

From Wax Cylinder to Metal Disc: Transplanting Robert Lachmann's "Oriental Music" Project from Berlin to Jerusalem on the Eve of World War II

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Abstract Of the multidisciplinary cohort of scholars associated with the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv in its formative decades, it is Robert Lachmann (1892–1939) who, in his approach to fieldwork and the importance he attached to it, comes closest to adopting the methods of classic ethnomusicology. In April 1935, having been dismissed from his post in the Prussian State Library under the Nazi racial laws, he took up a temporary appointment at the newly founded Hebrew University of Jerusalem with a mission to create an Archive of Oriental Music. He brought with him copies of his entire collection of some 500 wax cylinder recordings held in the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv. Between 1935 and 1938, Lachmann made 956 recordings on metal disc documenting musical traditions of different "Eastern" communities of Palestine. His writings from this period, however, rely predominantly on research carried over from his Berlin years. The most substantial, and the first to be completed, is his monograph *Jewish Cantillation and Song in the Isle of Djerba* (*Gesänge der Juden auf der Insel Djerba*) based on his fieldwork in Djerba in 1929. In this contribution, I argue that Lachmann's pioneering study of this Tunisian Jewish community provided the methodological blueprint for much of his work in Palestine. I focus on his series of 12 radio programs, entitled "Oriental Music," transmitted by the Palestine Broadcasting Service between November 1936 and April 1937. The programs, which feature different groups living in or around Jerusalem, were illustrated by live studio performances by local musicians and singers, simultaneously recorded onto metal disc. In successive lectures, Lachmann presents fundamental ideas about the nature and evolution of musical practices and systems that are explored more fully in his Djerba monograph.

Thwarted by inadequate finances and lack of institutional support, Lachmann's work was cut short by his premature death in May 1939 and it fell to his former student, Edith Gerson-Kiwi, to pick up the threads of his project. Lachmann's collecting activities, together with the comparative vision that informed them, laid the foundations for the work of subsequent generations of ethnomusicologists.

Berlin

Of the multidisciplinary cohort of scholars associated with the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv in its formative decades it is Robert Lachmann (1892–1939) who, in his approach to fieldwork and the importance he attached to it, comes closest to embracing the methods and values of the discipline that would subsequently be called ethnomusicology. Born in 1892 into a bourgeois Jewish family in Berlin (his father was a gymnasium school teacher; his mother was English by birth), Lachmann studied French and English at the Universities of Berlin and London before being called up to the front with the outbreak of World War I. Sent back due to ill health, he was posted to the prisoner-of-war camp at Wünsdorf to serve as an interpreter for North African and Indian prisoners. A keen violinist, Lachmann was soon drawn into the musical life of the camp, effectively using his time there to carry out the fieldwork for his doctoral thesis "Die Musik in den tunesischen Städten" (University of Berlin, 1922; Lachmann 1923).¹ The result was a wide-ranging musical ethnography that adopts classic methods of participant observation.

Lachmann describes his methodology in the introduction:

The material for this work has been gathered as follows. Firstly, I had at my disposal phonograms of Arabic songs which were recorded during the war at the Wünsdorf camp by Georg Schünemann for the Phonogramm-Archiv of the Berlin Institute of Psychology. At the time, I was working in this camp as an interpreter, and could, therefore, select the most distinguished musicians among the prisoners, and attend the recording sessions. (Lachmann 1923:136)

Following Schünemann's departure and without recording equipment, Lachmann was forced to adapt his approach. He continues:

between mid-1915 and October 1918, I studied music amongst the North African prisoners, [from whom] I obtained a general view of the variety of musical practices in the countries of the Maghreb. I tried to learn from these musicians, as far as possible according to their own method, something of their songs [...] The songs that belong to the urban art repertory, many of which are

very long, are repeated by teacher and students, just like parts of the Qur'an in schools. (ibid.:136–7)

He describes the laborious process of learning the songs by repetition and memorization, starting with the first phrase, then, when that was memorized, extending to the second, and so on, until the entire song was committed to memory. The musicians were often sent musical instruments from their home countries, and Lachmann joined in their performances, playing violin or percussion:

