

Musikgeschichte: Länder – Regionen – Städte

Joachim Braun

The Musical Landscape in Israel/Palestine 3,000 Years Ago and Today

I

Recently I became aware of two new German words, probably without adequate translation into other languages – “*Geschichtsaufbereitung*” and “*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.” In Germany the terms are applied while dealing with the periods of Nazi Germany and the GDR. They can, however, be applied to the re-evaluation of historiography of broader periods of nations and states. We in Israel, facing similar tendencies, apply them in our Eastern time account while dealing with some three mil-lenia. For the historiography of Israel – and I mean “Israel” in a broader sense covering the culture and people of ancient Israel/Palestine, the Jewish Diaspora and the modern state of Israel – this was made possible only because of, and in the framework of, the independent state of Israel, when the necessary national consciousness and national self-confidence was acquired. Self-reconsideration of history was hardly possible for an oppressed people on the threshold of the great cultures and states.

The central problem of musical historiography of the ancient world is the matter of sources. Years ago, in most fields scholars surmounted their reverential regard for the Holy Scripture and it became clear that the primary source for a historiography of ancient Israel/Palestine is archaeology. Musicology, as usual, stayed behind.

From the early days of musicology, both Jewish and Christian scholars were relying mainly on one and only source, the Holy Scripture. In 1980 the *NGD*, as early as Abraham Partaleone and Michael Praetorius in the early 17th century, briefly mentions the importance of archaeology and presents six pages on Ancient Israel/Palestine *in toto* based on Biblical quotations and devoted to the Biblical tradition of the Jerusalem Temple. Even some years ago, scholars (Hans Seidel, Amnon Shiloah) still consider the Bible the principal and richest source of knowledge on the musical culture of ancient Israel/Palestine.

As researchers of the past in a certain field of human activity, we are interested in the musical landscape, the “Platz im Leben” of music of Ancient Israel/Palestine, rather than in the music theology or music philosophy of the Old Testament. What part of the early oral tradition was delivered unchanged and what was changed, what was written down and later changed or subject to censorship – all this is mainly a question of future research. Only rare examples from the Old Testament prove the

process of change in the sense of historical reality, as for example, the two parallel passages in 2. Sam 6:5 and 1. Chr 13:8. Here an orgiastic musical event, accompanied by wood and metal clappers, rattles, drums and lyres (according to the first description), was changed or censored to a regular liturgical musical performance (singing with lyres, trumpets, drums and cymbals) – in the second. The picture of the entire musical landscape of ancient Israel/Palestine appears in new light when based on material relicts. This is, for example, the case of the “kinnor” and “nevel.” On the basis of archaeological evidence, the two musical instruments now have to be interpreted as lyres which means the end of the legend on King David’s harp.

The contradiction of biblical imaginative reality and historical facts reaches its heights in the case of the musical culture of the Babylonian/Persian and early Hellenistic I Period, or the so-called Period of the Second Temple. We know from general historians that for this period the situation of sources is excellent and the circumstances for cultural and economical developments were especially favorable. Historians of music gladly accepted this general situation for their particular field. And, indeed, such a picture of musical splendor and grandeur, liturgical and ceremonial parade emerges from written sources – the Books of Esra and Nehemia. These books tell us about a surprising number of cult-musicians which returned from the exile, huge orchestras and choirs, huge processions of singers and musicians under the guidance of Esra and Nehemia. The Mishna and Talmud add details on the type and numbers of musical instruments of the Temple orchestra. Musicologists accepted this information and on their part added details on the construction of the instruments. But the historical reality looks different: we are confronted with a surprising lacuna of at least 300 years in archaeological evidence as regards the musical culture in general, and especially the musical liturgy. Between the rich finds of the Iron Age and the Hellenistic II/Roman Age we may hardly consider a handful of finds relevant for the musical culture of the Babylonian/Persian and Hellenistic I Period.

