutistic elements, the piyyutim could not have been around during the time when the formal liturgy was being fixed."[2] But others point to the fact that prior to the time when prayer texts were fixed, various forms of the same prayer vied for popular acceptance.[3] Some were simple; others were quite elaborate. We also know that the precise wording of prayers varied widely from congregation to congregation, from manuscripts of early Palestinian liturgies which vary considerably in their versions of certain prayers. Liturgical creativity on the part of the prayer leader was not necessarily mandated, but was useful for a precentor, since only the sequence and opening and closing eulogies of most of the prayers were fixed. The actual wording of each individual prayer, in the period prior to the canonization of the liturgy, was left largely up to the discretion and creativity of the sheliach tzibbur. This would certainly argue for the possibility that some of the individuals who served as precentor chose to use poetic forms in the improvisational part of the prayers.

We noted earlier that this necessity for liturgical creativity was one of the factors that led to the professionalization of the sheliach tzibbur. We should remember that fixed prayer itself was not accepted without a struggle. As far back as the time of the Mishnah, the rabbis warned

worshippersnot to allow their prayers to become fixed and stagnant, lest the prayers become rote and meaningless to the worshipper.[4]

From the beginning of the synagogue, individual communities were left free, almost encouraged to "speak their minds in new compositions inserted within, or added to the ancient prayer forms."[5]

Prayer forms became fixed much earlier in the Babylonian rite than in the Palestinian community. Therefore, the first opposition to liturgical creativity emerged from the Babylonian Geonim who were attempting to consolidate their religious authority over the Palestinian community. The Palestinians still adhered to the laws as set by the Palestinian Talmud which allowed for considerable leeway in the specific wording of individual prayers. The piyyut was to become a symbol of this struggle for authority between the Palestinians and the Babylonians.

The earliest payyetanim (poets) whose piyyutim have been preserved are all Palestinian. It is difficult to date either Yose or Yannai, the first poets of this literature whose works have been preserved, but most scholars agree that they lived some time during the 4th or 5th centuries.[6] The third great paytan, Kallir, is thought of as having lived a short time prior to the Arab conquest of Palestine in 635 C.E. Kallir's poetry does not yet show the heavy influence of Arabic meter and rhyme that later piyyutim do. Three other factors led scholars to the opinion that the

earliest payyetanim were Palestinian. Their poetry is based on the Palestinian, not Babylonian, cycles of the reading of the Torah. The standard prayer forms found in their poetry resemble very closely the rites described in various Palestinian sources. Finally, as we will discuss later, opposition to the piyyut emerged first in Babylon. The lack of any Babylonian characteristics in the early piyyutim also points to the Palestinian origins.

We should briefly recall that the Palestinian sources of the Amoraic period recorded evidence indicating that the hazzan position had advanced far ahead of the role described in the Babylonian Talmud. The Arabic word that became used to describe the piyyut was hizana. Eric Werner indicates that the term hizana was used even before the time of the Geonic documents that show conclusively that the title of the synagogue beadle, the hazzan, had become synonymous with the role of the early sheliach tzibbur. This would suggest that the roles were probably combined earlier than we can document.[7] Many later payyetanim call themselves hazzanim. It is not clear, however, that these individuals also functioned as precentors. Perhaps the term hazzan was also used as a technical term by which those who composed piyyutim or hizana referred to themselves. Since we have no proof that these hazzanim did not also serve as synagogue readers as well as poets, we cannot prove or disprove the possibility that the term did indeed carry two distinct meanings. We shall posit, therefore, that since the terms for liturgical

poetry and for cantorial performance, paytanut and hazzanut, are used interchangeably so often by writers throughout the Medieval period, that the two institutions were indeed very closely intertwined.

Goitein points out that during the time period reflected by the Egyptian Geniza documents he examined, the most time-consuming portion of the worship service was the piyyut. Goitein indicates that these additions are called hizana in these documents, probably, he says, because this was the part of the service in which the hazzan had to prove his capabilities to the congregation. This suggests that piyyutim were so closely associated with the hazzan in the eyes of the congregation that they viewed the piyyut as the hazzan's art. Liturgical creativity, according to Goitein, was still an idea taken seriously by these 9th-11th century communities.[8] We should note that in the Geniza documents, piyyutim are called hizana, but the hazzan is never referred to as paytan. The people, at least in these communities, were more conscious of the hazzan and his performing, than they were of the content of his performance, as their choice of terms seems to indicate.

While in some communities, the smaller ones in particular, hazzanim also functioned as preachers who explained the meaning of the Scriptures, it is clear that many communities possessed either a rabbi or learned member of the community who was assigned the responsibility of lecturing on the Scripture text. These lectures, usually delivered on Sab-

baths and holidays, were central to the service. By the 8th century, however, these lectures began to be pushed aside and replaced by the more popular practice of singing piyyutim that expounded on the text. The piyyutim of Yannai and Kallir, based on the Scriptures, Targunim and Agadah, served the same function as the sermons did in the context of the service, and came as a welcome relief to congregants bored by the sermons.

There exists considerable debate concerning the reasons underlying the initial popularity of the piyyut. Graetz maintains that the lectures, conducted in Hebrew, had become boring to the congregants, and were especially boring after the common language of discourse became Arabic. The Arabic piyyutim, according to Graetz, fulfilled the same function the lecture had.[9] Leo Landman disagrees, pointing out that language could not have been a key issue, since many of the piyyutim that survived are written in flowery Hebrew even more difficult to understand than the Hebrew of the sermons.[10] Landman proposed that the popularity of the piyyut should be attributed to the musical chants that accompanied the poetry, rather than to the poetry itself. The congregants did not understand most of the Hebrew of either the lecture or the piyyut, but enjoyed the music to which the piyyut was set.[11] Evidently congregants would rather listen to unintelligible texts set to music than to equally baffling words spoken at them.

It is difficult to accept Landman's assertion that the

congregants comprehended neither the sermon nor the piyyut, but his contention that music played a great role in the rise of the piyyut's popularity seems most reasonable. Jews came in close contact with the society within which they resided, in this case the Syrian Byzantines. By the 4th century, the Syrians had already developed a large body of hymns, mostly versified homilies, quite similar to the early piyyutim. These were meant to be sung, and their melodies became very popular with the masses. The Jews of this time must have come in contact with these melodies, since they served as the folk-music of that time period.[12] It seems reasonable to assume that the Jews viewed the simplicity and sometimes dullness of their worship services, and came to envy the musical richness of their non-Jewish neighbors' lives. Either actively or passively, the notion of synagogue poetry sung to popular melodies during worship became assimilated into the Jewish consciousness. This prepared the community for the introduction of musical piyyutim in addition to, or instead of the simple chanting of prayers that had existed since Temple times.

Jacob Mann points to one more reason for the popularity of piyyutim. We note in an earlier chapter that the decline in Jewish literacy and knowledge had a direct impact on the need for the professional hazzan. Just as few lay people still had the background necessary to lead a service, equally few individuals possessed a comprehensive understanding of the halacha. The lectures following the Scrip-

ture readings were an early attempt to reeducate the masses in the laws by which they were supposed to live. The insertion of halachic and midrashic passages into the liturgy through the vehicle of piyyutim proved far more palatable and motivating to the congregants.[13] Thus the insertion of piyyutim served to let both the masses and religious leaders feel that they were being educated in the ways of halacha.

The existence of the early piyyutim complicated even further the service for the lay precentors that still existed in some communities, especially on Sabbath and holidays. On these days, when the congregants were at their leisure to spend extra time in synagogue, congregants demanded their favorite piyyutim. Creativity within the worship service had long been necessary to fill out the bare bones of the service, and when congregations became attached to a particular creative insertion, they demanded that their precentors continue both to produce new materials and to sing again the particular additions they favored. This further complicated the role of the lay sheliach tzibbur who was rarely creative or knowledgeable enough to live up to these high expectations. Thus congregants' positive encounters with early liturgical creativity or piyyutim led to the eventual professionalization of the role of precentor.

On the other hand, it may have been the early creative efforts of the first professional precentors, experimenting with various opportunities to expand their role, that are responsible for the creation of the piyyut. As the hazzan

searched for a vehicle with which to expand his influence in the community, he may have imitated the existing Syrian custom of singing hymns and poetry as part of the worship service. These insertions into the worship service may have made the precentor more popular with his congregation, who usually enjoyed the new custom. Although we cannot for certain determine which force ultimately influenced the other more, it is clear both that the rise of the piyyut was in part responsible for the professionalization of the sheliach tzibbur, and that the existence of professional precentors was in part responsible for the creation and spread of piyyutim.