Thus, I learnt a large number of pieces which I wrote down as dictated to me, perfecting the results and notating variants through repeated listening. The majority of this collection of some 300 songs belongs to the music of Tunisian towns. (ibid.:137)

His principal source was a singer from the town of Beja, a member of the Sidi Mahrez religious brotherhood, who was "recognized by his entire circle as a master of his craft." This singer had "an unusually rich repertory of songs and song texts" and could also provide "information of a theoretical nature [...] he knew a large number of technical music terms with regard to kind, form and rhythm which are quoted here where applicable, and which shall be discussed" (ibid.:137).

Following the war, Lachmann returned to Berlin where he completed his doctorate under the supervision of the medieval and renaissance musicologist Johannes Wolf, and studied Arabic with the renowned Orientalist Eugen Mittwoch. His subsequent appointment as a music librarian in the Prussian State Library supported the research he carried out in association with the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv through the following decade. The Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv had been founded in 1900 by Carl Stumpf and directed since 1905 by Erich Moritz von Hornbostel (1877–1935), a natural scientist by training with a doctorate in chemistry from the University of Vienna. Hornbostel had forged collaborative links with the Berlin Museum für Völkerkunde whereby ethnographers embarking on field trips were loaned a phonograph and blank wax cylinders by the archive, and provided the archive with their recordings and a journal containing essential documentation (place, date, informant and music recorded) on their return. The archive then produced galvanoplastic negatives (galvanos), which were used to make working copies (Ziegler 1994). The incoming recordings were transcribed and analyzed by Hornbostel and his colleagues, who used this material to

construct wide-ranging theories about the origins, evolutionary development and diffusion of music.

Lachmann's experience at Wünsdorf, however, set him on a quite different course. In contrast to the 'armchair' research of Hornbostel and others, Lachmann's research into contemporary musical practices is typically based on recordings made or supervised by himself, whether in Berlin or on field trips abroad, and his analyses are supported by information provided by the musicians themselves or by other recognized experts in their communities. He summarizes his activities during his Berlin years in his Annual Report, 1935–1936, produced for the Hebrew University in early January 1936:²

After the war, collections of Moroccan, Persian, Turkish and Japanese vocal and instrumental pieces were established with the help of reliable informants who were temporarily staying in Berlin. All of these collections consist of these phonographic recordings with the addition of material written down by ear and are accompanied by remarks concerning the system and practice of the respective music, as well as by collected texts [...]. Starting from 1925, I have undertaken further studies on occasion of various travels to North Africa: in 1925, in Tripoli; in 1929, in Tunisia and Algeria; and in 1932 in different parts of Egypt, including Sinai. Numerous recordings were made on all of these travels, altogether over 400 examples of Jewish and Arabic [sic] music. The Egyptian journey took place upon the conclusion of the Congress for Oriental Music in Cairo, in which I participated upon the invitation of the Egyptian Government. (Cited in Katz 2003:142)

Highlights of Lachmann's Berlin years include, in 1930, his cofounding with Erich M. von Hornbostel and Johannes Wolf of the Gesellschaft zur Erforschung der Musik des Orients (Society for Oriental Music Research), subsequently renamed the Gesellschaft für Vergleichende Musikwissenschaft (Society for Comparative Musicology). In 1932, Lachmann was elected the chairman of the Committee on Musical Recordings at the First International Congress of Arab Music held in Cairo and, in the same year, he was appointed sole founding editor of the *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Musikwissenschaft* (ZMW: Journal of Comparative Musicology) – effectively the first international journal on ethnomusicology. The ZMW ran to three volumes (1933, 1934 and 1935) before a ban by the Nazi authorities and the forced emigration of its principal collaborators led to its dissolution at the end of 1935.

