

**THE SECULAR MUSIC OF THE YEMENITE JEWS
AS AN EXPRESSION OF CULTURAL DEMARCATION
BETWEEN THE SEXES**

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JEWISH men and women in Yemen are portrayed in the sociological and anthropological literature as having lived in separate conceptual and spatial worlds. As a result, two very separate bodies of song existed, one pertaining to men and the other to women. In this paper, I show how the culturally defined demarcation between the sexes is reflected and epitomized in the music of the Jews who lived in Yemen.¹

The key to this separation lies in the fact that women were banned from the synagogue altogether. This exclusion is not prescribed by Jewish law, and there is no precedent for it in the Bible or other Jewish literature or communities. The reason given for women being banned from the synagogue in Yemen was the fear that they might be menstruating. The condition of menstruation is, in Jewish law,

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1. The period mainly referred to is the fifty years or so preceding 'Operation Magic Carpet', a series of airlifts between 1949 and 1950 in which the majority of Yemenite Jews were taken to Israel.

seen as ritually impure. Any condition of ritual impurity is considered hateful to God and may not be brought into contact with the synagogue or with any kind of religious practice. In accordance with the Bible and *Halakhah*,² men as well as women can be rendered ritually impure, and thus ritually polluting, to a similar degree, through the issue of semen, particularly semen out of place. Both men and women can be rendered pure through ritual immersion, though women only when their menstrual cycle has ended. Nevertheless, in Jewish law, as in the Yemenite practice of excluding women from the synagogue, women are treated as if they are far more impure than men and a danger to the ritual integrity of men.

Men's lives revolved around the synagogue. Since education was for religious purposes and its institution connected with the synagogue, Yemenite Jewish women were barred from religious spiritual life not only by virtue of the physical boundary imposed between them and the synagogue, but also by their almost universal illiteracy. While the greatest importance was placed on the religious instruction of boys, girls were excluded from education. Since religious texts and prescribed prayers were in Hebrew and the translation of the Bible was in Aramaic, women, who knew only Arabic, would not have been able to make sense of the texts even if spoken to them. Thus they were completely unequipped to practise formal religion. Among the Yemenite Jews, as among the Yemenite Muslims, the élite of society were the religious scholars. The men must therefore have derived a considerable sense of superiority from their religiosity and education, in contrast to the women's illiteracy and exclusion from religious responsibility. Outside the synagogue, men's lives were still ideally marked by religion, for they are said to have discussed holy matters in the home and at work. By excluding women from the synagogue and religious education, these were thus kept as a masculine preserve so that religiosity—at least according to the book—was definitional of masculinity.

Since community leadership was attached to the synagogue, and it was in the synagogue that the congregation was addressed on public affairs, not only were women disqualified a priori from holding any sort of public office, they were also denied a say in community affairs and direct access to information relating to them. Women's lives were centred on the home. Not being permitted to enter the synagogue and being exempt from most holy precepts—the men assumed these responsibilities on their behalf—the education of women was seen ostensibly as superfluous, even a serious trespass. They therefore remained uneducated and illiterate, with Arabic as their only language, and preoccupied themselves mainly with secular concerns. While emphatically identifying themselves as Jews and paying substantial tribute to their religion, they did this through folk customs, the only means open to them.

Men and women were thus segregated, ideally and in effect. The enforced exclusion of women from the synagogue, with all its implications, thus removed

2. The body of laws and teachings incorporated into Judaism after the time of the Bible and considered integral to it.

women decisively from any spiritual and public responsibility, while at the same time bestowing on them an autonomy and degree of power of another kind.³ Consequently, there existed a community of women alongside that of men, the two running in parallel but never meeting, at least not conceptually. In the same way, there also existed two separate bodies of song, one sung by men, the other by women. And just as the Yemenite Jewish men's world-view was a function of their religious upbringing and the fact that their lives revolved around the synagogue, so the women's world-view was a function of their very different life-style, upbringing and domain. These factors are also reflected in the totally unrelated musical styles and verbal content of their songs. In contrasting the songs of women and men, it is as if we are contrasting elements of two distinct cultures, which, seen at a certain level, they were.

Textual Content of the Yemenite Jewish Men's Diwan

By banning women from the synagogue, an essential definition of masculinity and masculine superiority in terms of spirituality and education could be in little danger of losing its exclusive association with men and could be asserted in all completeness in opposition to women. Reflecting this, the contrast between women's and men's music can be viewed as one between a 'folk'⁴ tradition and a formal, learned, higher art form, as well as between 'sacred' and 'profane' song types.

The secular music of the men was characterized by their connection with the synagogue and thus their identification with the sacred. Their religious education, literacy and proficiency in three languages was necessary to understand and perform it. It was influenced by liturgy in subject-matter and also musical structure.

In fact, it is only in opposition to liturgical music that the men's *diwan*⁵ can really be described as secular, since its devotional, spiritual and philosophical content almost lifted it out of this category, especially in contrast to the music of the women, which was truly secular. The *diwan* of Yemenite Jewish men continued a tradition of Hebrew poetry which originated in the courts of Muslim Spain around 950–1150 CE, when a movement known as the Andalusian School advocated a return to Biblical Hebrew as the most precise, lucid, beautiful and divine

3. This is discussed in Herman 1985.

4. The use of the term 'folk music' is discussed in Herman 1985, *ibid*.

5. A term of Persian origin, referring to any anthology of poetry, usually intended to be sung, and also to the guest room in a Yemenite home where the *diwan* is performed. Among the Yemenite Jewish men there was no standard version of the *diwan*, since each copy was written by hand in Hebrew characters and the poems would be selected according to the copyist's individual taste.

