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Abstract

Musica Sacra di Livorno (Birnbaum Collection Mus. Add. 6-7): A Reappraisal

The compilation called Musica Sacra di Livorno (MSL) consists of four large volumes of synagogue music scores for choir for three to five voices a capella. This compilation, one of the richest of its kind to come down to us from nineteenth century Italy, reflects the choral liturgical practice of the Portuguese synagogue of Livorno throughout the nineteenth century. Read in conjunction with Federico Consolo's *Sefer shirei Yisrael: Libro dei canti d'Israele: antichi canti liturgici del rito degli Ebrei spagnoli* (ca. 1982), MSL provides a glimpse into the unique liturgical tradition of the great synagogue of Livorno through the era of the Risorgimento and thereafter.

In exploring the historical and liturgical context of MSL, I shall refer to some of the composers whose works are included in it and the musical styles of their compositions. Moreover, I will examine the international networks of modern European synagogue music as they emerge from MSL, in relation to the Spanish-Portuguese synagogue in Paris in particular and synagogues in France in general in the context of Livorno under French rule in the post-Napoleonic era and beyond it, until and after the reunification of Italy. In the context of networks, also the manuscript titled *Musica Sacra di Venezia* (Birnbaum collection Mus. Add. 9) will be mentioned in light of the historical relations between Sephardic Jews from Venice (especially the Ponentini) and Livorno. As I have put it in the past, the synagogue of Livorno was a crossroads in early modern Sephardic liturgical music whose impact reached throughout the Mediterranean. It even reached out to northern Europe, if we take into consideration the intervention of some Livornese Jews in the early disputes over the use of the organ in the synagogue in the wake of the Reform movement in Germany. I intend to explore this proposition, i.e. Livorno as a crossroad, in more detail in this paper.

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