We have not yet discussed the most widely accepted theory concerning the origin of the piyyut, that of religious persecution. This history of the piyyut can probably be divided into three periods. We have just discussed many of the reasons for the piyyut's existence in the period prior to religious/liturgical persecutions. The second period of their development seems to be that of the complicated halachic piyyutim used to get around restrictions imposed upon Jewish worship services by outside authorities. The third period of piyyut development has its roots in the rise of Islam and its great influence on Jewish societal and cultural forms. These three periods do overlap, but much of the poetry that emerged did reflect timely needs of the community or hazzan. Each period has its own plausible explanation for the emergence of the piyyut. That the piy-

yut could serve different social and religious needs of the community as times changed is a tribute to its strength. It is not, therefore, necessary to favor any one theory of the origin of the piyyut. Any one of the reasons already cited could have been sufficient to stimulate the rise of this religious poetry.

Nevertheless, the origin of the piyyut remains a matter of scholarly debate. The majority opinion places its creation within the second period described above, as a response to various religious persecutions that faced the Jewish community. They avoided these restrictions by camouflaging the forbidden liturgical elements within new poetic creations. The origin of this theory dates back to several medieval sources of the 12th century.

Judah bar Barzilai in his 12th century work, Sefer Haitim, states the prevailing opinion:

> The enemies decreed that Israel must not occupy itself with the Torah. Therefore the sages ordained for them, in the midst of the prayers, to mention and warn the ignorant about various laws by way of praises, thanksgivings, rhymes and poems (piyyutim)."[14]

He is probably referring to the prohibitions imposed upon the Jews in 553 C.E. by Justinian's Novella 146. While this document did not forbid Jewish worship, it did forbid deutorosis, the interpretation of Scriptures via the Oral Law. Specifically, Justinian forbade the use of the Mishnah, and guaranteed Jews who did not understand Hebrew the right to hear the Scriptures read in Greek or any other language in the synagogue.[15]

J. Parkes points out that this policy was occasioned by the request of Jews who did not understand Hebrew. They demanded that the Scripture be officially read in a language they could understand. Justinian used this opportunity to side with the petitioners, and added to this support a supplement which forbade the lecture that traditionally followed the Scriptures and was used to expound upon the laws implied by the Scripture reading. Justinian's intention was to undermine the Jewish community's resistance to Christian missionary attempts. He felt that if Jews were not allowed to hear the rabbinic commentators on the Scriptures, they would be easier targets for the missionaries who used the biblical text accompanied by Christian interpretations as their basis for the conversion effort.[16] Justinian never forbade synagogue attendance or worship. Instead he hoped that these new laws would turn the Jewish worship service into a conversion aid.

Pirqoi ben Baboi (circa. 800) records that the Byzantine rulers also forbade the recitation of the Tefillah and Shma, the two central parts of the worship service.[17] We have no record of this prohibition, and it seems incongruous with the Byzantine approach towards converting the Jews. Nevertheless, any prohibition of this sort could certainly have added great impetus to the quest for liturgical writings which could be used as substitutes for these essential, yet forbidden, parts of the service.

The Jewish community responded to this challenge by

hiding the content of the lectures and/or prayers within complicated poetic devices using difficult language. Thus they succeeded in hiding their Jewish interpretations of the biblical text from the Byzantines. It is at almost the same time (6th-7th century) that the hazzan was beginning to gain widespread acceptance as the professional sheliach tzibbur for the Jewish community. The hazzanim became responsible for providing a camouflage for objectional portions of the service by using poetry and song. Since the hazzan was the individual responsible for leading the daily congregational prayers, it was only logical that the responsibility of developing this new kind of "underground" prayer would fall to him.

Paul Kahle concludes that the poetry of Yose and Yannai was probably composed specifically to combat the Justinian religious restrictions. He also posits that it was likely that both of them also served as precentors.[18] He cites no evidence for this hypothesis, but given the complexity of the piyyutim, and the fact that someone comfortable with them had to sing them to the congregation, it is logical to accept the possibility that Yose and Yannai may indeed have been hazzanim.

Another factor leading to the conclusion that the piyyut emerged as a response to persecution lies in the artificial nature of many of the early piyyutim. Many appear hastily composed and forced in their poetic style, indicating that they were written under time pressure and that their

content was far more important to the composers than their form. During this time of persecution, substitutes for the sermonic lectures had to be created anew on a weekly basis. Luckily, the notion of using poetry in the context of the service was already widely accepted. Persecution simply sped up the process by which piyyutim were composed and introduced to congregations.

The Justinian persecution did not affect the community in Babylonia. This accounts for the fact that the piyyut grew and prospered in Palestine so much earlier than it did in Babylonia. Another 12th century source, however, suggests that the Babylonian community had also composed piyyutim, almost 100 years before the Justinian persecutions in Palestine. They had been forced to create piyyutim in order to evade the restrictions on Jewish worship imposed upon them at the end of the Sassanian reign in Persia, sometime during the late 5th and early 6th century.

> The Persians forbade them the practice of circumcision and prayers....When the Jews realized that the Persians would enforce their prohibition of Jewish worship, they composed new prayers and called them al-hizana. They composed for these many melodies, and gathered often in order to sing and pray them. The difference between hizana and the compulsory prayer is that the latter is read without melody....yet the hizana is sung eagerly and zestfully.[19]

If the Persians accused the Jews of praying, they could claim that they were merely singing. Since Jewish prayer was not sung at this time (simple non-melodious chants were used), evidently this ruse worked. Unfortunately, we have no rem-

nants of these Babylonian*hizana*, which makes it difficult to verify the accuracy of this report by Samuel ibn Yahya. Petuchowski suggests that if the Babylonians did indeed use *piyyutim* to counter the Persian persecution they merely adopted the already-existing Palestinian custom.[20]

It is interesting to note that all the Geonic responsa that point to persecution as the prime cause for the rise of the *piyyut* do so in the context of diatribes against the *piyyut*. They point out that since Jews are not restricted in their worship by the Islamic rulers, they should abandon this practice which was only acceptable when it was essential to Jewish worship. Now it is nothing more than a frivolous addition, and even more, a threat to Jewish unity. The Geonic leaders had a sense of orderliness and propriety that was greatly offended by the anarchistic nature of the *piyyut*.[21] As long as the *piyyut* was merely an oral improvisation the Babylonian leaders had put up with it, but as the poems began circulating and capturing the imaginations and affections of the Jewish masses, the Geonim attempted to suppress them.

The Babylonian Geonim feared a loss of influence in the Jewish world as the *piyyut* spread. Since most of the *piyyutim* were Palestinian in origin, they relied heavily upon the Palestinian Talmud for their legal guidance. The Geonim feared the impact these popular *piyyutim* might have on uninformed congregants who would accept the legal interpretations offered in the framework of the *piyyut* they lis-

tened to in synagogue. In this way, the Palestinian legal tradition would become accepted as the "official line" in the minds of the congregants. Their goal was to impose the authority of the Babylonian Talmud as the only Jewish legal authority. Thus they were highly suspicious of the piyyut, because it was creative and therefore largely uncontrollable, and because it was Palestinian in origin and orientation.

Even the champion of the anti-piyyut movement, Pirqoi ben Baboi, himself born a Palestinian, attacked the piyyut not just because it was "foolish and ignorant." The bulk of his attack was that the piyyut deviated from the only acceptable Jewish law, the Babylonian Talmud as taught and explained by his teacher and mentor, Rav Yehudai Gaon.[22] Rav Yehudai traces his authority back to the Amoraim by way of the Babylonian Talmud. Yet the Jews who made most use of the piyyut marched to a different drummer -- the rulings of the Palestinian Talmud. The entire controversy over piyyutim appears to be little more than a political struggle by the adherents to the Babylonian Talmud to impose their religious authority over the community that lived by the rules of the Palestinian Talmud. The Geonim were particularly concerned with the spread of the piyyut and thus Palestinian interpretations to new lands where Jews had moved, places where the community had not yet lined itself up with either of the dominant traditions.

None of the opponents of the piyyut challenged its validity in times of persecution, but they cited various

reasons why the piyyut should not be allowed when it was not absolutely necessary. First, they considered the piyyut an unnecessary intrusion which broke up the flow of the service.[23] Second, the opponents considered it a burden to the congregation to have to sit through the service lengthened by the piyyutim.[24] Finally, they feared that the new poems, which lent themselves so easily to beautiful musical interpretation, would begin to overshadow the basic prayers. Baron cites a passage in the 11th century Sefer Hasidim which complains about a man who left the synagogue after the piyyutim, without waiting for the recitation of the regular liturgy.[25]

Despite these attempts at developing other reasons for attacking the piyyut, the Babylonian opposition was largely unsuccessful. The piyyutim continued to spread and gain wide, popular acceptance. While the Geonim and their successors tried to portray the piyyut as "intended only to remind the illiterate of the laws and regulations governing holidays and Sabbaths,"[26] two factors suggest that their efforts were in vain. First is the great abundance of piyyutim dating to the very time that the Geonim are rallying against it, suggesting that their edicts had little success in discouraging the composers of piyyutim. Second is the fact that even after the Geonic academies had ceased existing, Maimonides and others had to continue arguing against the piyyut, indicating that the piyyutistic tradition continued to develop despite the Geonic attempts to curtail it.