language, in competition with Muslims, who posited the excellence of the language and style of the Koran as proof of its truth. Quantitative metre, as found in Arabic poetry, was introduced into Hebrew poetry. In accordance with Arabic formulations, the adherents of the Andalusian School considered secular poetry to be an art form requiring education and training—talent alone being insufficient—and observing specific parameters of form, rhetoric and theme. Much of the poetry from this Spanish Golden Age of Hebrew poetry—in particular that of Judah Halevy, Ibn Gabirol and Ibn Ezra—reached Yemen via Egypt during the twelfth century CE and was taken over wholesale by Yemenite Jewish men. Their local poetry, while influenced by the Andalusian School, lacked the courtly setting and did not conform to all the rigid ideals of the latter, but formed its own local temperament, particularly under the influence of *kabbala* (a school of Jewish mysticism). While the poetry of the Andalusian School was seen as a distinct genre, existing alongside the *piyyut*—devotional poetry sung as hymns to embellish the synagogue service—the distinction among Yemenite Jewish men between *piyyut* and secular poetry was, I believe, obscured. This is confirmed by N. and A. Bahat (see *Jewish Yemenite Songs from the Diwan*, record, 1982), who assert that in Yemen, the *diwan* began as an appendix to the prayer-book, to be sung as hymns in the service, and that as the Yemenite poets added more and more of their own contributions to those of the Spanish poets, the anthology became so large that it was subsequently copied and bound separately.

The following three songs have been selected as representative of the Yemenite Jewish men's local *diwan*,⁶ two of which are by Shalem Shabazi (1618–1670), their national poet. Approximately three-quarters of the *diwan* is ascribed to him, including those of unknown authorship, in accordance with accepted practice. He (and other Yemenite Jewish poets) used Arabic and Aramaic in addition to Hebrew in his poetry—not, Razhabi (1964) asserts, as affectation, but as a normal mode of expression. Although Shabazi's poetry was influenced by Judah Halevy of the Spanish School and by Israel Najara, he rendered his poetry accessible to the ordinary Yemenite Jewish man, avoiding the full-blown imagery of the Spanish poets. His style is relatively straightforward and prosaic, as in the *Song for Circumcision*, which is down-to-earth and would have been understood by anyone. He writes about the religious realities of life, asking God to cure the child from his circumcision wound and to grant him good food, referring to the rejoicing of the father's neighbours upon witnessing the circumcision and the child's upbringing in studying the Torah and its (kabbalistic) mysteries. An extract follows.

He gave his neighbours great cause for rejoicing,
 inviting them to witness the circumcision.
 My Rock, cure this child and save him;
 for You are almighty and merciful too.

6. The men's song-texts presented here are quoted from Carmi (ed.) 1981.

This circumcision is his first religious duty.
May he recover, and enjoy great peace of mind and
 pleasure in the study of the Torah's mysteries.
May his food be choice and succulent.

In *The Seal*, poetic allegory and metaphor are juxtaposed to a straightforward prosaic style, the style changing in the last verse, where he dedicates his song to his friends:

(The Daughter of Zion:) 'Who kissed me until I fell into a faint,
 then said to me: "Do not be overwhelmed!"
That night I dreamt that I was (back) in the Temple of Love,
 (under) the canopy of my Beloved's Glory, in my own dwelling.
Before the time was due, I longed to sleep in His bosom,
 to cleanse myself (with prayer) and perfume myself (with incense).'

(The Poet:) 'Oh, then, (Moses) the faithful messenger
 will lead her (out of exile),
 and the emblems (of the tribes) will be inscribed upon my banners.⁷
My Beloved will come down into the Garden of Nut Trees,⁸
 He will remember his ancient covenant with the Patriarchs.
He will assemble all my kind and righteous tribes,
 and Israel will rise to greet the dawn in Zion's gates.

'May peace be yours, my soul, and a long life of piety, singing psalms of joy.
Now, in my dream, I kiss the faces of my elect companions
 with the letters of my song.
These shall be for us like a seal (of friendship).'

More so than the history of Jews anywhere else, that of Yemenite Jewry is dotted with messianic movements and the appearance of pseudo-messiahs. The messianic preoccupation of the Yemenite Jews paralleled that of the Zaydi Muslims, who were expecting an imam-redeemer. Even Shabazi was believed by some, during his lifetime, to be the messiah, or at least his harbinger.⁹ Reflecting this preoccupation, the poetry of Yemenite Jewish men is permeated with themes of the

7. As they were when Israel marched through the desert.

8. The Land of Israel.

9. Shabazi was a figure of legend among the Yemenite Jews. An acclaimed miracle-worker, his tomb in Ta'iz was considered holy and was visited by Jews and Muslims alike, who prayed there for relief from sickness and adversity. He lived at the time of the Mawza expulsion, the worst calamity to befall Yemenite Jewry, when their numbers were reduced by two-thirds. Also at this time, the appearance of the pseudo-messiah Shabbetai Zevi from Smyrna aroused an ecstatic movement in Yemen.

degradation of exile, the advent of the messiah and the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. In *The Seal*, Moses is not only himself but also symbolizes the future messiah: just as the Jews were once redeemed from exile, so God 'will remember His ancient covenant with the Patriarchs' and redemption will come again. This illustrates a further method of Shabazi, of referring to the glorious past of Israel as an indication of faith and hope in the glorious future. This theme is also commonly expressed in the form of an allegorical love poem in which the bride (Israel) and the bridegroom (God) are joined in wedlock. Sometimes, the two are represented as having quarrelled, the bride being expelled from the bridegroom's house. The bridegroom subsequently regrets her absence and calls her back, and the two are reconciled. In Sa'adiyah Ben Amran's poem *The Poet, The Dove and The Beloved*, the Dove represents the people (daughter) of Israel whom God, the Beloved, permits redemption and enjoyment of 'the peace of wedlock' with Him in the palace (Land of Israel).