Aged 40, Lachmann was at the height of his career when he was forcibly retired from his position in the Prussian State Library in September 1933 under the Nazi racial laws. In April 1935, following a protracted correspondence

with Judah L. Magnes, chancellor of the recently established Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Lachmann arrived in Jerusalem accompanied by his (non-Jewish) technician Walter Schur, to take up the position of *chaver mechkar* (research associate) in the School of Oriental Studies. His aim, as outlined in his correspondence, was to establish a "Section for Non-European Music" there. He brought with him his state-of-the-art recording equipment, his personal library of books, periodicals and commercial records, copies of his own collection of some 500 cylinder recordings, and copies of some 50 cylinder recordings made by Abraham Z. Idelsohn in Jerusalem in 1913. Within months of his arrival, Lachmann's "Section for Non-European Music" had been renamed the "Archive of Oriental Music."³



Figure 1. Family portrait, Berlin (n.d.). Georg and Jenny Lachmann (née Händler) and their three sons (from left to right) Heinz, Robert and Kurt. Private collection of Peter Lachmann.



Figure 2. Robert Lachmann, Portrait, Germany, early 1930s. Private collection of Peter Lachmann.

Over the following three years Lachmann made 956 recordings on metal discs documenting the oral musical traditions of the different "Eastern" communities of Palestine. His work was supported by a private donation, arranged by Magnes, supplemented by Lachmann's personal funds.⁴ Claiming that this income was insufficient to support his work in Jerusalem throughout the year, Lachmann established an annual pattern of spending the summer months in Europe (Berlin and London), where he was initially supported by a pension from his former employment in Berlin. His appointment at the Hebrew University was periodically renewed, but, despite Magnes's vigorous attempts to secure him a permanent position, this never materialized.

Lachmann's professional correspondence and diaries from his Palestine years describe an unrelenting stream of obstacles relating to inadequate and insecure finances and a lack of institutional support. His insistence on recording all the religious groups, without prioritizing any one of them, drew criticisms from both Muslim and Jewish quarters and alienated potential

sponsors. With World War II on the horizon, pressures of Jewish emigration from Nazi Europe fueling Jewish nationalist aspirations, and the Arab population staging a general strike and revolt, the times were hardly auspicious for convincing potential sponsors of the value and urgency of his "Oriental Music" project. Chronic illness led to Lachmann's hospitalization in September 1938 and, eventually, to his death in May 1939, aged 46.