The Babylonian Geonim were wrong in assuming that the religious persecutions were the real motivating factors in the survival of the piyyut. They should have recognized that after the Arab conquest of 645 when the Justinian persecutions were no longer in force, the Jews did not return to their older, simple prayer forms. They had become enamored with the new forms. Instead of ceasing to produce piyyutim, the Jewish community responded to the new freedoms by expanding their poetic output, this time adopting Arabic forms and poetic devices. Popular support and affection for the piyyut was the real reason behind the strength of the piyyut. No amount of influential leadership could succeed in overcoming its overwhelming popular support.

We have determined that the hazzan was intricately involved in the process of performing piyyutim, and thereby played a key role in determining the public's attitude towards the piyyut. In the eyes of the congregants, paytanut and hazzanut, the art of composing a poem and the art of performing, were inseparable. We do know that individuals who were not hazzanim were involved in the process of creating piyyutim, but we lack any information indicating that anyone save the hazzan was involved in their presentation to the public. Therefore, it is not surprising to learn that the attitudes of the Geonim towards the hazzan are a reflection of their attitude towards the piyyut. Much of what we can glean about the Geonic view of the hazzan must come from responsa concerning their performance of piy-

yutim. When Geonim complain about liturgical abuses by hazzanim, the underlying issue is almost always the piyyut. Thus the hazzan became a symbol of the piyyut in the Geonic war against their spread, just as the piyyut itself was a symbol of Palestinian halachic authority.

While this confusion of hazzanut and paytanut continued well past the Geonic period, it must be noted that the evidence indicates that at least the earlier Geonim saw the two terms as separate and distinct institutions, disapproving of the latter while supporting the former. Yehudai Gaon, the earliest of the Geonim whose responsa have been preserved, is considered to have used his office as gaon to help establish the institution of the professional hazzan. Mann, Ginsberg, Elbogen and Werner all cite responsa that ascribe the authority of the hazzan to the rulings of Yehudai.[27] Evidently, not only did Yehudai support the institution of hazzanut, but appears to have given hazzanim permission to use a shortened form of the Tefillah, according to a responsum by Rav Zemach.[28] This would have opened the door to piyyutim, and if the responsum is reliable, seems to indicate that Yehudai was more lenient on the issue of insertions into the service than his devotee, Ben Baboi, would like us to believe. It is unusual to credit Yehudai with a lenient stance on any liturgical issue, since he is viewed as a strict traditionalist in the handing down of halachic decisions. Ben Baboi ascribes his anti-piyyut stance to Yehudai. Perhaps Ben Baboi did not know of Yehu-

dai's lenient stance towards the hazzan; he may also have chosen selectively to use those positions of Yehudai that supported his anti-piyyut position.

The efforts of the Babylonian Geonim to eliminate the piyyut proved futile in the face of such great popular support. Even though some Geonim returned to their verbal opposition to the practice, the majority of the Geonic leaders, at least at Sura, recognized that they could not hope to eliminate the piyyut, and could at best hope to control the phenomena. Their compromise position, expressed by Natronai, accepted the insertion of piyyutim as long as the opening and closing formulas remained intact, and the thematic matter of the prayer was dealt with by the piyyut.[29]

אם אומרים בכל ברכה וברכה מעין אותה ברכה . . . הרשות
בידו ועקר שאומרים בכל ברכה וברכה מעין פתיחתה ומעין
חתימתה, ובאמצע אומרים דברי אגדה . . . שפיר דמי

Natronai's compromise with the piyyut became the basis for his successors' position on the issue. The Geonim thus hoped to regain at least some control over the spread of the piyyut, by buying into the system of piyyutim and imposing these very minimal standards upon it.

Saadia Gaon composed his own piyyutim. He also proposed a set of regulations to govern the use of piyyutim which added to Natronai's rules only one stipulation. Saadia forbade the creation of any new blessings not included in the Talmud.[30] He freely made use of Palestinian piyyutim in his Siddur, giving in to the popularity of certain piyyutim.[31]

אך את שתי התוספות האלא שמצאתי רבים אומרים אותן,
אני רואה לרשום

Saadia was basically friendly towards piyyutim but did display the typical Geonic lack of comfort towards their use.[32]

וכבר הסברתי שאין כוונתי לרשום פיטנות, ולולא היה הפיוט הזה
מעשה נהדר לא רשמתיו

He makes sure that the reader understands that he does not really approve of all paytanut, even though he has been persuaded to include this particular piyyut which he finds especially beautiful. This ambivalence on Saadia's part is particularly noteworthy because he himself was a creator of piyyutim and other liturgical insertions.

While Saadia was ambivalent, he was a supporter of Natronai's compromise. Nachshon, who served as Gaon less than 20 years after Natronai, seems totally to reject even the spirit of that compromise.[33]

במתיבתא ובכל אתר דאיכא רבנן לא משנינן כלל מתפלות דתקינו
רבנן . . . ולא פיוט ואין מכניסין לבית הכנסת חזן שיודע
פיוט ובית הכנסת שאומרים פיוט מעידין עצמם שאין תלמידי חכמים

Nachshon claims that any congregation that allows a hazzan who knows piyyutim to recite them during services testifies that the members of that congregation are not scholars. He also states that at his academy (Sura) they do not deviate from the prayers instituted by the sages, nor do they insert piyyutim. We know, however, from Amram and Natronai that piyyutim were used at Sura. Ginsberg tries to discount this citation by questioning its authorship. Ginsberg doubted logically that Nachshon would contradict the rulings of his two immediate predecessors, Natronai and Amram. Therefore

he amends the text, and ascribes the responsa to the Geonim of Pumbedita, who according to Ginsberg, continued to oppose the piyyut.[34]

Similarly, Rav Zemach opposed the insertion of piyyutim.[35]

שליח צבור שמוסיף על מטבע שטבעו חכמים בתפילה ומרבה דברים בר נידוי הוא, ומתבעי לאעבורי

Zemach suggested that congregations discharge or excommunicate their precentor if he added words to those set by the sages for prayer. The continued opposition to the piyyut as evidenced by Nachshon and Zemach indicate to us that the piyyut had been at best grudgingly accepted by the Geonim. Those that did actually use them did so only in response to the actual practice and demands of the populace. This is a fine example of real practice, minhag, coming into conflict with halacha. As usual, practice won out over principle.

Amram is perhaps the best example of this accepting, yet ambivalent position. He recognizes that he cannot alter congregational practice, and therefore allows congregations the right to decide for themselves whether or not to include piyyutim in their worship.[36]

ואם רצה לומר קרובה אומר במגן ומחיה וקודם קדושה ואומר בהללו שלש ברכות כל מהו שירצה. ולא דבר קצוב הוא ולא חובה הוא, אלא כמו שירצה צבור לקרבות או למצוט

Amram makes sure, though, that the congregation understands that the additions are optional (reshut) and not essential like the required prayers (chovah). He recognizes that in some congregations the piyyut was already taken for granted as a required part of the liturgy. He hoped through this

ruling to get Jews to recognize the difference between the two kinds of prayers, a distinction many no longer remembered.

The hazzan was at the center of this ambivalence, for he was the implementor on the congregational level of the Geonic rulings concerning the piyyut. He could choose to follow or ignore the rulings. If the hazzan did not voluntarily enforce the minimal standards outlined by Natronai, Amram suggested that the congregation remove him from his position.[37]

ואי מיקלעינו לאתרא דאמר חזן דלא דמי למטבע מסלקינן ליה

That this responsa is directed at the hazzan is most significant. The hazzan had far more contact and direct influence with the Jewish masses than the Geonim had themselves. While the local hazzan had no real halachic authority, his day to day decisions and actions were perceived by the congregation as a normative and correct interpretation of Jewish law. The Geonim had to bring the hazzanim in line with their rulings if they wished to have any influence over the use of piyyutim in the service.

The mere fact that such extensive debate exists concerning the permissibility of piyyutim, suggests that the Geonim feared something far greater than merely the lack of uniformity in Jewish worship. They sensed in the uncontrolled growth of piyyutim after the periods of persecution a direct challenge to the relevancy of their halachic authority. They saw the use of the piyyut as the start of a re-

bellion against standardized prayers. The piyyut became a symbol of challenges to their authority as did the unchecked power of the hazzan. Their fears were not wrongly placed. The halachic rulings of the Babylonian academies would ultimately prove to have had far less an impact on the actual use of piyyutim than did the personal opinions of the local hazzanim.

We must return to the reciprocal effect the emergence of the professional hazzan and the piyyut had on each other. Their development has been closely intertwined. Just as the early sheliach tzibbur improvised prayers to fill out the simple worship service, when the Justinian persecutions prohibited preaching, the hazzan extended his improvisatory skills to include excerpts from the now forbidden halacha and agadah. Goitein cites many liturgical compositions found in the Geniza where the author designates himself as hazzan.[38] Maimonides speaks interchangeably of the compositions of singers and preachers "and others who imagine themselves able to compose a poem."[39] Certainly the hazzanim were not the only ones involved in the process of writing piyyutim, nor were they always successful in their endeavors.

