
Harran provides an excellent introductory overview of Hebrew music from the Bible through the Talmud and Rabbinical writings until the early modern era.

Harran offers a look at the musical writings of three rabbis: Rabbis Judah ben Yosef Moscato (1530-1593) Chief Rabbi of Mantua, Leon Modena (1571-1648) Chief Rabbi of Venice, Abraham ben David (1542-1612) who all wrote during the Italian Renaissance.

Moscato presents the power of music as a cosmic and spiritual phenomena. Modena offers two response on music- one on the topic of the permissibility of performing art music in the synagogue. Modena was a contemporary of Solomon deRossie who set much Hebrew liturgical music to the Baroque style which Modena encouraged as a glorification of the highest of Jewish art forms. Moscato is one of the most important rabbis, authors, and preachers of the Italian Jewish Renaissance. He was forced to leave his native town Osimo when the Jews were expelled from the main places in the papal states by Pope Pius V in 1569. Moscato went to Mantua, at that time one of the great centers of Jewish culture and scholarship in Italy. It seems that, not long after his arrival in the city, he became the official preacher of the Mantua community and in 1587 was nominated to the post of chief rabbi. Moscato's range of learning and knowledge extended over all fields of cultural interest to Jews of the Renaissance, and he was better versed in them than most of his contemporaries. Besides being grounded in Jewish traditional culture, rabbinic literature, and aggadah, he was at home in Jewish medieval philosophy and was also familiar with classical philosophy and music. The Renaissance gave rise to these rare types of multi faceted Renaissance scholars with a wide breadth of interests including almost everything cultural, intellectual, and of the spirit. Moscato's educational and cultural horizons extended to such secular sciences and disciplines as medicine, music, astronomy and the gamut of the sciences. Moscato, explaining his reliance on non-Jewish sources and his frequent reference to them, states that all the great philosophers had been disciples of ancient Jewish kings and prophets; that philosophy, a Jewish science which was part of Israel's ancient culture, had been lost during the long period of exile and was preserved only in the writings of the non-Jewish students of Jewish teachers. Such accounts assert for instance that Aristotle learned everything from the Kohen Gadol via when Alexander conquered Palestine around 310 BCE. Alexander brought back to Aristotle, his teacher books that previously had belonged to King Solomon, and which become incorporated into Aristotle’s extensive library of which the historical record can enumerate. By such logic the philosopher Plato, Socrates student, met Jeremiah, and all Platonic wisdom derives from Jeremiah. Moscato used his knowledge of music for instance effectively in his sermon on music, for instance (Nefuẓot Yehudah, sermon 1), he argues in detail that the fundamental concepts of Renaissance music were based on the terms and formulas found in the Psalms, and concludes that King David was the inventor and teacher of the discipline of music, deriving originally from Tuval Kayin in Bereishit, even though in Moscato’s times the terms and forms of Baroque were known in Latin and in Italian. In fact it was the Baroque artists like Bach and Buxtahude in Germany.... Rameau, Couperain, and deLully in France...... and Vivaldi and others in Italy who developed the Baroque forms of music such as the fugue further. Bach is attributed with modern musical notation transcription although clearly musical notation can be discerned in the early residual notations in Psalms (i.e. Selah= ascending scale on stringed instrument) and the Masorites, Rabbi Asher ben Asher in Tiberia and his family edited the Masoretic text to include cantillation marks.
Rabbi Leon Modena was a Venetian rabbi, cantor, preacher, teacher, author, and polemicist. His father, Isaac, came from an old French Jewish family which settled in Modena and, after they moved to Bologna and later Ferrara, retained the surname Modena. His mother, named Rachel, but renamed Diana by his father, came from an Ashkenazi family that had resettled in Italy. Leon Modena was born in Venice but spent his youth in Ferrara, Cologna, and Montagnana. He studied Bible, rabbinics, Hebrew language, poetry, letter writing, voice, music, dancing, Italian, and Latin. In Modena’s autobiography recently edited by Bernard Cooperman of the UMCP Modena suffered from an addiction to gambling which Modena confesses in the autobiography due to financial stresses. Hayye Yehudah recounts a very difficult life which included in addition to the death of two infants, the loss of his three adult sons: Mordecai, who died by inhaling fumes during alchemy experiments; Zebulun, who was murdered by a Jewish gang over a Jewish woman; and Isaac, whom he banished to the Levant and who traveled as far as South America. Modena supported a major musical performance in Ferrara that took place in the synagogue on Friday evening, Tu be-Av. the Italian synagogue, where he also was elected cantor. In 1622 he prepared for press the first book of Hebrew music, Ha-Shirim asher li-Shelomo, by Salamone Rossi. In 1628 he was maestro di cappella for a Jewish academy of music, Accademia degli Impediti, which was popular both inside and outside the ghetto.