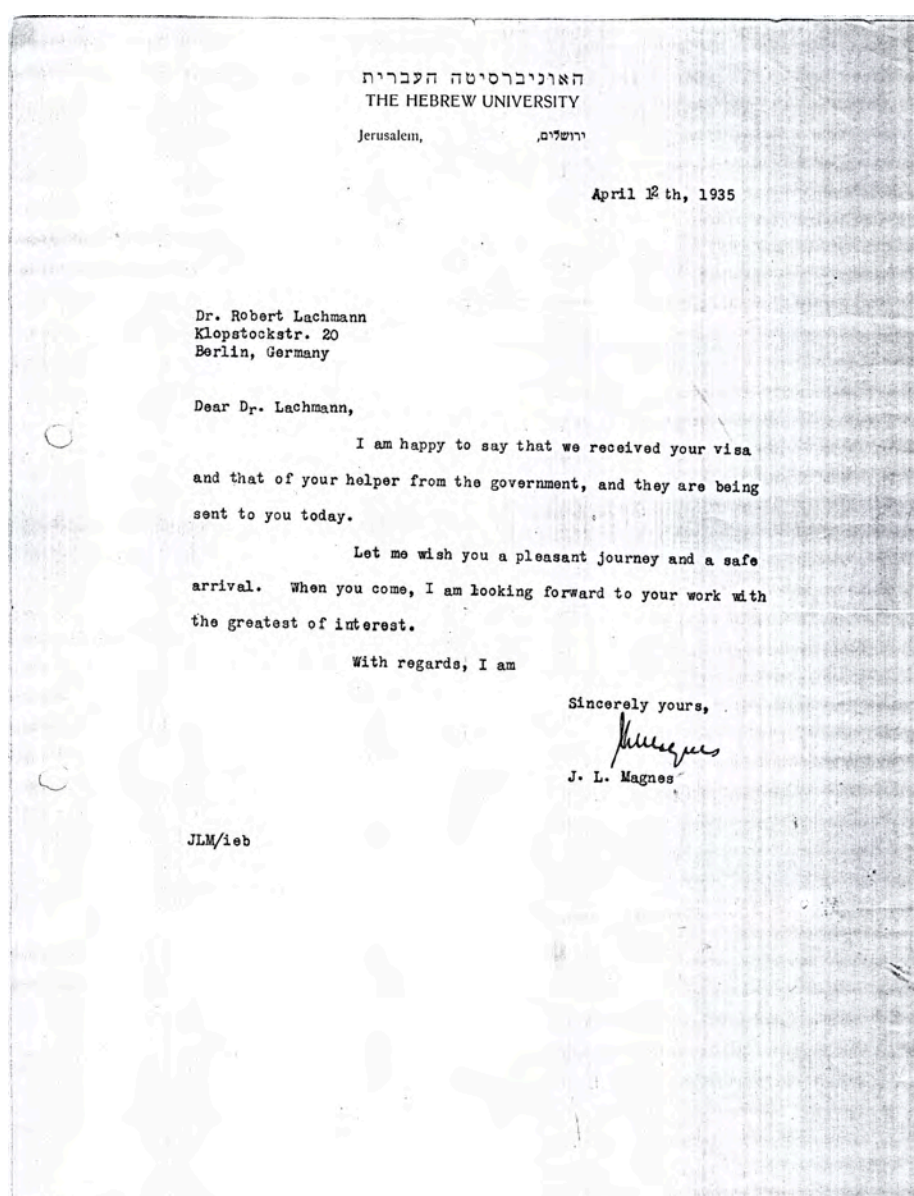


Figure 3. Letter from Judah L. Magnes to Robert Lachmann, 12 April 1935. Music Department, Israel National Library. Jerusalem.



Figure 4. Telegram from Judah L. Magnes to Kurt Lachmann, 9 May 1935. Private collection of Peter Lachmann.

From Berlin to Jerusalem

Despite the rupture it signified in his personal and professional life, Lachmann viewed his project in Jerusalem as a continuum, flowing seamlessly from the projects he initiated in Berlin. The most tangible expression of continuity was the transfer to Jerusalem of copies of his entire collection of cylinder recordings held in the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv to form the basis of his new archive. In a report of his activities dated 17 November 1935⁵

Lachmann describes how he obtained these copies on a return visit he and his technician made to Berlin in July 1935:

The Berlin phonogram archive is in possession of all the records of Oriental music that I have made on former occasions, partly in Berlin, but for the greatest part in North Africa [...] Part of these phonograms (which were all recorded with an Edison machine) only existed on the original wax cylinders; the rest were already copied by means of an electrotpe process. By kind permission of the present director of the Berlin archive⁶ we could make copies of the original by means of a pick-up specially constructed by Mr. Schur for the purpose of transferring sound recorded on cylinders to disc. In the same way we were allowed to "pick up" a collection of cylinders containing records of Jewish Oriental songs, and of Jewish and some Samaritan cantillations made by A. Z. Idelsohn in Palestine in 1913 and presented by him to the Berlin archive. In addition to these discs I brought copies, in cylinder form, of all of my recordings which had been electrotyped already; these will be transferred to discs here [in Jerusalem]. (Katz 2003:132)