(The Poet:) 'Tell me, pure and perfect one,
 tell me so that we may rejoice here in Taima¹⁰
 — O wise princess, tell me where do you make
 your home?'

The dove answered: 'Sa'adiyah, there is a
 high chamber reserved for me in the Palace.¹¹
 But though I could robe myself in beauty, my
 heart is full of lamentation.

'Oh, show me the way, my friend, guide me,
 for I am at a loss.
 Pray, understand, and do not lose patience:
 Where is the road that will lead me to my Beloved?'

(The Beloved:) 'O heart of hearts, open
 the gate to Me. There are beds of balsam
 in My garden and vines sweet with honey.
 'Truly, I now give you leave (to be redeemed),
 to enjoy the peace of wedlock. Do not let
 the evil spirit incite you, My daughter,
 let him not encroach on My domain.

'You may choose the choicest land, and the
 inner chamber of the Palace panelled with ivory.
 Oh, arise from the depths, My pure one,
 and heed My words.

10. A province in North Arabia.

11. The Land of Israel.

'Let us go up to Mount Abarim and lie there
 together in friendship, without flesh touching flesh.
 You will find contentment there,
 and so will I.'

The metaphors and imagery are very stylized: God is not only 'Beloved', but also 'Rock' (Shabazi: *Song for Circumcision*). The people of Israel are the 'princess', 'Dove', 'God's Daughter' (Ben Amran), and the Land of Israel is the 'Palace' (Ben Amran), the 'Temple of love' or the 'Garden of Nut Trees' (Shabazi: *The Seal*). In their great concern to praise God and express love for Him, God is described as 'Beloved', while in their most important quality as loving God, the people of Israel are 'Heart of Hearts' (Ben Amran). Erotic imagery is often employed to express the longing for union between God and Israel. A common formula used in the Yemenite Jewish *diwan* to introduce religious allegory is that which appears at the beginning of Shabazi's *The Seal*—'Who kissed me until I fell into a faint': 'The Daughter of Zion' dreams that she was back 'in the Temple of Love' under her 'Beloved's canopy'. She longs 'to sleep in His bosom', to cleanse and perfume herself.

Thus it can be seen that the men's *diwan* was essentially religious in content, part of a wider Jewish school of poetry and of an even wider international poetic form, in the context of a parallel form existing among Muslims. The Yemenite Jewish form was a genre requiring precisely the kind of education received in the synagogue in Yemen, bestowing a knowledge and literacy in three languages, including Hebrew and Aramaic, the languages of worship. It was therefore an educated, literate and religious genre, with a very specific recognized form, and was bound by rules or regularities of language of expression, rhythm, rhyme, metre, performance and rendition.

Textual Content of Yemenite Jewish Women's Songs

The songs of the women, by contrast, belonged to an oral tradition. There were no explicitly formulated rules relating to their form, content, structure or thematic nature. Being sung in the Arabic language, they formed part of a local Yemenite tradition rather than belonging to a Jewish tradition. The subject-matter is exemplified in this paper by a selection of women's wedding songs,¹² which may be descriptive of the events and customs in progress or, as presented here, love songs. While men expressed mainly spiritual love—love of God—in their songs, women sang of earthy love and its emotions.

12. The women's wedding-song texts presented here are quoted from the commentary to the record *Shoshana Tubi Sings Yemenite Wedding Songs*.

The following extract is about sexual love, employed not as religious imagery (in contrast to Shabazi's *The Seal*) but representing only itself:

My love, my beloved said goodbye and went away.
He opened my buttons and inflamed me with fire.
(From 'Khalowni Adhaiweh' and 'Khili Khalili' (Let me be free))

The next extract expresses collaboration against the bride's parents in the form of illicit love:

'Yabent Yabaitha' (The white girl)

Oh, white girl, pull me from the window slowly,
That your parents will not notice us,
That (even) the fly in the air will not see us.

The next songs express tormented, wronged love:

'Shillu Salami' (Take my regards)

Carry my regards and put them on his door.
Tell him it is enough craziness and torment.

'Nazalt Asayelleh' (I went down to the valley)

I went down to the valley because of my heartache,
To order my ring and to water my horse.
My beloved, a lover is one who can forgive,
But one whose love is hard, my pity upon him.

The women also sing of unobtainable love:

'Yakhthar Khothari' (Green, my green)

My beloved, my parents mock me because of you.
The more they mock me, the more my love for you grows.
If I sang, they said I am in love;
I prayed—they said I repent;
I cried—they said, 'poor one, so far from his beloved'.

During the wedding ceremony, the women also sing about lost love:

'Yaman Legi Li' (Who found for me)

Who found for me a dove from the wild doves
She flew to me and went away.

I cried for two days, twice a day,
And I watered the art of love with the tears of my eyes.

and describe the searing emotions of love:

'Halaft' (I swore)

These are the keys of my heart, look what is in it.
In it, sighing, and moaning, and fire is burning inside it.

Men sang of messianic dreams and the return to Zion. Their love songs were highly refined allegories, their imagery is stylized. Women, on the other hand, sing of secular love, manifesting a solid awareness of the physical world (as well as a major concern with the metaphysical world of evil spirits, as exemplified in other songs).

Yemenite Jewish Men's and Women's Songs: Form, Melody, Rhythm and Rendition

The sacred/profane and 'art'/'folk' distinctions, presented here as paradigms through which to view the contrasting natures of Yemenite Jewish men's and women's music, can be seen to apply to the musical as well as the textual aspects of the songs.