The halachic piyyut, written in response to the Justinian persecutions, was often boring and highly legalistic. In order to maintain the congregation's attention while the piyyut was being recited, the hazzan searched for melodies which he attached to the text of the poem. The congregation often found these melodies enjoyable. The piyyut provided

the hazzan with the motivation to become increasingly involved in the creation of new music for the synagogue. This was a new role for the hazzan. We already know that he chanted and improvised prayer texts and was appreciated for his sweet voice, but the music of the synagogue had been restricted to simple chant. With the emergence of the piyyut, hazzanim began to compose or borrow pleasant melodies to which they could sing the piyyut. Without the piyyut, the role of the hazzan may have remained simply that of prayer leader, rather than developing as it did into the position of musician as well.

The prevailing opinion is that the melodies to which the piyyut was sung formed its main attraction for the congregants. Music had become a motivating force in Jewish worship for the first time. Many piyyutim had refrains for the entire congregation to sing, called pizmonim.[40] Earlier in this chapter we referred to the 12th century letter of Samuel ibn Yahya who noted that when the hazzan recited the additional poems he was "accompanied by the congregation with shouts and songs."[41] Thus the piyyut was also one of the earliest forms of congregational singing.

Goitein disagrees, claiming that it was the texts themselves that motivated the congregations' newfound affection for both the hazzan and the piyyut.

> It seems to me that the piyyut fulfilled in those days a role comparable with crossword puzzles in our own society. While the newly composed melodies were a devotional pastime for many, the effort required for the full un-

> derstanding of the difficult texts was a mental exercise for the more sophisticated.[42]

The fears expressed by the Geonim are based on a similar position. They, like Goitein, assumed that the congregants really listened carefully to each and every word. Perhaps the well-educated and highly motivated members of the congregation did, but it is far more likely that the affective experience of listening to the music of the piyyutim was a far greater motivator of the masses than the cognitive experience of understanding the nuances inherent in the poems. In short, the Geonim's fears about losing authority were ill-founded, though understandable from their point of view. Most of the piyyutim were far too complex for the common layman to grasp their full meaning at a single sitting. While the piyyut fulfilled the halachic obligation to pray, the melodies to which they were sung provided the enjoyment which ultimately made the piyyut so popular.

So strong was the popular love of piyyutim and their melodies that Maimonides was forced to recommend to a halachically concerned hazzan that he ignore the general halachic attitude towards these additions, and instead simply follow the customs already in effect at that place. Maimonides acknowledges that

> the piyyutim are indeed highly improper, but their recitation was preferable to the communal strife that would inevitably erupt as soon as the newcomer would try to abolish them.[43]

The popularity of the piyyut put great pressure on the hazzan constantly to compose new texts and melodies. This

was particularly difficult because of the elaborate Hebrew employed by most of the piyyutim, since few Jews used Hebrew regularly after Arabic became their vernacular. Hazzanim are known to have searched far and wide for piyyut texts and melodies to use in their congregations. On occasion, they also paid other hazzanim for the right to use their compositions. Shalom Spiegel cites examples of hazzanim writing to each other in order to exchange piyyutim, and he attributes the spread of the Palestinian piyyut to Babylonia to these exchanges.[44]

The pressure to create and perform new compositions constantly made life difficult for many hazzanim. The constant changing and lengthening of the service often exhausted the hazzan. Acknowledging this fact, Hai Gaon relaxed the requirement that hazzanim stand and lead the priestly benediction, if they had tired themselves too greatly from leading the service to that point.[45] The poetic and metrical devices that imbued the piyyut after the Arab conquest required far more intricate music than the earlier piyyutim had. More and more hazzanim found themselves adapting well known secular melodies for the piyyut texts. Their motivations for doing so may be viewed as acts of desperations, or conscious efforts to please the congregants. We shall discuss this further in the next chapter.

The decline in Jewish knowledge on the part of congregants led to the need and creation of a professional precentor. These precentors developed skills in liturgy and

music, and searched for vehicles with which to make best use of their artistry. From an early time they lent their talents to the creation of poetry and liturgical insertions for the synagogue. Initially, then, we must view the piyyut as a creation of the hazzan. But when the piyyut became a religious necessity in times of persecution, and later a much sought after liturgical diversion, the piyyut became the creator of the modern hazzan. The piyyut made absolutely necessary to the community that individual who had the time and talents to study, compose and perform these new texts. The rise of the piyyut made it impossible for the community ever again to return to the notion of a non-professional sheliach tzibbur, thereby guaranteeing the future existence of the professional hazzan. Conversely, the hazzan was ultimately responsible for the acceptance of piyyutim as a regular part of the worship service. Thus we see that the two are tightly bound together in their development.

Endnotes

to

Chapter Three

1. Lawrence Hoffman, Canonization of the Synagogue Service (to be published by Notre Dame University Press, 1979) chapter 4. For further discussion, see Ezra Fleischer, "Piyyut," EJ, vol. 13, pp. 573-598; and Heinemann & Petuchowski, Literature of the Synagogue (New York: Behrman House, 1975), pp. 203-213.

2. Ezra Fleischer, "Studies in the Problems Relating to the Liturgical Function of the Types of Early Piyyut," Tarbitz 40, no. 1 (October, 1970), p. 8.

3. Jakob Petuchowski, Theology and Poetry (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 15.

4. Mishnah Avot 2:8.

5. Shalom Spiegel, "On Medieval Hebrew Poetry," The Jews, ed. Louis Finkelstein (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 866.

6. Petuchowski, Theology, p. 14.

7. Eric Werner, The Sacred Bridge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 236.

8. Goitein, Society, vol. 2, p. 159.

9. Heinrich Graetz, A History of the Jews (Philadelphia: JPS, 1945), vol. 5, p. 150.

10. Leo Landman, "The Office of the Medieval Hazzan," JQR, n.s., 64 (1972), p. 159.

11. Ibid., p. 160.

12. Werner, Sacred Bridge, p. 236.

13. Jacob Mann, Texts and Studies, vol. 1, p. 281.

14. Sefer Haitim, ed. Jacob Shor, Responsa no. 252.

15. Novella 146 of Justinian; English translation in James Parkes, Conflict of the Church and Synagogue (New York: Hermon Press, 1974), p. 393.

> Necessity dictates that when the Hebrews listen listen to their sacred texts they should not

> confine themselves to the meaning of the letter, but should also devote their attention to those sacred prophecies which are hidden from them, and which announce the mighty Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ....From their own complaints which have been brought to us, we have understood that some only speak Hebrew and wish to use it for the sacred books, and others think that a Greek translation should be added....Being apprised of the matter at issue, we give judgment in favour of those who wish to use Greek also for the reading....or any other tongue which in any district allows the hearers to better understand the text....
> Thus there shall be no opportunity for their interpreters, who make use only of the Hebrew, to corrupt it in any way they like....
> The Mishnah, or as they call it, the second tradition, we prohibit entirely....

16. Parkes, Conflict, p. 252.

17. Ginzberg, Ginzei Schechter, vol. 2, p. 553.

18. Paul Kahle, The Cairo Geniza (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 27.

19. Samuel ibn Yahya, a 12th century Jewish convert to Islam, cited in Jacob Mann, Texts & Studies, vol. 2, p. 241.

20. Petuchowski, Theology and Poetry, p. 13.

21. Baron, Social/Religious History, vol. 7, p. 132.

22. Ginzberg, Ginzei Schechter, vol. 2, p. 553.

23. A.Z. Idelsohn, Jewish Liturgy and its Development (New York: Schocken Books, 1932), p. 43. Here Idelsohn cites Nachshon and Maimonides, both of whom Idelsohn claims, feel that the piyyut interrupts the flow of the worship service, and therefore, should be eliminated.

24. This information was related to the writer during a personal interview with Dr. Max Wohlberg of the Jewish Theological Seminary Cantorial Institute.

25. Baron, Social/Religious History, vol. 7, p. 130. Here Baron refers us to Sefer Hasidim of Judah HeHasid, ed. Margoliot, p. 221.

26. Yehuda bar Barzilai, Sefer Haitim, ed. Jacob Shor, no. 252.

27. Eric Werner, "The Doxology in the Synagogue and Church," HUCA 19 (1945-46), pp. 303, 307.

28. Otzar HaGeonim ed. Lewin, vol. 1, p. 72. Rav Tzemach permits the practice of offering a shortened Shemoneh Esrei on the grounds that:
שקבלו קצור זה מהחזנים הראשונים שקבלו ממר יהודאי ז"ל שקבל מרבו עד ר' יהושע . . . דתנן יהושע אומר מעין שמונה עשרה

29. Ibid., p. 70.

30. Lawrence Hoffman, Liturgical Responses Suppressed by the Geonim unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, ch. 4, "The Piyyut." See n. 23, p. 84, where Hoffman cites Heinemann, Yachaso shel Saadia, p. 222.

