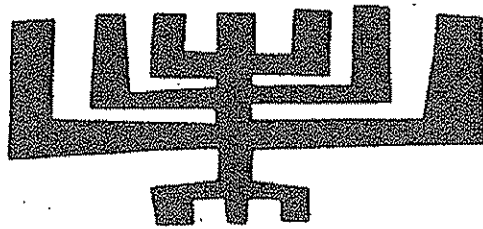


ISSN: 0147-7536

Musica Judaica



Journal of the American Society
for Jewish Music

VOLUME X, No. 1

(5479 / 1987-88)

A POSSIBLE INFLUENCE OF TRADITIONAL CHANT ON A SYNAGOGUE MOTET OF SALOMONE ROSSI

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IN MARCH of 1987 I was engaged in research at the "Phonothèque," the National Sound Archives of the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem. At the time I was seeking different versions of the *Kedushah* according to the Italian rite, transcribing chants from tapes made in 1950's by Leo Levi. The Levi Collection contains over six hundred traditional melodies from the Jewish communities of Italy, most of which were recorded under the auspices of the National Center for Musical Research at the St. Caecelia Academy in Rome (see Levi 1956:5).

Purely by chance I stumbled on the chant for Psalm 80, verse 4: *Elohim hashivenu*, used in the Italian rite for the *gellilah* ('the rolling up of the Torah scroll') ceremony (see my transcription in Ex. 1). I was immediately struck by the similarity of its melody, which resembled the well-known motet based on the same text by the early Baroque Jewish-Italian composer, Salomone Rossi (1587-1628) (see Ex. 2). The similarity was especially surprising since nowhere in the literature concerning Rossi's synagogue music is there any indication that he was influenced in any way by traditional *nusach*.

The composer himself, in the preface to the 1622/23 publication of his synagogue motets, stated that

he was making a complete break with the past, creating "something new in the land... the Lord... has put new songs into my mouth" (Rikko 1973:III, 41 and 7); yet, nowhere does he mention the traditional chants of his community. Indeed, Rossi's friend, Rabbi Leone da Modena (1571-1648), urged him to create a new corpus of synagogue music modeled after the motets of the church. Leone was embarrassed by the "primitive" quality of Jewish liturgical music, and was eager to institute reforms so that "arrogant opponents [will no longer] heap scorn on the Hebrew people" (Rikko 1973:III, 22; quoted in Harrán 1987:6).

The consensus of twentieth-century scholars, who have studied this music, is that Rossi and Rabbi da Modena were successful in their reforms. In his pioneering study on Jewish music, Abraham Zvi Idelsohn (1929:199-201) stated that Rossi's compositions "for the synagogue have not the slightest sound of Jewishness...[nor are] traditional modes or motives...to be found in [them]. Neither did he utilize any traditional melodic line as theme or *cantus firmus*." The musicologists who followed Idelsohn's footsteps took essentially the same position. Peter Gradenwitz (1949:138) wrote that Rossi's "music is conceived in the style of

the madrigal period, apparently without the composer's ever using ancient Hebrew motives or chants." Aron Marko Rothmüller (1954:98) continued to echo this sentiment: "It appears that Rossi did not make use of any traditional melodies in his compositions, but composed quite freely..."

The denial continues even in more recent studies. Alfred Sendrey (1970:276) wrote: "It is the unanimous consensus of musical experts and laymen alike that Rossi's music lacks any traditional elements; there is not the slightest reminiscence of *nussah*, cantillation or of the Biblical accents (*ta'amim*)..." And the Rossi scholar, Joel Newman (Rikko 1973: 42), called *Hashirim asher lish'lomo* "a collection of original polyphonic settings of Jewish liturgical texts, compositions which neither quoted nor alluded to the age-old prayer modes of the synagogue (the *nussah*)."

Indeed, the primary musical influence on Rossi's synagogue motets seems to have come from the church music of the time. In a recent article (Jacobson 1988:4), I cited a number of stylistic influ-

ences from church motets by Christian composers who were contemporaries of Rossi, including one instance of a shared melody for Rossi's and Lodovico da Viadana's (1564-1627) settings of Psalm 137, and even a possible model for the setting in question (Psalm 80) from a motet by Orlando di Lasso (1532-1594). But this chant from the Levi Collection seems to be the first evidence uncovered to date which indicates that Rossi may indeed have been influenced by traditional synagogue melodies. However, the connection is not strong enough to call Rossi's setting a "harmonization" of the synagogue melody. His motet is in no way comparable to the nineteenth-century four-part settings by Salomon Sulzer (1804-1890) and Louis Lewandowski (1821-1894) of the traditional liturgical chants of their communities. When we compare the *canto* part of Rossi's motet with my transcription of the chant (Exs. 3a-e), we can see that they are only loosely related. It is clear that Rossi treated the chant quite freely, expanding it melodically, and leading it in new directions for the sake of its dramatic and harmonic structure.