Yemenite Jewish men had an overall form for the performance of songs as a musical suite and a prescribed manner of singing them. The performance of the *diwan* was divided into three parts, *nashid*, *shira* and *hallel*. These could be taken together as a suite, the *nashid* or *shira* may be taken singly, or the combinations *nashid/shira* or *shira/hallel* may be performed. When one occurs with the other, the *nashid* preceded the *shira* which precedes the *hallel*. To my knowledge, the *hallel* was not performed alone.

The *nashid* was a responsorial¹³ prelude designed to prepare the assembled company for the impending *shira* by warming up the atmosphere. It could also be sung as a piece on its own, drawn out at great length.¹⁴ In the *diwan* (guest room) where the *diwan* (song) was performed, in the middle of some social event a singer might spontaneously begin to sing a *nashid*, being responded to by one or a group of the men present, until eventually all the men might be participating.

13. Alternation of singing by soloist and chorus.

14. According to Razhabi (1968) the term *nashid* refers to a song sung in a group where some of the group are singers, the remainder the audience.

The character of the *nashid* is improvisatory and melismatic,¹⁵ the soloist having considerable scope to show off his art through melismata, lengthening of syllables and repetition of lines. It was traditionally sung in free rhythm and was never accompanied by percussion or dancing. The literary form of the *nashid* is that of the Arabic *qasida*, unified by a single recurring rhyme throughout. The metre also remains unchanged throughout the poem. The language of the *nashid* is almost always exclusively Hebrew.

The *shira* is the central musical event in any social or ceremonial gathering. It is generally sung in regular rhythm, accompanied with percussion, and is much livelier than either the *nashid* or the *hallel*. It is generally performed by a group, but lines may be reserved for the soloist to demonstrate his skills.

In the *shira*, Hebrew, Arabic and less commonly Aramaic are often found within a single stanza, and even in the same line. The metre and rhyme of the poem remains consistent no matter what language a verse, strophe or line may be in, indicating tremendous linguistic virtuosity on the part of the poet. The poetic form of the *shira* is the Arabic *muwashshah* or 'girdle poem', which regularly alternates sections with separate rhymes with other sections with common rhymes (e.g. aa bbbaa ccaa, etc.)¹⁶ while the metre and length of lines may vary. A stanza is usually constructed with an initial section of three to five hemistichal lines, the two halves being called *delet* (Hebrew: 'door') and *soger* (Hebrew: 'lock'), followed by three shorter lines, each being the size of one hemistich of the preceding lines, in a different faster metre called *tawsih*. The stanza then usually concludes with two or more hemistichal lines, both of which may, and the last of which must, rhyme with the first line of the poem.

Once the *shira* was finished, the singers and dancers faced and greeted the audience and sang *hallel*, a song of praise opening and concluding with the word '*hallelujah*' ('praise be to God'). The singers and dancers sang together, without percussion, frequently dividing into two choruses and singing in parallel fourths or fifths.¹⁷ The musical style of the *hallel* was different from that of the *nashid* or *shira*, recalling liturgical music and biblical cantillation. The text is in Hebrew prose, based on verses from the Bible, mainly the Psalms. Within this overall structure, there was flexibility for an individual to choose any number of verses or strophes according to the occasion or atmosphere or his own mood, rather than singing an entire poem from beginning to end.

Before proceeding with my comparison of the melodic aspect of the songs, it is necessary to give a brief explanation of my derivation of scales and tonality

15. Containing many melismata, referring, in a song, to the embellishment of a syllable with a shower of notes.

16. Although the poetic forms used by the Yemenite Jewish men were Arabic in origin, they reached their *diwan* via the Andalusian School of Hebrew poetry, not directly from the neighbouring Arabs.

17. Consecutive chords comprising two notes with a consistent interval of a fourth (fifth).

from the music of the Yemenite Jews, an approach which is completely alien to their own conception. The women, and possibly the men in their *diwan*, did not have scales independent of the melodies. I have therefore derived scales from the melodies and in this way assessed the functions of the notes in relation to one another. The men used established scales and modes invested with meaning in their liturgical music, and it is very possible that these were carried over into the music of their *diwan*. However, since this cannot be assumed, I have derived scales and tonality from their songs in the same way as with the women's songs. In presenting various scales below, I indicate the relative place of the note which I have interpreted as the 'tonic' (denoted by 't'), and of the note which I have interpreted as a secondary cadential tone (denoted by 'c') in the context of each particular song from which the scale is derived.

In discussing the scalar forms of these songs, I am not referring to specific notes but to certain arrangements of intervals. Without the fixed tuning of melody instruments,¹⁸ Yemenites do not have absolute pitch but pitch relative to that of the other notes of the melody. However, the intervals are not precise, which is inevitable where a musical motive¹⁹ is conceived of as a whole and not as the sum of individual notes.²⁰ A single note cannot therefore be assigned a specific pitch or placed an exact distance from any other precise note.

Although I present melodic examples in notation designed for the reproduction of harmonic music, I must at the same time apologize for its inappropriateness and inaccuracy in representing Yemenite music, since it carries over implicit meanings proper to harmonic music into any type of music it is used to represent. This notation is not designed to deal with microintervals or the abundance of melismata that appear in Yemenite Jewish music. Being non-harmonic and non-divisible, the rhythm of this kind of music is not sufficiently precise to fit into bar lines or to be represented by signs signifying (relative to each other) very exact time values. Thus in transcribing Yemenite Jewish music in 'Western' notation, I have, in effect, constructed Western idealizations of their music.