This does not mean that we have to deny the Biblical evidence on music as a totality; there certainly are cases where we may see a mutual confirmation of sources, at least on the surface: the absence of the lute, for example, from the archaeological layers of the Iron Age to the Hellenistic/Roman Age coincides with the Biblical text, which has no name for this instrument. Now it is possible to disclose the undeniable conflict of Biblical texts and archaeological evidence: from the territory of ancient Israel/Palestine there are at our disposal some 700 finds with musical meaning, and modern archeological research has reached a level which allows to draw the general picture of Israel/Palestine’s musical scenery.

Music in this area, as other aspects of social life, was governed by the phenomenon of “das Ungleichzeitige im Gleichzeitigen,” to use the wording of Helga Weippert, or in regard to music, I would rather say “*the heterogeneous in the homogeneous*,” i. e. heterogeneous ethno-religious musical units in a homogeneous Levantine musical landscape. The mosaic of the musical landscape was created synchronously by different diachronic historical cultural levels of musical culture. In a historical sequence this musical picture may be delineated as follows.

The oldest group of inhabitants which we can identify from a socio-musical point of view belongs to the *Natufian Stone Age* (12th-8th mill. BC) and appeared during the Neolithic Agrarian Revolution. It is confirmed by the work-cult-jewellery-sound syncretism of sound-producing tools – string-rattles (10th mill. BC, Illustration 1), bull-roarers. In the 4th mill. BC the Acoustical/Organological Revolution occurred: in the Near East and in ancient Israel/Palestine in particular, complicated chordophones (harps and lutes) and membranophones appeared and the first signs of musical active shamanism and individual professional virtuosity may be detected.



Illustration 1: Female skeleton-fragment with fox-tusk string-rattle around the hip bone. Ha-Yonim Cave (North Israel), about 10,000 BC, in situ (with the kind permission of the Israel Antiquity Department).

In the second large period, the *Bronze Age* (late 4th – end of 2nd mill. BC), Canaanite culture shows signs of early urbanization, and rich archaeological finds confirm a high degree of musical development. The main local traits are connected to the beginning of an autochthone tradition of mass-performance: the mass-use of cult clay-rattles (avoided by the Biblical text), individual forms of musical instruments and performance practices of string and wind instruments (lutes, lyres and reed double-pipes) advanced for the Near East professional and folk forms of performance. A great part of the musical terminology of the Old Testament was born at this time in North Canaan, Ugarit. Along with the two neighbouring great ancient musical cultures – the Mesopotamian and Egyptian – a third entity is now attested to on the East shores of

the Mediterranean Sea from the Sinai to Ugarit, the Canaanite or Levantine musical culture.



Illustration 2: Terra-cotta cult stand with depictions of five musicians: a double-pipe player (full-size), and four bust-figures with lyre, double-pipe, cymbals and drum. Ashkelon, 11th-10th cent. BC (with the kind permission of the Israel Antiquity Department).

During the *Iron Age* (1200-586 BC) along the shores dominated the Philistine and Phoenician cultures, in the hinterland and highland the Kingdoms of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Judah and Israel ruled. At the initial stage of monotheism, however, and at least until Hellenistic-Roman times, the orgiastic Canaanite musical tradition was a considerable part of musical life. Material relicts from the Iron Age of Ancient Israel/Palestine confirm the presence of a multitude of different religions and cults, different ethnic traditions and languages, different stages of historical and socio-political development and different musics. There was hardly one dominating Judaeon/Israelite musical culture, an impression the Biblical texts may have created. The musical culture was rather a colorful mosaic, created by a number of local musical cultures. As result of a process of acculturation, however, on the very restricted territory of Israel/Palestine an autochthon culture emerged, which presents the musical landscape of ancient Israel/Palestine. The cult stand from Ashdod (11th century BC, Illustration 2), for example, is so closely related to different traditions that it was interpreted as depicting Philistine cult-musician, was compared with the passage from 1. Sam 10:5-6 and now by latest research may be explained as an early – if not first – depiction of the Cybele cult. Local lyre players and female singers were highly regarded in the entire Near East. They excelled as priestly musicians over the entire country although with different features in each sub-culture. In the 9th-7th century BC there was a general diminishing of the number of strings of the string instruments, which seems to indicate some kind of musical “ars nova” in Israel/Palestine. Mass-instruments, as clay rattles, were distributed over the entire country, as was the reed double-pipe. The birth of the *zumra*-type instruments, however, could be detected only in the Edomite culture, but soon were accepted over the entire country, as the round frame-drums. The lute is absent from Biblical texts and is completely absent from the Bronze Age to Hellenistic times. The total absence of the harp remains an unanswered question, while the absence of the lute, parallel to the absence of cymbals, may be attributed to the increasing pressure of orthodox monotheistic circles. It is a picture of heterogeneous ethnic/national musical sub-cultures in a larger area of a homogeneous Levantine musical landscape.