31. Siddur Saadia, ed. Davidson, Assaf & Joel (Jerusalem, 1941), p. 251.

32. Ibid., p. 289.

33. Otzar, ed. Lewin, vol. 1, no. 179.

34. Ginzberg, Ginzei Schechter, vol. 2, p. 510.

35. Otzar, ed. Lewin, vol. 1, p. 70.

36. Seder Rav Amram Gaon, ed. Goldschmidt, pp. 167-168.

37. Ibid., p. 32.

38. Goitein, Society, p. 37.

39. Maimonides, Moreh Nuvuchim 1:59.

40. Macy Nulman, Concise Encyclopedia, p. 195.

41. See note 19, this chapter.

42. Goitein, Society, vol. 2, p. 161.

43. Maimonides, cited in Goitein, Society, vol. 2, p. 160.

44. Shalom Spiegel, "Medieval Hebrew Poetry," p. 874.

45. Shaarei Teshuva, No. 177. Responsum of Hai Gaon used by the opposition to the piyyut as an argument that even the Geonim recognized that the piyyutim had made the service too long.
שליח צבור צריך להקהות לכהנים ופעמים שיגיע החזן אומר לאחר שיודע וקורא עם הכהנים ושותק החזן ורווח, ואין בכך כלום וכך אנו עושין בישיבה.

Chapter Four

THE HAZZAN AS MUSICIAN

The struggle over the piyyut found its halachic settlement in the compromise of Natronai. The Geonim were forced to accept this compromise in order to have their authority over liturgical matters accepted by as wide a spectrum of Jews as possible. Even so, the Geonim conceded grudgingly, as we noted in the previous chapter.

The hazzan was caught in the middle of the struggle over the piyyut, seen as both the adversary (in his role as creator and performer of piyyutim), and as an ally (for only he could implement and enforce the Geonic compromise). The hazzan was a key factor in influencing the people's liturgical attitudes, and his actions often reflect the true liturgical desires of the community. Moreover, it was the piyyutim which provided a creative outlet for this new professional, and helped change the nature of the hazzan's role from a mere sheliach tzibbur to a respected musician.

The debate over music in Jewish tradition may be seen either as reflection of the religious authority's xenophobia, or as another struggle for liturgical control. Due to halachic restrictions, since the destruction of the Temple, music had played an insignificant role in the Jewish community. Both vocal and instrumental music were outlawed as a sign of mourning over the destruction of the

Temple. The Jewish populace eventually grew tired of these restrictions, and demanded that more music be introduced into their religious services. Since the halachic authorities could not hope to overcome the will of the people, they attempted to impose some standards by which to control the phenomena. The compromise which emerged was quite similar in principle to the compromise used for dealing with the piyyut. In this particular case, the issue concerned the inundation of secular melodies in the Jewish worship service. As in the piyyut controversy, the hazzan is once again at the center of the debate, defending both his own professional growth and the desires of the people.

We have already established that the hazzan chanted the prayers in the synagogue. In Tannaitic times these simple chant-melodies came from two sources. Some ancient melodies which dated back to Temple times were remembered and preserved as the basic substance of the hazzanic repertoire. For prayers that were written after the destruction of the Temple, the precentor improvised new chants to fit the words. It should be noted that this chant was more akin to declarative recitative than it was to actual singing. Rather than being melodious, the chants were actually simple cantillations. The unadorned chanting of the obligatory prayers continued well into the Geonic period; Saadia distinguished the cantillation of the prayers and biblical readings, dating far back in Jewish history, from the singable melodies of the piyyutim.[1]

No system of musical notation existed until the 9th century. Thus, any musical tradition had to rely on oral transmission from generation to generation. Oral transmission guaranteed that the melody would change as it was influenced by each community's traditions and tastes. Because of this process of oral transmission, it is unlikely that any accurate renderings of the original prayer chants survived farther than the Tannaitic period. Since the musical tradition that was passed on was minimal, the precentors had to turn to some outside influence for the musical ideas they employed in the development of their improvisatory chant. The early improvisations imitated the oriental modal melodies, and lacked any rigid rhythmical patterns.[2] These influences even further changed the few remnants of the older so-called "Jewish" musical tradition.

It is generally accepted that Jewish music has always been a reflection of the cultures Jews experienced. It is unlikely that an independent body of pure Jewish music ever did exist. The music we call "Jewish" is comprised of those melodies and chants which Jews have subjectively chosen to preserve and transmit from one generation to another. Their origins were not Jewish, but their usage made them so. This principle is as applicable in the 20th century as it was in the first.

Various "Jewish" musical traditions have been preserved. The Jewish community in 7th century Babylon was heavily influenced by the new "florid and melodious intonation" which

had become the popular style for liturgical chant in the Arab world.[3] This intonation required trained vocal technique and agility. It probably existed before the hazzan became professionalized in Babylon, but became the standard improvisatory technique of hazzanim as more and more congregations hired permanent precentors. These chants were transmitted to other diaspora communities, and eventually came to be seen as "the old Jewish tradition of expressing devotion" by Jewish communities throughout the world.[4]

A second source of Jewish musical tradition is the cantillation that has accompanied the reading of the Scriptures in public at least since early Tannaitic times. Musical chant may have been attached originally to the reading in order to arouse public interest.[5] The Talmud berates as disrespectful anyone who reads the Pentateuch in public without its tune.[6] Evidently, certain melodies had already become traditional for use when chanting the Torah, for the Talmud also maintained that "Whoever chants the Scriptures according to the melody of secular songs abuses the Torah."[7]

Like the chants that accompanied the fixed prayers, the tunes to which the Scripture was chanted varied from location to location, since no system of notation yet existed. Thus every community developed its own set of Jewish musical traditions. More than a century before Guido of Arezzo (995-1050) instituted the modern system of notating music, Aaron ben Asher of Tiberius developed a complete system of musical accents for the Bible. These biblical accents do

not indicate precise intervals or dynamics. Instead, they convey short sound patterns and their approximate intervals. They serve as reminders of the basic musical motifs.[8] Thus, by the end of the 9th century, the chant for the Scriptures was basically set. However, since these symbols represented only approximations of musical motifs, not specific fixed intervals, the reading of the symbols could vary widely from community to community, depending on how the local precentor chose to remember and interpret the meaning of the symbols.

The Geonim probably welcomed this attempt to standardize the tune to which the Scriptures were chanted. A responsum in Machzor Vitri attributed to Natronai stated various principles of musical performance in the synagogue. Natronai acknowledged the existence of symbols which indicated the correct melodies, and claimed that these tunes were authentically Jewish, having been handed down ever since Sinai.[9]

ניתנו פסוקי טעמים ונגינות הקריה מסיני במסורת

It appears, rather, that Ben Asher chose selectively from the total musical corpus available to him,assigning only those themes he liked to the trope signs he invented. His signs preserve to this day an approximation of the actual chants used in the 8th and 9th centuries. Unfortunately, we have no way of checking to determine if these chants bear any resemblance to the chants of 300 or 600 years earlier.

It is unquestionable that the chants which did circu-

late in those days were as influenced by the music of the general society as they were by any Jewish musical tradition. Eric Werner points out that the musical traditions of the Jews of Kurdistan and Yemen, places where the Jews had little contact with their surrounding cultures, offer a striking example of what would have happened if Jewish music had been free from all assimilative influences. The music of the Jews of Yemen and Kurdistan deteriorated into "an unorganized chant, no longer resembling an art-form."[10] Their chant may be more purely "Jewish" than any we have available, but even their musical traditions were subject to the interpretations of many centuries of precentors.

Until the 7th century we have no evidence that the synagogue included any kind of choral or unison singing within its limited repertoire. Chant, with its inherent improvisatory quality, did not lend itself easily to large group singing. Instead we find records of responsive singing between the precentor and the congregation. Even the congregational responses, however, were recited quietly and individually, rather than in unison.[11] While the church developed responsive choral singing as early as the 4th century, it was not until the 7th century that we find evidence of Jewish choral singing.[12] The church also employed chant and congregational responses, but their responses were often entire prayers, not just short responsorial lines, and were sung in unison by the congregation as opposed to the Jewish practice of all the congregants responding personally each

with their own chant.

The rise of the piyyut changed this situation dramatically. While the Jews retained their tradition of responsive singing, the tunes attached to the piyyutim were melodious and not chantlike, and were well suited to unison singing of the response verses of the piyyut. Liturgical music that lent itself to group singing was a new phenomenon for the synagogue, and probably helped rekindle the congregants' enthusiasm for their worship services. As we noted in the previous chapter, the fact that the piyyutim lent themselves to this new kind of music is a prime factor in accounting for their popularity. Before we can discuss these new piyyut melodies, we must examine the prevailing Jewish attitudes towards music in general.