EXAMPLE I: Transcription of *Elohim hashivenu*
from the Leo Levi Collection (Y 1301/LL12/170)¹

freely

4/4 E - lo - - - him, ha - shi - ve - - - nu,
ve - ha - - - er pa - - - ne - cha, ve - ni - va - she - - - a.

7.8: E - lo - him tse - va - - - ot, ha - shi - ve - - - nu,

ha - - - er pa - - - ne - cha, ve - ni - va - she - - - a.

7.20: A - do - nai e - lo - him tse - va - - - ot, ha - shi - ve - - - nu,

ha - - - er pa - - - ne - cha, ve - ni - va - she - - - a.

EXAMPLE 2: The *canto* part of Rossi's *Elohim hasivenu*²

אֲרֻבַּע קוֹלוֹת

מִיָּד מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְהִשְׁמָע וְהַרְאֵנוּ וְהַשְׁמָע וְהַרְאֵנוּ

וְהַשְׁמָע וְהַרְאֵנוּ

וְהַשְׁמָע וְהַרְאֵנוּ

וְהַשְׁמָע וְהַרְאֵנוּ

3e

וְנוֹשְׁעָה

ה' אֱלֹהִים

צְבֹאוֹת

הָאֵרֶץ וְשׁוֹכְנֶיהָ

בְּנֵיךְ

EXAMPLES 3a-e: A comparison of Rossi's motet and the chant

first phrase

chant

E - lo - - - - - him

mm. 1-7 (Rikko edition)

Rossi

E - lo - - - - - him

second phrase

chant

ha - shi - ve - - nu

mm. 8-14

Rossi

ha - - shi - ve - - - - - nu

third and fourth phrases

chant

ve - ha - - er pa - - ne - cha ve -

c

Rossi

mm. 15-24

ve - ha - er pa - ne - cha ve -

ni - va - she - a

ni - - - va - she - a

fourth phrase

chant

ve - ni - va - she - a

d

Rossi

mm. 45-52

ve - ni - va - she - - - - - - - - - a

fourth phrase

chant

ve - ni - va - she - a

e

Rossi

mm. 53-61

A - do - nai E - - - - - lo - him

It is possible, of course, that the influence may have moved in the opposite direction. Perhaps, in the middle of the seventeenth century, after the practice of polyphonic singing in the Italian synagogues had ceased, the Jewish congregations in Mantua and Venice had begun to sing a chant that was a

simplified monophonic version of Rossi's motet. While we shall probably never know for sure who influenced whom, there are several indications which suggest that the chant is the older source.

The motet is unique among the thirty-three in the collection, in that it is the most old-fashioned, in the

sense of pre-Baroque melismatic polyphony. It is also the only motet wherein a melodic theme reappears three times, each time in a different setting. This would seem to suggest that Rossi had employed a pre-compositional melodic idea, one which he repeated in several variations, to insure that it would be recognized by his listeners.

Now, as was mentioned above, the opening *bicinium* of this motet (Ex. 4) bears a striking musical resemblance to another, very different motet, *Cum essem parvulus* by

Orlando di Lasso (Ex. 5). One could argue that this resemblance might indicate that Rossi had copied Lasso's head-motive, which was, in turn, perpetuated in oral tradition by the Italian synagogues. One might also infer that Lasso's treatment of that head-motif was known to Rossi, influencing him (either consciously or subconsciously) to alter the pre-existing synagogue chant to resemble the polyphonic form of the motet by his older colleague.

EXAMPLE 4: Rossi, *Elohim hashivenu* (mm. 1-7)

EXAMPLE 5: Lasso, *Cum essem parvulus* (mm. 1-4)³

Based on the evidence at hand, we are not in a position to state without reservation the direction this interaction took, whether the traditional chant inspired the motet or the motet gave birth to a new synagogue chant. Nonetheless, it is clear that, in either case, their

striking similarity sheds new light on the activities of Salomone Rossi. It is to be hoped that more research will be carried out utilizing the Leo Levi Collection, particularly in transcribing the melodies and comparing them to the synagogue motets of Salomone Rossi.

Notes

1. Courtesy of the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem.

2. Courtesy of the Hebrew Union College Library, Cincinnati.

3. Orlando di Lasso, *Sämtliche Werke*, 15:72.

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