Throughout his Palestine years, Lachmann maintained a continuing correspondence with his international colleagues, including those who, like himself, had been forced to emigrate. Much of this correspondence concerned his plans to resurrect the ZMW. His colleagues in the US, notably the anthropologist Helen Roberts and the musicologist Charles Seeger, were particularly encouraging, urging him to use English as the principal language of the journal and offering to secure a publisher in the US. Lachmann, for his part, was committed to resurrecting the journal in Jerusalem, arguing that, with its wealth and diversity of religious and ethnic groups, this city held a unique potential for comparative research. In his first correspondence with Magnes in March 1934, Lachmann envisages that "owing to the history and geographical situation of Jerusalem, the Hebrew University might well develop into a centre of research in Eastern music" (Katz 2003:74). He continues to insist on the "inexhaustible potential" of Jerusalem and Palestine in his subsequent reports, and in his 1935–1936 Annual Report he states explicitly that the journal is conceived as "an organ for the results of [the Archive's] research" (Katz 2003:141). In a letter to Magnes dated 10 March 1937, Lachmann encloses a preliminary budget prepared by the Azriel Press in Jerusalem to print and distribute the provisionally titled quarterly *Journal of Eastern and Primitive Music*. Heading the list of ten articles he proposes to include in the first issue is his own "Cantillation and songs of the Jews on the isle of Djerba," based on his research on the island in 1929.⁷ In May 1938, Lachmann sent Magnes a prospectus for the newly titled *Journal of Comparative*

Musicology, including a list of ten international scholars who had agreed to serve on the advisory board, and the arrangements for collecting subscriptions (Katz 2003:203–4). His health failing and with no prospect of obtaining a permanent position in the Hebrew University, Lachmann spent the summer of 1938 in London trying, unsuccessfully, to secure a collaboration with the BBC Overseas Service. He refers once more to his research among the Jews of Djerba in a report (in Hebrew) dated 8 January 1939, where, in a last, oblique reference to the prospective journal, he states that his article on the cantillation and songs of the Jews of Djerba is "ready to be published in a journal" in both Hebrew and English translation (Katz 2003:213–4).

Songs of the Jews on the Island of Djerba, Tunisia

Drawing from his research in the village of Hara Sghira in the spring of 1929,⁸ Lachmann's monograph *Jewish Cantillation and Song in the Isle of Djerba* (*Gesänge der Juden auf der Insel Djerba*; 1978) is by far the most substantial of his Palestine writings. Completed in its original German version in the year of his arrival, this pioneering study of a Tunisian Jewish community provides the methodological blueprint not only for his radio series "Oriental Music," but also for his Palestine project as a whole.⁹ He states the purpose of his visit at the outset:

The two [Jewish] communities claim to be of great age; they are said to have settled in Djerba shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple. This tradition suggested the present inquiry; it seemed worthwhile to find out whether their cantillation and song could be traced back to antiquity. (Lachmann 1940:1)¹⁰