Reflecting the limitations of Western notation in representing non-harmonic music such as this, I will describe the limitations to which my use of this notation conveys the same meanings as in Western harmonic music and set out my adaptation of this notation to Yemenite Jewish music. First of all, just as Yemenite Jews did not have a concept of absolute pitch, similarly my transcription is not equivalent

18. In Yemen, the orthodox Shiite administration forbade the use of musical instruments, and moreover, the Jews were said not to have played musical instruments in their mourning of the Temple in Jerusalem. Since percussion instruments, being non-melodic, were not considered to be musical instruments, these were used to accompany songs by Jews and Muslims alike. Despite these restrictions, flutes and stringed instruments were played secretly, but this was not common.

19. 'The briefest intelligible and self-existent melodic or rhythmic unit' (Scholes 1970: 661).

20. Keren (1980) describes the gestalt nature of Asiatic music in this way.

ent to the pitch of the recordings. Since my intention is to depict intervals rather than notes, these too should not be taken as exact representations, since the actual intervals may be more flexible or contain microtones. Where an interval is obviously microtonally larger than shown, this is indicated by the symbol \uparrow placed before a note to show that it is sharpened by less than a semitone. Where a note is ornamented, this is represented with the symbol \sim . Time values are not intended to be exact but to indicate the approximate rhythmic character and duration of notes in relation to each other, or even, more vaguely—particularly where a song is in free rhythm—which notes are long, which are short, and which are somewhere in-between. Where a note is slightly more sustained than shown, this is represented by the symbol \smile or \frown . The grouping of notes is not carried out according to divisive time values, as in harmonic music. Instead, as far as possible it follows melodic and word groupings. In the case of the women's songs, since I do not know Arabic, phrase—rather than word—groupings are reflected. The symbol is used here to group notes without tails, and not as a tie. Where notes are accented, this is denoted by the symbol \wedge or \vee . In the percussion depicted in the song 'Tantin Binath', secondary accents are depicted by the symbol $/$. The end of a melodic and textual sentence is symbolized by a short line $|$, while the end of a verse is symbolized by two short lines $||$. Finally, my separate treatment of texts and music contradicts the fact that the Yemenite Jews had no concept equivalent to the generic all-embracing term 'music' covering a vast selection of phenomena. They had their *shira*—'songs' (also used to refer to poetry)—*diwan* in the case of the men. Percussion was another phenomenon, accompanying, rather than being strictly synchronized with the melody and words. My analytical methodology does not, therefore, represent the music of the Yemenite Jews as they themselves perceive it but is merely a paradigm within which their music can be comprehended.

The distinction between the music of the Yemenite Jewish men and women in terms of higher art form versus 'folk', and sacred versus profane, can be seen to extend to their melodies. While neither have a formal literate tradition for melodic components of their secular songs, the melodies of the *diwan* appear to manifest a conscious concern with unification and beautification, which is interpreted here as an aesthetic concern. Women's melodies, while obviously aesthetically pleasing, seem more directly subservient to the text, and they also have a less extensive tonality than the men's melodies. The influence of liturgical cantillation and rendition on the men's melodies can be seen as connecting them with the sacred.

The characterization of Yemenite Jewish men's music as formal and as containing a more extensive tonality²¹ is supported by its frequent correspondence with established modes,²² or with the scales on which these modes are based. By

21. Principle of notes having particular functions within the context in which they appear, and in relation to the tonic.

22. A mode is an established recognized arrangement of intervals into a series, understood as having its own particular mood or meaning.

contrast, there is no external system to which the majority of women's songs correspond. An exception to this can be found in the first part of 'Love Song' (example 1 below), which uses a scale type similar to one described by Idelsohn (1944) as the standard scale for both Jewish folk and synagogal music and used as a basis for certain recognized modes, associated with specific moods. However, since it was a common practice for both Yemenite Jewish men and women to adapt existing melodies to a variety of texts, any association of mood which may have been attributed to certain types of musical structure was probably weak.

In comparing scalar structures derived from the *diwan* and women's songs, it can be seen that the melodies of the former demonstrate more complexity and tonality than the latter. The majority of scalar structures derived from the melodies of the *diwan* are essentially tetrachordal,²³ consisting of a single tetrachord, two conjunct tetrachords²⁴ such as in the *shira* 'Tsur Menati' (example 2), two disjunct tetrachords,²⁵ as in the *shira* 'Sar Ha-Memuneh' (example 3), or a tetrachord apparently constituting the melodic nucleus.²⁶ Scalar forms built on or including tetrachords are also very common in the music of Yemenite Jewish women (example 4). However, the forms of two conjunct or disjunct tetrachords seem to make only an occasional appearance.

Approximately half of the scalar forms derived from the *diwan* are conjunct. This scalar type differs from disjunct forms in its tendency not to contain a single system of tonality extending throughout the whole series of notes: one group of notes, beginning where the last group left off, may seem to duplicate the tonal functions of the other group, the finale²⁷ generally being the note of conjunction. However, the men's melodies, unlike those of the women, tend not to be nucleal in character.²⁸

A substantial proportion of women's songs are based on conjunct forms, a large number of which are made up of two conjunct thirds. An example of this is a melody whose essential structure is made up of two conjunct, nucleal thirds found in the 'Hineh' song (example 5). (The *infracix*,²⁹ an upbeat, is treated here as external to the core.) Another scalar structure derived from the women's songs

23. Pertaining to a tetrachord, being a group of four consecutive notes.

24. Two consecutive tetrachords joined by a common note.

25. Two consecutive tetrachords separated by a step.

26. That is to say, notes lying outside this tetrachord would seem peripheral to the main melodic structure.

27. Last note of a mode. Used here as the last note of a melody.

28. I use this term to denote a melody or scalar form emanating from or revolving around a central nucleus.

29. Auxiliary note below essential note structure (Sachs 1962).

is pentatonism, the octave being divided by five main steps, while additional notes of passing value may also be present (example 6).³⁰