As mentioned, for the *Babylonian-Persian Period* (6th-4th century BC) we are confronted with an archaeological gap of some three centuries. Archaeological evidence is, in fact, completely absent from this period. This state of the art puts in question the entire picture of the rich musical culture described in the books Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles. The only reliable artifacts are a clay figurine and a drawing on a terracotta shard with the depiction of female drum players/dancers, which may be attributed to the local popular tradition of female folk dance with drum rhythm.

For the *Hellenistic-Roman Period* (late 4th century BC – early 4th century AD) the abundant archaeological and written evidence creates a florid mosaic of a multicultural and multi-religious society, typical for Hellenistic cultures. Musical styles from the Dionysian, Nabataean, Idumaeon, Sidonian to Israeli, Samaritan and Syrian interacted. It is remarkable that the relationship and affinity of the different ethnic and liturgical life styles at this historical period is frequently seen in and attributed to the musical behaviour of human communities. This is confirmed by both Jewish and Ro-

man sources. Musical life includes now a broad spectrum of musical instruments: ancient (cymbals, rattles) and modern (bells, crotals) Idiophones, new mobile and virtuoso string instruments (lutes, harps; for the obsolete lyre the place of a symbol is secured); mono- and double-pipes build in new advanced forms which allow a broad use of different tone-rows and by use of metal a more brilliant sound, horizontal flutes and shrill conical double-tongue instruments. Mosaics, depicting musical events, decorate Jewish and non-Jewish buildings. At this time the *shofar* is broadly accepted as the second most important after the *menora* as a symbol of a Jewish symbol-group. In the 4th century the organ is attested in Samaritan communities as a liturgical instrument. Josephus describes musician competitions, and Ben Sira praises the delights of music. This time shows, however, also the beginnings of strong pressure from Jewish autocratic circles to suppress alien music and musical instruments and the use of musical instruments in general. The Greek melody was proclaimed synonymous with adultery and the *Oracula Sibyllina* prohibits the use of musical instruments in front of the altar. In this syncretic landscape of both acculturation and confrontation, the ancient times disappeared, and on the eve of Christianity and Jewish diaspora new musical era was brought to life.

II

It is the concept of this paper that the musical landscape of modern Israel basically reminds the one of Ancient Israel/Palestine with most processes and tendencies intensified and in some cases brought to painful hostility. The gap in the "*Ungleichzeitige im Gleichzeitigen*" has become wider, over more distant periods, which makes it harder to create homogeneity; the traditions have become more distant, from wider geographical, chronological and cultural areas, which makes acceptance and tolerance more difficult; communication and information channels are faster and highly factual, which activates reaction, competition and rivalry.

On the border of the pre-Christian and first Christian millenium, the fragile harmony of the Hellenistic musical life was revolutionized. For the Israelites and Judeans it was the end of a geographically concentrated and restricted musical culture which in the forthcoming nearly two millenia changed into more than one hundred fragmented, often distant musical sub-cultures. The different Jewish '*edot*' (ethnic communities), now at the sources of Israel's musical culture, break up roughly into the *Ashkenazi* (Europe and North America), *Sephardic* (South Europe, Near East) and *Yemenite* (North African and Asian) groups. The traditional music of the different '*edot*', an ongoing process of change in form, nature, and contents of the oral tradition, today may only vaguely represent, if at all, the core of the musical material at the beginnings of this tradition. Although mostly a musical kernel of sounds is present in similar genres of most '*edot*', we may call it an "identity gene," we hardly will recognize similar sections of a certain prayer if performed by different '*edot*'. The strict monotone recitation tone of the Ashkenaz style changes unrecognizably into a highly interwoven ornamented style of nasal singing when performed in Yemenite communities, and both are far from the hurried chanting of Iraqi Jews or the Samaritan vocal polyphonic "organized chaos" of sounds. Even the exophonical sign-system, which was added to the Biblical