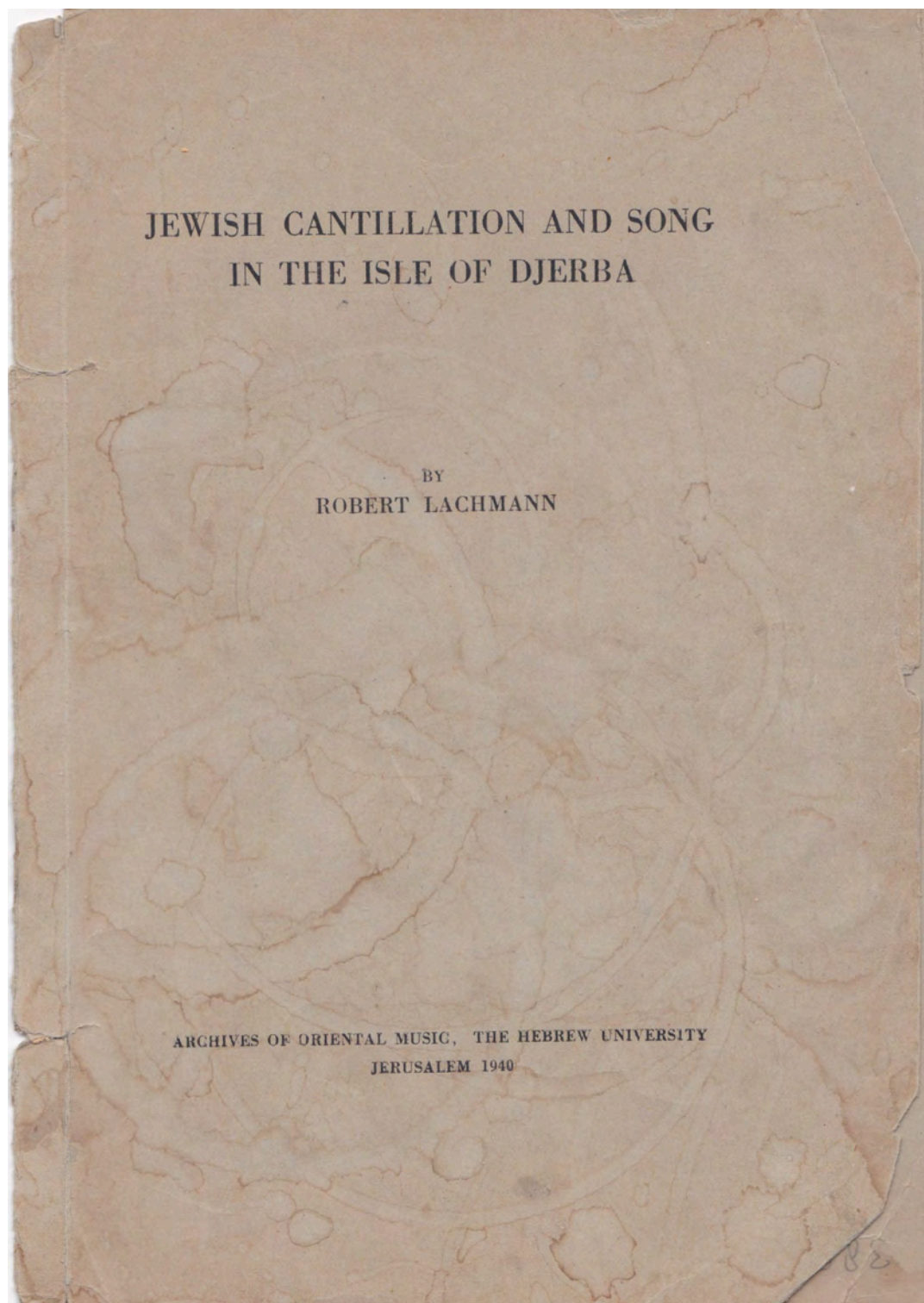


Figure 5. Front cover. Lachmann 1940.