EXAMPLE 1: 'Love Song'³¹

Scale derived from 'Love Song'

EXAMPLE 2: Part I of 'Tsur Menati' (shira)³²

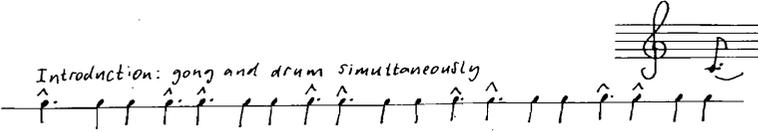
30. In addition, the women sing a class of melodies which sound as if they could be Turkish-influenced, perhaps a legacy of the Ottoman occupation. 'Yaman Legi Li' is particularly of this kind (cf. the record *Shoshana Tubi Sings Yemenite Wedding Songs*).

31. *The Living Tradition: Music from Israel* (record).

32. *Jewish-Yemenite Diwan* (record).

EXAMPLE 5: The 'Hineh' song (*Shoshana Tubi Sings Yemenite Wedding Songs (record)*)

Introduction: gong and drum simultaneously



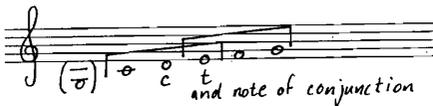
Gong and drum accompany song



Interlude between verses: gong and drum



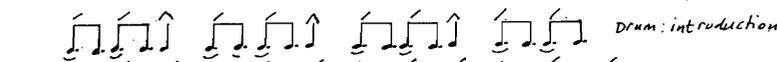
Scale derived from the 'Hineh' song consisting of two conjunct nuclear thirds



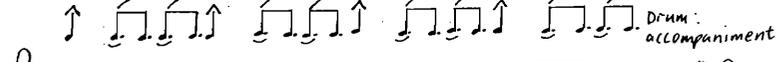
and note of conjunction

EXAMPLE 6: 'Tantin Binath' (*Folk Dances and Festive Dances (record)*)

Drum: introduction



Drum: accompaniment



Each line sung by soloist and repeated by chorus



Drum: accompaniment



Pentatonic scale derived from 'Tantin Binath'



On the whole, the men's melodies have a more defined and extensive tonality than those of the women, since the latter are frequently pentatonic and/or nuclear, leaving room for less extensive tonality. In the songs of Yemenite Jewish women, there may sometimes be a little more extensive tonality, while at other times only the function of a tonic³⁴ can be detected, and at yet others a piece of music may change direction and the previous tonality be thwarted with an unexpected finale.

Another way in which the *diwan* contrasts with women's songs is in its manifestation of melodic coherence and unity. For example, while it is common practice for the singer to switch from melody to melody in the course of a song, there tends to be some factor unifying a whole piece or suite of pieces. This may consist of common scalar material, while there may be a subtle change in tonality or metre or in a particular melody or motive that periodically recurs.

In their combination of several different melodies within a single song, the women's songs, unlike the men's, display no concern to unify these melodies where they are not similar. Thus there may be nothing to join the two melodies except the omission of a pause, and from a slow, gentle melody, the leader may suddenly break into a vigorous one or pass from one melody to a new one containing seemingly unrelated scalar material.

Another indication of aesthetic concern manifested in the *diwan* can be found in melody/text relationship. For example, while the allocation of tones to words is usually one to three tones to a syllable, in the *diwan* a word is often elevated by substantial melismata with the intention of creating a sense of spiritual exaltation.³⁵ This device may be carried over from the synagogue, where the amount of melismata is in direct proportion to the significance of the liturgical occasion.

It appears that Yemenite Jewish men were concerned with music as an art form apart from its function of conveying the text and its meaning. More concern was manifested to perfect and beautify the melody, structuring and embellishing it, than in the women's music. Accordingly, certain sections of the *diwan* were reserved for a soloist who was given the opportunity to display his special skills in singing. Both men and women based their songs on recurring motives, which were varied while retaining their essential melodic shape. Such variations, especially using melismata, were produced mainly by the soloist who thus displayed his skills as well as adding interest to the melody. Thus the *diwan* was often sung in an improvisatory³⁶ manner, with room for individual expressiveness and for virtuosity in a particularly talented performer.

It is possible that in the women's songs, certain motives occurred in several songs of a specific type, since Gerson-Kiwi (1965) presents a transcription of a line of melody as a melody type that can be a starting-point for many similar song types. In an individual song, brief recurring motives are often varied slightly,

34. The most important note in function—the 'home' note.

35. *Jewish Yemenite Songs from the Diwan* 1982 (record): commentary.

36. I.e. based on improvisation, whereby the performer composes and performs simultaneously.

sometimes because of a change in the metre of the text, sometimes for 'spice' and sometimes, as in the men's *diwan*, as a manifestation of creativity. The women also used expressive techniques in singing—particularly in changing dynamics—and, as anywhere, a more outstanding singer with a pleasing, supple and melismatic voice would be given recognition and credit.

Apart from the melody, greater complexity can also be seen in the form of much of the *diwan*. While some of the melodies of the *diwan* share forms, and small repetitive forms with the women's melodies (A, B), many of the former have more compound forms and are constructed of three or four different parts (A, B, C or A, B, C, D). The overall musical form of a song from the *diwan* is often very compound, several different melodies being intertwined and interrelated.