Even before the destruction of the Second Temple, we have some indication that vocal music was frowned upon by the religious authorities. Mishnah Sota 9:11 states "When the Sanhedrin ceased (circa 50 B.C.E.), singing ceased at wedding feasts." Following the destruction of the Temple, the leaders completely banned instrumental music, and attempted to ban the performance of, or listening to, vocal music as licentious and inappropriate. Talmud Sotah 48a records comments of Rab and Raba on the subject: "Rab said: The ear which listens to song should be torn off. Raba said: When there is song in a house, there is destruction on its threshold." Both justify this ban as a symbol of continued national mourning over the loss of the Temple.[13]

Geonim, living 700 years or so after the destruction, faced the problem of enforcing a law that was still on the books, but largely ignored by the Jewish population. As the diaspora Jewish communities became more comfortable in their surroundings, it became increasingly difficult to enforce a ban on music on the basis of an event distant both in time and emotional impact from the lives of the people. While some Amoraim cited the "evil outcome" that music would lead to, the majority of Talmudic authorities persisted in prohibiting the practice on the grounds that Jews should continue to mourn for the loss of the Temple. The Geonim recognized that this reason had lost its impact by the 8th century, and therefore relied on the earlier anti-music rationale: that it led to licentious behaviour.

It is clear that this edict was unpopular and difficult to enforce within the Jewish community. There is evidence of secular singing at weddings and banquets throughout the Talmudic and Agadic literature.[14] Even at the time of the initial ban itself the law was unenforceable. Therefore, it is all the more surprising to realize that the initial Geonic rulings on the subject were as unresponsive to the realities of Jewish life as the original Talmudic edict. R. Moses Gaon of Sura (828-836) upheld the Talmudic view that both instrumental and vocal music were forbidden. In order to enforce the ruling, he imposed sanctions, disqualifying any person engaged as a musician from acting as a witness in any legal proceeding. Playing music

was against the law, and lawbreakers could not serve as witnesses.[15] These sanctions probably had little effect on the popular practice, as is witnessed by the fact that the later Geonic responsa on the issue began to compromise the Talmudic position.

The first compromise is traceable to Hai. In a letter to the Jewish community at Cabas, Hai reminded his readers that anyone who listened to instrumental music when wine was being served was subject to excommunication.[16] Hai did not challenge Moses' position on instrumental music, but in another letter, this one to the community at Kairowan, he permitted secular singing at wedding celebrations. "It is the custom at banquets and wedding feasts to sing hymns of praise to God and songs felicitating the newlyweds....but the singing of Arabic love songs is absolutely forbidden."[17] Hai cited the authority of Mar Ukba, who in the 3rd century forbade all singing at festivities. Unlike Mar Ukba, Hai may have made a distinction between unacceptable secular songs (suggestive Arabic love songs) and acceptable secular songs (those which take on religious meaning by virtue of the context in which they are sung). Until this point, all secular music had been lumped together as intolerable. Hai opened the door for secular melodies to enter the synagogue in the guise of prayers, for this responsa can be viewed as a precedent-setting decision on the subject.

Generally, the Geonim continued to oppose any use of secular folk melodies, denouncing them for the immorality

of the lyrics originally associated with them; however, these melodies did find their way into the synagogue service. Massechet Soferim suggests that specific melodies had become associated with specific prayers.[18] It is not known for certain that the hazzan himself introduced these melodies, but he certainly was involved in the selection of the chant or melody to which each prayer was recited. Here a major conflict began. The rabbinic authorities felt that these melodies distracted the worshippers from their concentration on the prayers.[19] Their attempt to maintain a serious approach to the content of the service made them suspicious of the melodies which began to adorn the prayers. They viewed these melodies as distractions to worship, rather than as enhancements.

Saadia reinforced the general disapproval of music, although he explicitly stated that music could have a positive value in a religious setting. Hai would eventually give a specific example of the justifiable use of music. Saadia, writing earlier, when the admissibility of music in either secular or religious life was still being hotly debated, devoted a full paragraph of his Kitab al-Amanat (Book of Philosophical Doctrines and Beliefs) to the positive effect music can have upon the human soul.[20] This paragraph reflected Saadia's appreciation of the Greek and Arabic thinkers on the subject, and marked a substantial departure from the normative Jewish approach to the subject.

Maimonides gleans from both Hai and Saadia, and artic-

ulated the prevailing opinion quite clearly in a responsum concerning the admissibility of music in the Jewish community.[21]

> Music in general...is forbidden, except when it belongs to prayer which moves the soul either to joy or to sorrow....Moreover, there is no difference between the singing of Hebrew or of Arabic words. Permission or prohibition depends exclusively upon the content of the words.

Maimonides clearly made a new distinction, which shall be examined later. For some rabbis, the language in which a song was sung determined its acceptability, but for Maimonides, the content of the words themselves, not the language, made the difference.

Sefer Hasidim, a late 12th century ethical work of Judah ben Samuel heHasid, summarized the final results of the compromise process initiated by Saadia and Hai. Judah heHasid could state in clear terms, without the ambivalence found in Saadia and Maimonides, that a worshipper should openly use whichever melody helped motivate him to better understand and pray the prayers.[22]

> If you cannot find anything in the prescribed prayer, search for some melody, so that you will pray with concentration, and your heart will feel what your lips recited in prayers; for song makes the heart receptive.[23]

The Geonim never felt comfortable with music, but they did open the door for the compromise position which became the rule within the community. Even Hai admitted music into the worship service, as long as the worshippers did not pay too much attention to it, and were not distracted from their prayers by the music.[24] Generally, however,

the compromise was towards the creation of a sharp line of distinction between secular and sacred music. Secular music was forbidden and religious music was permitted.

We know that the main body of Jewish music that existed from early times was that of the simple prayer chants and biblical cantillation. Where did these acceptable melodies come from? They were either newly composed, or adapted from existing church and secular melodies. These secular and newly composed melodies entered the sphere of Jewish religious music because the worshippers allowed, indeed, insisted that they be used as such. This reality was not readily accepted by the religious authorities.

Hai Gaon, who allowed for the possibility that Jews could under certain conditions listen to secular music, clarified that the music that was prohibited was the music of the goyim, not Jewish music.[25]

. . . לא על שירות של ישראל אמרו, אלא על דברי הגויים.

It should be remembered, however, that in Hai's eyes, the only music he considered "Jewish" was that associated with worship. The tradition of Jewish secular songs did not emerge until the 11th and 12th centuries.[26] Therefore, for the Geonim, secular music meant non-Jewish music.

There are no Geonic responsa that directly connect the hazzan with the debate on music. There is, however, an informative responsum of Alfasi on the subject. An inquiry was sent to him concerning a hazzan who was in the habit of chanting prayers to melodies borrowed from the Moslems.

Alfasi responded that if the precentor persisted in this practice, he should be removed from office.[27]

ש"ץ שמוציא מפיו דברים שאינם הגונים כגון שהיציא מפיו דבר נבלה ומרנן בשירי ישמעאל מסלקין אותו . . . .

This fear of foreign melodic influence did not end with the Geonic period, nor with Alfasi. We quoted earlier from the 13th century Sefer Hasidim, indicating its approval of the use of any melody that might better motivate the soul towards prayer. Evidently, the author did not include melodies known to be of non-Jewish origin in this category; later in the same book, there is stated a warning to mothers not to sing Hebrew lullabies with gentile melodies to their children. Instead, they should use Jewish songs that praise God.[28]

Hai, Alfasi and Judah Hehasid all displayed a naive attitude toward the sources of the Jewish music they did approve of. As we noted earlier, the only "authentic" Jewish music was non-melodic chant, and even that could not be considered purely Jewish. It too was heavily influenced by the cultures in which it grew. Every local community had its own traditional Jewish music. As seen in an earlier chapter, a hazzan was warned by Maimonides not to try to change the liturgical and musical customs of the community that employed him. This attested to the fact that Jews, wherever they resided, borrowed melodies from their neighbors, and fit their prayer texts to the tunes. Within a short time, the new tunes were considered to be real "Jewish"

music by those that sung them.[29] It is therefore impossible to label some melodies as Jewish and permissible, and others as foreign and forbidden.

We noted in our discussion on the piyyut that soon after Yannai, the payyetanim began to incorporate Arabic rhythmic modes into their poetry. It had been difficult for the hazzan to apply the more popular, rhythmic melodies that already existed in the general culture of the 5th century to the early piyyutim which lacked a fixed number of syllables or rhyme pattern in their verses.[30] As Hebrew poetry began imitating Arabic poetic forms and rhythms, the melodies circulating in the general culture became more easily applicable to these texts. Rhythmical melody, synonymous with Arabic music, became the norm for synagogue music, and the hazzanim strove to find music to fit the texts and poetic forms of the new piyyutim.

It is unclear whether payyetanim wrote piyyutim with a specific melody in mind, or whether the piyyut was first written and then assigned a melody. Several scholars cited the fact that many piyyutim have been found with the proscription telling the precentor to sing the poem to the melody of (la-han) of well known Arabic or Spanish songs.[31] Others suggested that hazzanim wrote piyyutim to fit melodies which they wanted to popularize with their congregants.[32] On the other hand, some scholars note that as early as the 9th century, complaints were levied at the hazzan, maintaining that he had changed the text of the

prayers in order to make them fit his melodies.[33] This would suggest that the texts existed first, and the hazzanim struggled to find melodies which fit them, finding the need to change part of the text when the melody did not fit easily. An exception to this debate was the halachic piyyutim which emerged as a response to religious persecution. All agree that these were written without melodic forethought.