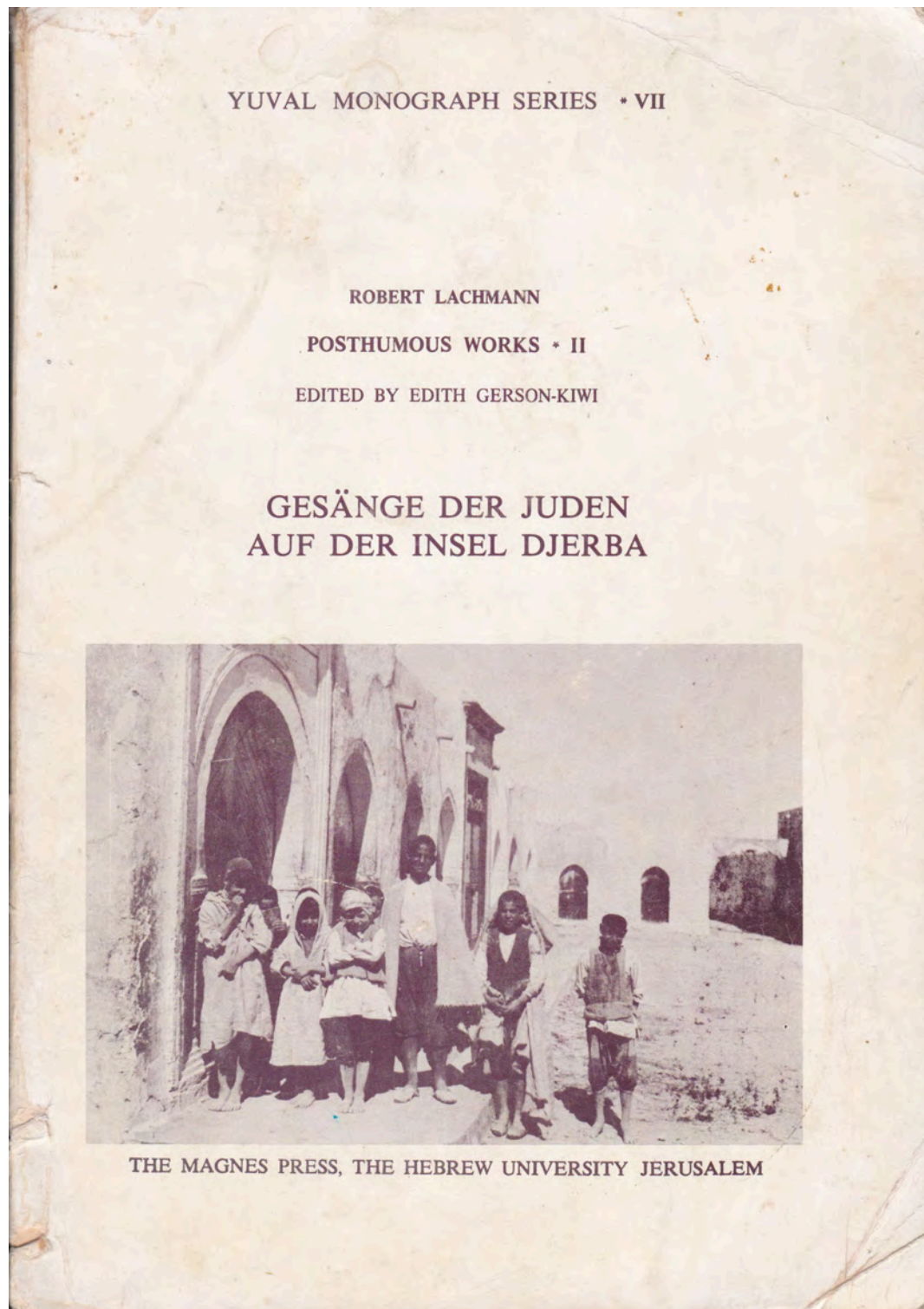


Figure 6. Front cover. Lachmann 1978.