Although the women's songs, like the men's, often contain several melodies, they are disparate, and it does not seem applicable to refer to an overall musical form of their songs. Their form is generally very simple, consisting of one or two short motives repeated over and over again. In contrast to the men's apparently frequent concern for melody as an art forming the men's songs, the women's do not aim at refinement of form and shape of a melody. However, in both cases, the importance of the song lies primarily in the text, with the melody subservient to the words. This becomes clear when we see that melodic lines are often expanded or condensed to accommodate variations of length in the textual line, without changing the character of the melody.

A number of aspects of the *diwan* reflect men's connection with liturgy and thus with the sacred. Some liturgical music strikes me as being melodically fairly similar to the *diwan*³⁷ (although rhythmically much freer than most *diwan*), and it is likely that where the Yemenite Jewish men use scalar³⁸ structures and motives in their *diwan* which come close to their liturgical music, the implicit meanings are carried over with them in music, the emotions, associations and moods evoked by certain types of melodic structure are ingrained in the minds of the members of a culture. However, since in their secular music a number of melodies are adapted to different texts, there may not necessarily be a correlation between melodic meaning and the content of the text.

A scalar form often found in the *hallel*³⁹ very strongly recalls biblical cantillation. The *hallel* tends to be chanted in declamatory style on one recitation tone, or perhaps two or three. However, unlike liturgical cantillation, where the melodic formula is rigidly prescribed, the singer of the *hallel* in the *diwan* shifts from one recurring tone to another apparently at will.

The 'sacred' classification of the *diwan* can be seen to apply to aspects of rhythm. In the *diwan* of the men, rhythm is either *tartil* (free) or, when rhythmi-

37. However, liturgical music—in particular, biblical cantillation—and *diwan* each need to be considered as sociologically watertight categories.

38. Pertaining to a scale, i. e. an arrangement of intervals into a tonal series.

39. I have also detected it in two *nashid*.

cal, either duple or triple,⁴⁰ the latter two often being found in the same piece. In the men's songs, regular rhythm is considered inferior to *tartil*, perhaps because the latter is associated with dancing, while *tartil* takes on a more serious complexion, being more closely associated with the meaning of the text and being the only rhythmic form used in liturgy. It is therefore not surprising that the *tartil* occurs always in the *hallel*, which is closest to liturgy.⁴¹ The songs of the Yemenite Jewish women are mainly in regular rhythm, either duple or triple. The fact that so much of the men's music is in *tartil* while this is infrequent in women's music could be connected with the idea that men's music is a higher art form nearer to the sacred, while women's music, in comparison, is a vulgar, uneducated form.

Another aspect connecting the *diwan* with liturgy can be found in rendition. Both men's and women's songs share solo and response forms of rendition, the latter comprising a soloist singing the first half of the verse while the chorus takes the second half (or the soloist singing the verse and the chorus singing the refrain). The women's songs are also antiphonal, with two half-choruses alternating the half-verses, such as in Gerson-Kiwi's (1965) description of two small groups of women sitting huddled together, singing long epic songs, alternating with each other in half-verses. I have not heard the men sing antiphonally, and it is noteworthy that while the response form occurred in the synagogue in Yemen, the antiphonal form did not. It is therefore not surprising that in the Yemenite *diwan*, response was the most general practice.

The *hallel* of the *diwan* often verges on the liturgical in terms of rendition where, as in the synagogue, organum⁴² may occur, and also content—for example, in the recitation of a blessing or a Psalm—and style, often declamatory.

The melody-text relationship of the *diwan* also reflects the impact of liturgy. Thus music and text are more significantly interrelated than in the performance of women's songs, such as where, in the former, melismata occur in amounts proportional to the significance of the text. The women's songs do not attempt to correlate text and music in this way. For the latter, a melody is no more than a vehicle for transmitting the words, with which it corresponds only as phonetic entities. For the men, music is apparently more than this, reflecting the conception of biblical cantillation as a very rigid formula constituting the correct meaning and understanding of the Bible to the extent that a mistake in cantillation could be considered tantamount to blasphemy.

40. Rhythm based on a repetitive sequence of pairs of beats (duple) or three beats (triple).

41. Nowadays in Israel, Yemenite Jewish singers do not feel compelled to render the *nashid* in free rhythm.

42. I.e. parallel fourths and fifths.

Conclusion

The men's *diwan* was therefore a learned art form. Not only was an education and literacy a prerequisite for singing and understanding it, but a specialist training, a knowledge of specific poetic forms and metre, and philological ability were necessary to write them. The poet was therefore distinct from the performer. Reflecting these distinctions, the words of the men's songs were written down and transmitted in writing and were therefore not readily available to the illiterate women, whose songs were transmitted orally. By contrast, the women had no formal method of composition, nor any conscious awareness of form or construction in songs. There was nothing to bar anyone from participating in or composing their songs, although some women would have had more ability and inclination than others.

In contrasting the music of Yemenite Jewish men and women, I am referring to tendencies rather than to a sharp clear-cut division; none the less, these tendencies are strong. There is an overlapping area: women's melodies do exist which sound more complex and compound than many of the men's being sung in free rhythm, and based on scales with tonality as extensive as any which appear in the men's songs. The men's songs do have melodies constructed of small recurring forms and have a very large proportion of conjunct forms, although these generally incorporate a tetrachord. Mostly, however, the men's melodies reveal more concern with overall cohesiveness and a greater complexity than those of the women.

Similarly, the subject-matter of the men's songs is more 'high-brow' and esoteric than that of the women's songs. Just as in their everyday lives men were ideally concerned with spiritual matters, so their songs are about these concerns, focusing particularly on the coming of the messiah, ritually cleansing oneself from the impurity of exile, and returning to the Land of Israel. Even the contexts of song performance were consistent with the sacred/secular distinctions between Yemenite men and women. Men, we are told (Goitein 1947: 74-6), sang only on festivals and special occasions. While engaged in their craft, if they worked together, they ideally discussed the Torah.