Similarly, scholars disagree concerning the reasons hazzanim brought in outside melodies instead of composing their own. Clearly, the burden of composing new melodies weekly was a great one. Sendry suggests that since the early hazzanim had little musical training, their musical tastes were at a low level; at best, they could borrow melodies they heard in the taverns and streets and adapt them for synagogue use.[34] A.W. Binder disagreed, stating that "the more original a hazzan was, the more likely he was to bring non-Jewish music into the service. He appreciated the beauty of the melody, no matter what the original lyrics were."[35]

Unwittingly, the Geonim played a role in allowing non-Jewish melodies to enter the synagogue service. Natronai's compromise on the piyyut did not take into consideration the fact that no melodies existed within the Jewish tradition to which these piyyutim could be sung. Where did they expect the melodies to come from? They also failed to recognize that part of the reason the populace was so attached

to the piyyut was the very fact that it was so often sung to popular melodies from the surrounding non-Jewish culture. Thus, the Geonic inability to come to terms with the reality of the people's love for music actually allowed new melodies to enter the synagogue unchecked. No real compromise on the sources of Jewish music was ever reached. The Geonim accepted those melodies that were used for religious purposes. They failed to recognize that the sources for those melodies were the same non-Jewish secular songs they had forbidden in their other responsa. By the time the religious authorities dealt with the reality of the situation as Alfasi attempted to do, it was too late to influence or control the phenomena in any way.

The only criteria the Geonim were able to objectively apply on the selection of appropriate music, was the language used in singing the song. Since no Hebrew secular music existed, the Geonim, like so many 20th century Jews, assume that if a text was in Hebrew it must have some inherent religious value. All songs sung to non-Hebrew words were lumped together as secular and licentious, but any melody was considered permissible if sung to Hebrew words.

Hazzanim were forbidden to sing any song in Arabic, even at a party or social gathering. A responsum usually ascribed to R. Hananiel ben Hushiel (990-1050) stated that the prohibition against music articulated in the Talmud applied specifically to non-Hebrew songs.[36] דגמרא שאינו בלשון הקדש ביו דמנא ובין דפומא מנא לן דאסור וכן חזן המנגן בלשון ישמעאל ....ואסיקנא דאפילו במשתה אסור

According to this responsum, it was equally forbidden to listen to non-Hebrew songs as it was to sing them. Probably, the Geonic stricture forbade the hazzan to sing Arabic songs in Arabic, but did not refer to an Arabic melody that had been borrowed and adapted to Hebrew lyrics.

Maimonides showed a more mature understanding of the issue. He recognized that not all Hebrew lyrics were acceptable, and his remarks suggest that Jewish secular music had begun to emerge by his time. As stated earlier, Maimonides' official position was little more than a restatement of the Geonic and Alfasi position, but acknowledged the reality of the situation by stating that it was not the origin of a song, nor its language that determined its acceptability, but its content.[37] If the text expressed a noble theme, then it could be sung, no matter what language or melody was used. If the thematic matter was vulgar, even the Hebrew language could not excuse its usage.

This realistic and enforceable position of Maimonides stood in contradiction to the positions of the Geonim on the issue. The Geonic position revealed a blind spot and a lack of understanding on the importance of music in the people's lives. Unfortunately, Maimonides' position was never widely circulated. It remained unpublished until 1873.[38]

As Maimonides evidently recognized, law could not arrest the operation of human instincts, particularly in the area of music. In the face of consistent rabbinic opposi-

tion, the role of music in the lives of the Jewish people increased dramatically after the rise of Islam. Despite the halachic and philosophical objections, musical performances in the synagogue in constant interplay with the rise of the piyyut, assumed a focal point in community life. Some hazzanim and local authorities attempted to find legal loopholes through which they could justify the adaptation of foreign music for synagogue use. The responsa of Hai lent themselves to lenient interpretation.[39] Most communities simply ignored the Talmudic, Geonic and later prohibitions on the use of music, as is evidenced by the great wealth of musical material which entered the synagogue and Jewish life during this period.

The Jewish layman's chief source of music was the synagogue; when they went there on the Sabbath, they expected their hazzan both to lead the prayers properly, and to entertain them. The people looked forward to this refreshing interlude from their hard lives, and sought cantors with vocal virtuosity and musical creativity. They were not concerned with the sources of the melodies sung by the hazzan, as long as they were enjoyable. Thus the hazzan's vocal endowment began to outweigh in importance all the other qualifications set by the halachic authorities. Music became an increasingly important part of the synagogue service and the people's lives, as reflected by its rising value in Islamic culture at large.

This ultimately led to charges that the hazzanim abused

their positions. Whether true or not, the hazzan's influence certainly spread, as did his power within the community. Documents suggest that in some communities, the hazzan became more powerful and influential than the local rabbinic authority. Smaller communities often felt it was more important to hire a hazzan than any other communal or synagogue official. The hazzanim recognized that music and its hazzanic performance served as a motivation for synagogue attendance sometimes even greater than did the obligation to pray. While the music often made the obligation feel less burdensome to the congregants, some hazzanim omitted what some considered essential liturgical staples to make more time for piyyutim and their musical performance.[40] Later writers would berate the hazzan and denigrate his office because of this and other abuses, suggesting that in some areas they had become widespread.

It is unquestionable that the rise in stature of the office of the hazzan was primarily related to his ability as a creator and performer of Jewish music. Originally, music was only a marginal part of the hazzan's responsibilities; the rise of the piyyut and subsequent influence of Islam helped make music the cornerstone of his profession. By the 10th century, we have witnessed the complete metamorphosis of the hazzan, from synagogue beadle to sheliach tzibbur to a musician and entertainer. The sheliach tzibbur role was never lost, but took second place in the minds of the congregants to the hazzan's abilities as musician.

Endnotes

to

Chapter Four

1. Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, Vol. 7, p. 126.

2. Sendry, Music of the Jews in the Diaspora, p. 71.

3. Ibid., p. 226.

4. Ibid., p. 227.

5. Idelsohn, Jewish Music, p. 35.

6. B. Talmud Megillah 32a.

7. B. Talmud Sanhedrin 101a.

8. Idelsohn, Jewish Music, p. 69.

9. R. Natronai Gaon, cited in Machzor Vitry, ed. Hurwitz Nurnberg, 1923, p. 91.

10. Eric Werner, "Review of the Articles: Music and Hazzan Encyclopedia Judaica," Musica Judaica 2, p. 94.

11. Eric Werner, From Generation to Generation, p. 81.

12. See Baron, Social/Religious History, Vol. 7, p. 125 and Werner, "The Doxology" HUCA 19 (1946), pp. 307, 349.

13. For a more complete discussion of the ban on music imposed after the destruction of the Second Temple, see Idelsohn, Jewish Music, Chapter 5.

14. Sendry, Music, p. 73.

15. Teshuvot HaGeonim, ed. Assaf, Vol. 1, #21.

16. Ginzei Kedem, ed. Lewin, Vol. 5, p. 34.

וכל שכן במשתה אנשים כי זה איסור גמור וכל מי שפורץ בדבר זה
אנו מנדין אתו בין על ידי נשים ובין על ידי אנשים...

17. For similar texts see Ginzei Kedem, ed. Lewin, Vol. 5, pp. 52-54; Teshuvot HaGeonim, ed. Assaf, #193; Teshuvot HaGeonim, ed. Harkavy, #60.

18. Soferim 14:9 ואומר שמע ישראל פסוק ראשון בנעימה ואף העם עונין אותו אחריו

19. Landman, The Cantor: An Historical Perspective, p. 10.

20. Sendry, Music, p. 57.

21. Werner, "Doxology," HUCA 19, p. 314.

22. Sefer Hasidim 158 כשתתפלל אומר אותן באותו נגון שנעים ומתוק בעינך, ותתפלל תפילתך בכוונה.

23. Sefer Hasidim 11

24. Otzar HaGeonim, ed. Lewin, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 30. ואפילו בשעה שמנגנת אם יכול בלבו לתפלתו בעניו שאינו שומע אותה ואינו משים לבו אליה מותר

25. Ginzei Kedem, ed. Lewin, Vol. 5, p. 34.

26. Gradenwitz, Music of Israel, p. 121.

27. Alfasi, Responsa 281.

28. Sefer Hasidim 238.

29. Landman, Cantor, p. 13.

30. Kahle, The Cairo Geniza, p. 27.

31. Sendry, Music, p. 234.

32. Notes from an interview with Dr. Max Wohlberg.

33. Schlessinger, "Hazzan," Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. 6, p. 286.

34. Sendry, Music, p. 233.

35. A.W. Binder, "Jewish Music," The Jewish People, Past and Present, Vol. 3, p. 10.

36. Shaarei Teshuva, ed. Chasan, No. 152.

37. Teshuvot HaRambam, ed. Freiman, No. 56, pp. 338-339.

38. Baron, Social/Religious History, p. 206.

39. Landman, Cantor, p. 12.

40. Sendry, Music, p. 235.

CONCLUSIONS

We have noted the development of the role of the hazzan since his emergence as the synagogue beadle in predestruction times. The original usage of the term hazzan carried none of the responsibilities or implications which the same term held seven centuries later. The prayer functions of the modern hazzan were carried out by the sheliach tzibbur in his role as voluntary communal precentor. The position of sheliach tzibbur rotated among members of the congregation, and only minimal standards defined who could serve in that capacity. The sheliach tzibbur served a priestly function, representing the community in prayer before God. He was also the prayer leader, leading the congregations in their recitation of the simple prayers.