texts in the 9th-10th century, the *t'amey hamikrah* did not secure a constant musical and performance tradition.

What was it then that was keeping together the often distant musical structures? It was not the musical pattern, nor the performance tradition – it was the liturgical sacred text: the prayer text, liturgical or para-liturgical texts of the events of the Jewish “life-cycle” (birth, puberty, marriage, death) and “season-cycle” (festive days, holidays).

The inconsistency of the musical oral tradition and the interaction with a great number of neighbouring cultures changed the music unrecognisably and sometimes to the opposite. Music itself does not allow to follow up the process of change, while the history of a musical instrument, e. g. the organ, provides an excellent documented example of this process. An Alexandrian 3rd-century BC invention and later Hellenistic/Roman arena instrument, the organ was not accepted at the Temple and branded from Jewish life by Talmudic and Midrashic writings both as pagan Greek invention and for the Temple unacceptable, inferior musical instrument. The confusion of names of the organ and a clear case of misunderstanding by Joshua ibn Gaon brought to life the legend about the organ as Temple instrument (the Gaon wrongly using the name *magrepha* for the organ depicted a phantasy-instrument in his hand-written Bible, 1306). Since the organ was frequently depicted in Hebrew manuscripts of sacred texts and after this accepted in some Jewish communities: a unique case of change in symbolic meaning and function of a musical instrument on the basis of a misunderstanding in Biblical iconography.

With the beginning of the emancipation of European Jewry (18th century) the first steps towards Jewish secularism were made. From this time on started the building of a Jewish nation not necessarily identical to religion. Music became an integral part of this process. The establishment of a modern secular national school of art music, which featured a national musical language, became the central challenge of Jewish musicians in many parts of the world from Russia to Switzerland and the USA. In the first decade of our century, music itself, supported by all means of expression of national tradition rather than a sole sacred text, became a decisive force of national amalgamation. This process reached new dimensions and received a new meaning in the State of Israel.

The musical culture of modern Israel occurred from the multicultural tradition of late 19th-century Palestine under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Simultaneously, the accumulating process of increasing Jewish emigration from different parts of the world decisively shaped the culture and mentality of pre-state conditions. Hundred thousands and later millions of Jews with different musical traditions met in Israel.

The early attempts in the 20's to establish a professional musical culture were not successful and for the pioneers, in some cases, even tragic (for example, Yoel Engel, one of the founders of the St. Petersburg Jewish National School of music could not find in Palestine of the 20's a suitable frame for professional and social life). The first major confrontation occurred in the 30's with the massive influx of musicians with Western musical education, mainly emigrants from Nazi Germany. Faced with the local dominating Jewish and Arab traditional music and local Western dilettantism they

became disillusioned and desperate. Palestine's landscape, nevertheless, soon changed: professional activities increased when in 1936 Bronislav Hubermann founded the Palestine Orchestra (at present, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, IPO). The institutionalization of Western art music started. Jewish and Palestinian traditional musical cultures were pushed aside and ignored by the musical establishment. A striking example of the confrontation between local Near Eastern pop-music and established Western art music is the, so-called, "*cassette-singers movement*" by musicians of Jewish-Arab origin who performed Eastern commercial traditional music. From the 70's this trend gained popularity and small partisan pop-groups developed to one of the main strains of contemporary Israeli popular music. One of the inter-Jewish conflicts – Ashkenazi (Western) musical images *versus* Sephardi (Eastern) musical images was launched.