Women, by contrast, accompanied their everyday activities with song and sang about earthly subject-matters, about love between man and woman rather than love of God. Generally, they express a concern with the here-and-now rather than the dreams of the messianic afterlife which permeated the men's songs. Some of their wedding songs directly describe events in progress, while on the whole their imagery is far more realistic and concrete than the highly stylized imagery of the men.

Through their links with the synagogue, men had access to a more far-reaching world than the women, having contact with and receiving influences from Jewish communities elsewhere in the world. This is manifested musically in the fact that their *diwan* belonged to an internationally Jewish art form. Some of their poetry was imported from Spain via Egypt, while their local *diwan* also drew on influ-

ences from Palestine. In contrast, the women's songs were more indigenous, more specifically Yemenite, and most were interchangeable with those of the Muslim women. In this way too, therefore, the men's link with the synagogue and the women's exclusion from it has implications for the different domains reflected through their songs.

This ideal picture of the complete demarcation between the sexes being reflected in their musical expression may have been modified by some familiarity with each other's music. Women were exposed to hearing the men's *diwan*, although they were excluded from the sort of upbringing in which the men's song-texts would have much meaning for them. Conversely, men were also exposed to hearing the women's music. For example, in the procession of the bride on her way to the bridegroom's house the women led the way, making music, while the men followed ten or so yards behind. Also, in the bridegroom's procession to the bride's house, the men sang their processional songs or *zafat*, which were the only men's songs in which women were permitted to participate, with their trills and percussion.

There were instances in which a man, having no sons, would decide to instruct his daughter, although this could only have little if any impact on the music of the women as a whole. Since she could not participate in the community of men, their songs and the occasion to sing them were not part of her social world.

The heterogeneity of Yemenite Jews constituted another limiting factor to this ideal picture. Yemenite Jewish communities existed where the demarcation between the sexes did not conform to the same criteria. For example, Barer tells us (1952) that the Yemenite Jews of Habban were unlike all other Yemenite Jews: they behaved and looked like free people, and the women were educated. Also, in some remote parts of Yemen, there were tiny Jewish communities in which the men were illiterate and may therefore not have had a tradition of *diwan*, which is a literate and educated art form. The men in these communities may well have had a truly secular tradition of singing, akin perhaps to the style of women and the secular music of the local Arabs.

Certain elements of Boon's (1982) semiotic approach to anthropology can be applied to the picture presented here. According to this approach, a culture is comprised of systematized sets of symbols arbitrarily selected from an infinite sphere of possibilities, and it is defined in terms both of the symbols it has selected and of the possible symbols which have not been selected. Other cultures represent these negative possibilities which one specific culture is not. A culture is part of a total network in the same way as a text is just one component in a whole network of literature, to which it may refer or contrast itself, by which it is influenced or which it influences. In this sense, the boundaries of a culture, like those of a text, are blurred, so that a culture can be meaningfully described only comparatively, against other cultures. Yet it is also this discursive aspect of a culture which justifies its being seen as a culture, which sets up boundaries. This idea of the discursiveness of cultures and of the internal discursiveness within a culture can be applied to the cultural demarcation of the sexes among Yemenite Jews.

The Yemenite Jews constituted simultaneously a single culture, defining itself in terms of its own internal symbology and also against that of, and attributed to, the surrounding Muslim population. This culture converted itself into a discourse of two sets of symbols and two cultures, one masculine, the other feminine, each similarly having significance in terms not only of what it was, but equally in terms of what the other was, its own negative aspects. In this respect, it is the distinction rather than what the actual symbols are that is crucial. Symbols and sets of symbols may shift, but only in relation to the opposing symbols and sets of symbols. Moreover, symbols transcend social behaviour and need not be affected by any discrepancies occurring at a different order of reality.

While one domain was marked out as a masculine preserve and another as a feminine preserve, between the two there was a meeting-point: in the territory of the home, in the occupational sphere of subsistence work, in the women's identification with men's aims, in the men's incorporation of women's interests in their own (Herman 1985), in their mutual equation as Jews or as members of a family. These factors are not stressed in the presentation of an ideal picture of Yemenite Jewish society since they are not considered relevant. Correspondingly, if men had a 'vulgar' song type, this is apparently not considered worth mentioning. What is significant is that there were two diametrically opposed bodies of song, one belonging to men which was religious and refined, which women, by virtue of their femininity, could not possibly sing, and the other belonging to women (the men's 'lowbrow') which men, as the price of their masculinity, necessarily could not share.

If social reality should ever have fallen short of the ideal of men and women being so distinct that they had totally different bodies of song, then the formula was sealed at the level of symbology by the men's denial of any knowledge of women's songs (Brauer 1933), just as Moroccan city and *ksar* men render their masculinity unquestionable by pretending not to know anything about their womenfolk's activities (Maher 1974). The Yemenite Jewish men's *diwan* was a 'higher' art form, while the women's songs constituted a 'lower' form, and the men could not compromise their masculinity and superiority by even knowing, let alone singing, feminine and, moreover, inferior songs, any more than they could engage in household chores. Therefore, by excluding women from the synagogue, thus treating them as especially impure, a domain, with all its implications, could be preserved exclusively for men and rendered definitive of masculinity, in unchallenged opposition to femininity. The distinction between the music of Yemenite Jewish men and women was to a large extent a function of their different lifestyles and world-views, but more importantly—at least as presented by surviving (male) 'informants'—it expressed the opposing criteria of masculinity and femininity, epitomizing the culturally defined demarcation of the sexes.

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