The Italian Renaissance physician, scientist and philosopher Dr. Portleone, who knew more languages than he had 10 fingers, treated music in a massive disquisition on the Ancient Temple and its ritual describing it as an art correlating with the contemporary Italian music. When in 1605 he had a stroke and was half-paralyzed, he composed for the use of his children his great work Shiltei ha-Gibborim (“Shields of the Mighty”; Mantua, 1612), the first Hebrew book using European punctuation. In this, he attempted to elucidate the details of the Temple, its service, and everything pertaining to it, in order to make the prescribed daily recitals of the relevant passages more intelligible. He begins by describing the architecture of the Temple, this serving as the basis for discussing the architectural measurements and scales and the relationships of parts of a building and their proportions. In discussing the songs of the Levites in the Temple service and the musical instruments they used, he deals with music in general and instrumental music in particular, as well as poetic meter. The Dr. gives in three of the “shields” the order of sacrifices for each day, the passages for evening study of the Torah for each day in the year, arranged according to the days of the week and according to the weekly Scriptural portions, as well as a complete list of the chapters from Pentateuch, Prophets, Hagiographa, Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash, and Zohar. What makes his analysis of the Levitical singers and Levitical instrumentalists so profound is his drawing on mikorot from Sifrei Kabbalah that describe the theurgic effects of music in the higher heavens so that the microcosm is a reflection of the macrocosm.

Harran’s epilogue presents a unique contribution of Hebrew scholars to early modern music theory.

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This book is a must study for not only scholars of Jewish music, scholars of music in general, scholars of Rabbinic culture in the Italian Renaissance, Jewish culture in general; music in the Bible, the Mishnah, and the Talmud; early modern Hebrew music theory; Jewish music in the history of ideas but also any lovers of music and culture and the Jewish arts that recognize Jewish music as the crowning glory of all the Jewish arts namely music.
Of further great interest are Don Harran’s peer reviewed journal articles which include:

1. Harrán, Don  "Adonai con voi" (1569) : a simple popular song with a complicated semantic about (what seems to be) circumcision. The Jewish Body (2009) 427-463  2009


5. Harrán, Don  Between exclusion and inclusion : Jews as portrayed in Italian music from the late fifteenth to the early seventeenth centuries.  Acculturation and Its Discontents (2008) 72-98  2008


"The impact of the major cultures in contact with Judaism on Jewish music":.  World Congress on Jewish Music (1978, Jerusalem) (1982)  1978


Harrán, Don  Musicology in Israel : its resources and institutions.  Ariel 27 (1970) 59-66


Harrán, Don  On a Jewish musical Renaissance.  Daedalus 137,1 (2008) 96-100  2008


Harrán, Don  Salamone Rossi as a composer of "Hebrew" music Yuval 7 (2002) 171-200 2002


Harrán, Don  What to make of "The Pickled Jewess" ("la Ebrea marinata") in a sonata by Marco Uccellini (1645)? Italia 21 (2012) 42-78  2012

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