The creation of a new school of Israeli art music dominated compositional thought from the 30's until today. Musicians of different backgrounds, different concepts of aesthetics and taste were united in Israel by the idea and notion of a new national culture, national responsibility facing a national mission in a new age of a new Jewish nation, the Israeli nationality. Although well-known composers (Stefan Wolpe, Erich Sternberg) advocated modernism and innovation and rejected any attempts of a national musical style, the new ambience – the geography, the landscape, the new national majority, the statehood – all of this was too strong not to provoke new music. Guided by the concepts of 19th-20th century European national schools of art music, the Israeli composers created the "Mediterranean style." "*It is only on his own soil that [the artist] is 'allowed' to address his listener and to develop a free dialogue based on a clear and known common basis,*" wrote Uriah Alexander Boskovich (1907-1964), the composer considered to be the founder and ideologist of the new style. On his orchestral song, *The Lord is my Shephard* (Ps. 23), he commented: "*It is evident that the Israeli musical canticle abandons the enclosed realm of the synagogue, of theology and of official religion and reached to the origin of psalmodic poetry.*" The raw material for his music was the soundworld of Israel from ancient Jewish prayer-tunes to Bedouine double-pipe improvisations, from East-European Jewish dance-tunes to Arab drum-rhythms. Boskovich was followed by a number of composers of the older generation, everyone in his own way. Paul Ben-Haim created music which fused Sephardic and Western musical styles; Oedon Partos' music was based on an amalgamation of Western art music and the Yemenite idiom; Joachim Stuchevsky preferred his own *klezmer* tradition, while Marc Lavry's source of inspiration was the new Israeli folk song. It was the last one who proclaimed "*that there is something which can be found only in the works of Israeli composers, which could not exist had they not lived here, something that we call 'Israeli music'.*"

Modern techniques of composition were not alien to Israeli composers and some (Joseph Tal) used dodecaphonic as well as electronic means of expression. This was the time of the "melting-pot"-ideas. Soon (60's -80's), however, with the second and third generation of composers mostly educated in Israel and furthered by studies in Europe and the USA, the time of fragmentation of styles in art music started: from folklore transcriptions to electronic music, from diverse use of traditional styles to

avant-garde. One of the leaders of the new developments was once again Boskovich, who turned to the meaning of numbers in the Kabbalah for a musical purpose. The composer died early, but his central idea adequate to the historical developments of his time – the enclosure and integration of all aspects of the Jewish cultural heritage, historical, religious, traditional, or pure musical – emerged now as the uniting force of Israeli art music. Jewish musical pluralism is now represented by Israeli secular art music. Only a brief selection of composition titles by Israeli composers of the second and third generation may represent the picture: *Judith* and *Jerusalem Symphony* (Mordecai Seter), *The Writings of Hezekiah* and *Be Not as Your Father* (Abel Ehrlich), *Mizmorim* and *The Old Decrees* (Ben Zion Orgad), *Festival Prelude* and *Confession* (Noam Sherif), *Elegy on the 1967 War* and *The Destruction of the Temple* (Tzvi Avni) and so on. *This is a Gate Without a Wall* and *About an Old Tune* by Marc Kopetman, an emigrant of the early 70's from the former Soviet Union, are of special significance. Blending the high musical professionalism of the aliya from the former Soviet Union and the national strivings of the Israeli musical culture, Kopetman's technically refined and nationally conscious musical language represents a new level of intellectual and emotional symbiosis typical for the new strains in Israeli music. Israeli composers, accepting diverse advanced composition techniques, strived for one central human and artistic idea – the musical expression of the Israeli reality, of the thoughts, feelings and longings of an Israeli musician in the second half of the 20th century, the incorporation in his compositions of the musical collective memory of the Jewish and Israeli people.

Israel has one of the finest symphonical orchestras in the world, at least twenty peripheral symphonic and chamber orchestras, several splendid concert halls, several music festivals, an opera theater, two academies of music, four departments of music at local universities and a special channel of the Israeli Radio broadcasting art music some 20 hours per day. The listeners of this channel, however, are hardly 3% of the population. The fame of Israeli musical culture is based mainly on the artistic level of the IPO, which presents every season only in Tel-Aviv some 300 concerts.