At the same time that the liturgy was growing in complexity, Jews were becoming less literate both in terms of their Hebrew language ability, and in terms of their knowledge of Jewish texts. It became more difficult to find volunteers within the ranks of the congregations who were still able to lead the worship service, and therefore became necessary to appoint a professional sheliach tzibbur, who did know the prayers and could lead the worship. While some communities appointed professional precentors, others turned to their synagogue beadle, the hazzan for leadership. Because of his responsibilities to the synagogue, he was constantly in attendance, and was more likely to know all the worship traditions that had evolved.

By the late Talmudic period we see some evidence of the term hazzan occasionally used in reference to the precentor; by the early Geonic period, the terms hazzan and sheliach tzibbur have become interchangeable. With the professionalization of the position, more stringent requirements were developed for those desiring the position.

The role of hazzan was further enhanced by the rise of the piyyut. There is evidence that piyyutim existed prior to the Justinian liturgical persecutions, and one can assume the precentor would have sung them for the congregation. But the hazzan became intricately involved in the creation and performance of piyyutim when they became a religious necessity, due to the liturgical restrictions imposed on the synagogue by the Byzantines.

It is clear that the institutions, piyyut and hazzan, owe much to each other in terms of their development and popularity. The emergence of piyyutim which replaced prayers or sermons required that the hazzan learn and perform them. The piyyutim lent themselves to more interesting musical interpretation than many of the prayers did. The hazzan's interpretation of the piyyutim increased his own popularity with the populace, and at the same time increased their affection for the piyyut. The Islamic conquest led to the rescinding of the religious persecutions, thereby making piyyutim unnecessary. However, both the piyyut and the hazzan had become basic institutions of synagogue life beloved by the public, and they demanded that

the hazzan continue to compose and perform piyyutim. This put him in direct confrontation with the religious authorities who deemed that the practice of piyyutim should cease, since they were no longer necessary. The issue was further complicated by the strong influence Arabic meter and rhyme had upon the piyyut, and that Arabic folk melodies had upon the hazzan.

Had it not been for the rise of Islam and its strong impact upon Jewish culture, the controversy over the piyyut probably would have died. By Geonic times, in many communities the hazzan had become a performer of piyyutim who was valued more for his vocal technique than for his ability to serve as representative of the community in prayer before God. The Geonic attack on the hazzan was largely directed at his role as musician. Since the destruction of the Temple, Judaism held an ambivalent attitude towards music in general but came to accept vocal music in the service of God. In his effort to please the congregation, the hazzan often chose music for its entertainment value, rather than for its ability to move the soul in prayer. Despite Geonic warnings to cease importing foreign melodies into the worship service, the practice flourished. This reality forced the Geonim to compromise; they eventually came to accept foreign melodies sung to Hebrew texts in the praise of God. The Geonic period saw music established as the key element of hazzanic popularity. The hazzan was now seen in popular eyes more as a musician who

entertained them than a sheliach tzibbur who represented them in prayer. Religious authorities have always found it difficult to impose change on popular conceptions, and the role of the hazzan that emerged during the Geonic period has been sustained to this day.

The emphasis on musical performance rather than religious sincerity often led to abuses of the hazzan's position. Certainly, many Geonim continued to view the use of foreign melodies as an abuse. The public often regarded the hazzanim as religious authorities. But hazzanic training was far from standardized, and often gullible hazzanim spread superstitious customs. Natronai and Hai both commented on the custom of one particular hazzan who thought the Kiddush wine had beneficial medicinal effects. After reciting Kiddush, he would pour the wine on congregants' hands who would then rub it in their eyes.[1]

By the end of the Geonic period, musical ability had become the principal qualification for the hiring of a hazzan; religious knowledge of hazzanim subsequently declined. Not all communities suspended the religious and personal standards outlined in chapters 1 and 2, but Geonic and later literature suggest that a substantial number of hazzanim did lack religious training. Yehuda Harisi, a Sephardic scholar and poet of the 13th century, visited the community of Mossul in Mesopotamia. He published a report of his visit to the local synagogue in his Sefer Tachkemoni, which included a satiric description of the "artistry" of the

local hazzan.

> I counted in the Tefillah more than a hundred clear and evident mistakes....He begins with the hundred benedictions which trip glibly from his tongue in a memorized fashion....He covered his face with the tallit, but not out of humility. He stood in haughtiness and increased his swaying movements. He began to recite piyyutim and songs, all of them broken, halting and blind. They had neither rhyme nor meter. They were without structure or content. And he dragged out his piyyutim; some of the people remained seated and some slept and reclined. But some of them fled and did not return for the prayers. When he had finished his piyyutim, he turned back to complete the Tefillah, and there was not a man in the synagogue because the whole congregation could be found in their homes, asleep.[2]

In our own times we may note similar abuses by hazzanim of their position. The hazzan who emerged primarily as sheliach tzibbur only retained that as his most important role until the rise of the piyyut. Since that time, that primary function of the hazzan has often taken a secondary position to his role as musician.

Current disaffection with the hazzan is probably traceable to two developments examined in this study. The victory of the position that the hazzan could represent not only the unlettered, but the entire community in prayer, has allowed for a de facto transference of the responsibility to pray with kavana from the individual worshipper to the hazzan. This decision has permitted Jews to feel that the sheliach tzibbur can legally fulfill their personal obligation to be present during the recital of all the prayers in the service. When Jews did pray, they did so as individuals; rarely were prayers recited in unison as a group.

This also led to individuals entering and leaving the synagogue as they completed their personal prayers.

The change in the popular view of the hazzan from the original role of precentor to the later role of musician also bears responsibility for abuses that have lasted to our day. When the communal expectations emphasize one's musicianship more than one's Jewish knowledge and ability to represent the community in prayer before God, hazzanim simply live up to the demands placed upon them. Jews have made the hazzan into a performer, rather than a worshipper. Though we have no halachic records indicating that the expectations of the hazzan were officially broadened to reflect the dominant role of music in the hazzan's responsibilities, Jewish popular conviction clearly conveyed that implication to the generations of hazzanim.

The current desire for unified congregational participation in the singing and reciting of prayers stands in direct contrast to the dominant trends of Jewish liturgical history, as evidenced by this history of the hazzan. While there is obviously a tradition of the hazzan as a performer whom Jews flocked to listen to, there are few records of congregations singing in unison anything more than an occasional response to a piyyut or prayer. Unison group singing or recitation seems alien to Jewish tradition. Similarly, the current desire for our religious professionals to become more group leaders than priests also stands in contrast to the dominant trends in Jewish worship. The sheli-

ach tzibbur had been known as a prayer leader who prayed on the community's behalf. He did not have to inspire the community to pray; rather he had to be inspired by the community, so that he could represent them appropriately in his prayers.

This study shows that the wishes for a more unified liturgical participation are not rooted in a history of Jewish communal worship, at least not in the period stretching from the destruction of the Second Temple until the early 10th century. We must recognize this fact, and begin a search for contemporary or earlier justification for the value of such unified participation. The communal worship needs of 20th century Jews in secular America may be quite different from the communal needs that created the existing models. The sense of unified community was unquestioned in pre-Emancipation Judaism, and therefore was not a need that worship had to fulfill. However, though we find little sympathy for our desire for community in this history of Jewish prayer leadership, we should not stop our search for new liturgical models of participation. The hazzan became a musician simply because the Jewish community demanded that the synagogue provide them the enjoyment they could not find in their daily lives. They found that enjoyment in listening to the hazzan's singing.

Today's Jews have a need to feel that they belong; they desire community. The role of the hazzan in the future will have to change to respond to these new demands. If it

does not, the position will become anachronistic, merely a fulfillment of needs that no longer exist. One would hope that hazzanim of vision will emerge to reclaim the past glory of the hazzan as a sheliach tzibbur who motivated Jews to attend the synagogue to share in an experience they could not find elsewhere.

Endnotes

to

Conclusions

1. Otzar HaGeonim, ed. Lewin, Vol. 1, p. 97
   וזה שמקדש ומטעים לצבור משום רפואה מקדש ונותן להם כדי ליתן ממנו על עיניהם.....לא שמענו מי שמשים את כוס הקידוש בלילי שבת על גבי עיניו אלא ודאי בשתייה.
2. Sefer Tachkemoni, trans. Victor Reichert (Jerusalem: A.H. Cohen, 1973), pp. 112-114.

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