Art music, however, cannot be considered the main stream of music which shapes the Israeli musical landscape. Western art music remains an island in a sea of musical whirl. Along with the tradition of collective singing of the so called *schir yisraeli* (Israeli song, a type of early 20th century Russian mass-song acculturation) at social gatherings and in over-filled halls, where people meet regularly for the performance of this repertoire, oriental Arab/Jewish popular music is nowadays one of the strongest strains in the Israeli musical landscape. Numerous popular music groups, frequently of a mediocre artistic level, dominate audio-video media. Most ethno-religious communities, concentrated around a certain block of music, at this stage seem to resist an active process of integration or acculturation. Besides the International Folk Music and Dance Festival, regularly take place festivals of the Eastern song, the *hassidic* music, the *khasanut*, each with its own audience, own ideology. The general picture has moved in the 70's-80's from the "melting-pot" to a pluralism reality.

Ethnic, religious, social and cultural pluralism has produced not only common peaceful existence and syncretism. It has produced also conflict, estrangement, ag-

gressive confrontation. A research project conducted in 1984/5 by a team of musicologists and sociologists at the Bar-Ilan University came to the conclusion that four hardly comparable main blocks of music constitute the musical culture of the Jewish Israeli population: Jewish traditional music, Israeli popular music, Western style art music, Western style popular music. In this modern mosaic of musical styles the "Ungleichzeitige im Gleichzeitigen" and the "heterogeneous in the homogeneous" is manifested in a new more vehement way. Not only is the non-simultaneousness of Western art music and Jewish traditional music very large, but the two are of rather distant ideologies. Israeli popular music, itself strongly divided by politically biased Ashkenazi and Sephardi patterns is a secular phenomenon and opposed to Jewish traditional religious music; moreover, the last one, divided by theological and ethnical partisanship is, in fact, opposed to any style of art music and is not simultaneous to any of the other three blocks of music. This is the picture of musical life without even taking into account Palestinian traditional, popular and meanwhile non-existent art music. In this musical reality, Jewish traditional music and Western art music emerged as the most powerful centrifugal, even aggressive forces of Israeli society, while popular music both Israeli/Palestinian and Western style with its broader ethnic basis seem to be more centripetal in tendency. The research results stressed the interdependence of acculturation and level of education. The demographical tendencies of Israel (a strong increase of the Palestinian and Jewish orthodox population), however, and political developments of the late 90's resulting from this, seem to hamper the process of acculturation. In this landscape the "heterogeneous in the homogeneous" seems to have changed to its opposite – "homogeneous blocks of music in a society of a heterogeneous musical culture."

Literature

- Aspects of Music in Israel*, Israel Composer League/National Council for Culture and Art. Israel 1980.
 Joachim Braun: *Musik in Alt-Israel/Palästina*, Freiburg 1999.
 Ibid.: *Biblische Musikinstrumente*, in: MGG2S, vol. I, Kassel 1994, col. 1503-1537.
 Ibid. u. Judith Cohen: *Jüdische Musik*, VI. 20. Jahrhundert, in: MGG2S, vol. 4, Kassel 1996, col. 1557-1569.
 Tova Bensky, Joachim Braun and Uri Sharvit: *Towards a Study of Israeli Urban Musical Culture: The Case of Kiryat Ono*, in: *Asian Music* XVII-2 (1986), p. 168-209.
 Jehoash Hirshberg: *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine 1880-1948*, Oxford 1995.
 Abraham Partaleone: *Shilte ha-giborim*, Mantua 1612.
 Michael Praetorius: *Syntagma musicum*, Wittenberg 1614/18.
 Hans Seidel: *Musik in Altisrael*, Frankfurt a. M. 1989.
 Amnon Shiloah: *Jewish Musical Tradition*, Detroit 1992.
 Helga Weippert: *Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit*, München 1988.
 Eric Werner: *Jewish Music*, in: New Grove, vol. 9, p. 614-634.