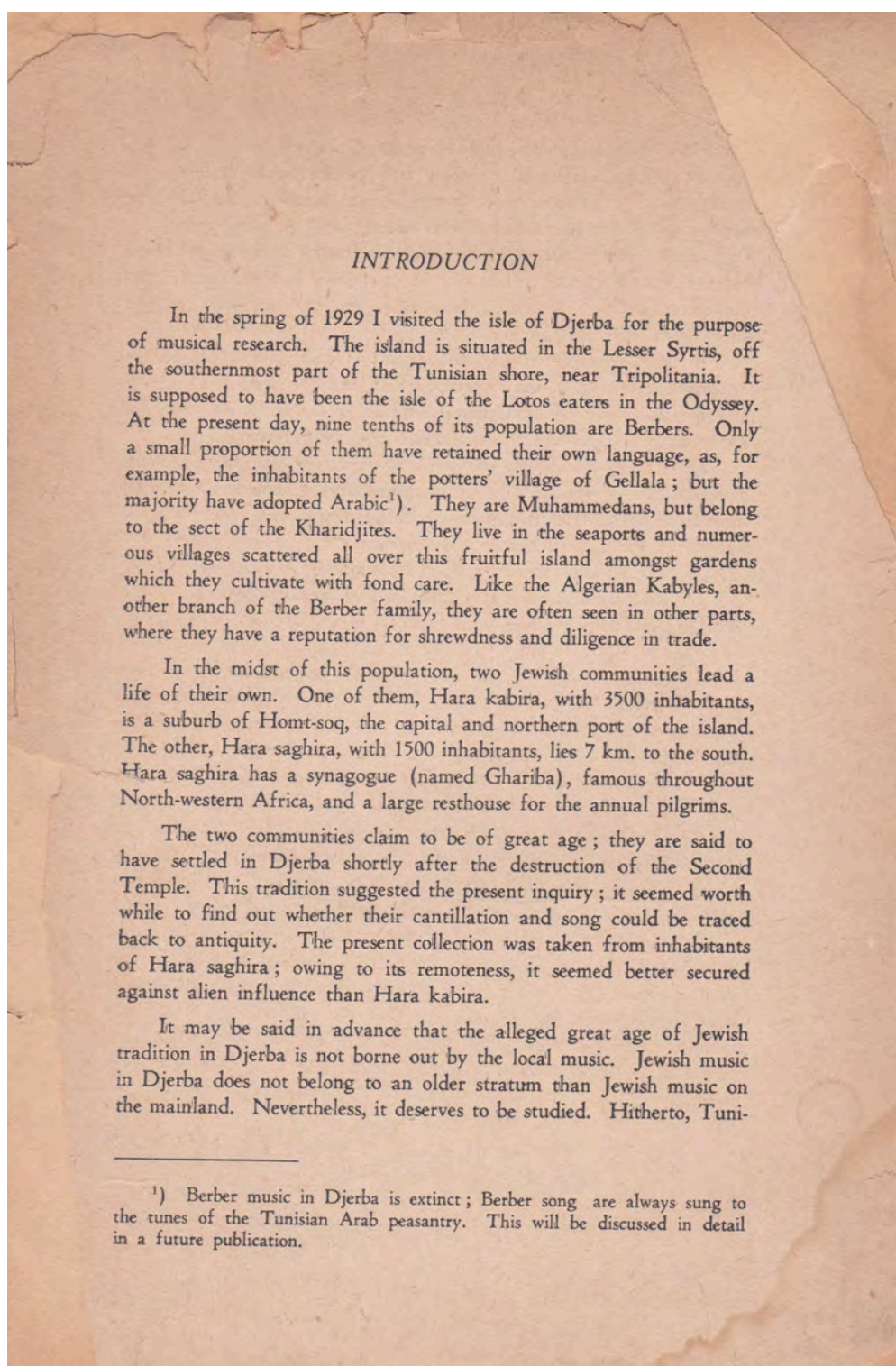


Figure 7. First page of Lachmann 1940.

Lachmann based his research in Hara Sghira, the smaller of the two Jewish villages, because, "owing to its remoteness, it seemed better secured against alien influences than Hara Kebira" (Lachmann 1940:1). He concluded that "Jewish music on Djerba does not belong to an older stratum than Jewish

music on the mainland" (ibid.:1). Yet his results were significant in another respect. Remarkably, in their zeal to protect the community from secular influences, the rabbis of Hara Sghira forbade the presence of musical instruments in the village. This prompted Lachmann to launch into a full-scale investigation of the distinctive qualities of music conceived for the unaccompanied voice.

Lachmann divided his recordings from Djerba into three different kinds of repertory: liturgical cantillation (*liturgische Kantillation*), festival songs (*Festlieder*)¹¹ and women's songs (*Frauenlieder*). The liturgical cantillation and festival songs were sung by men to Hebrew texts, and the women's songs used the Judeo-Arabic vernacular. Each repertory type is characterized by different principles of tonal and rhythmic organization, or, in Lachmann's terminology – a different "musical system" (ibid.:2).

Notwithstanding their purely vocal renderings on Djerba, the festival songs adopt the tonal and rhythmic systems (*māqāmat* and *iqā'āt*) of Tunisian-Arab urban music, which, Lachmann argues, ultimately derive from instrumental practice (see below). He considers the festival songs as belonging to the general sphere of Arab urban music.

The liturgical cantillation and the women's songs, by contrast, exemplify "different tendencies of the musical voice" (ibid.:2). The liturgical cantillation belongs to "that class of recitation which includes the emphatic rendering of magic formulae, of sacred texts, and of heroic poems" (ibid.:7). In this repertory type, Lachmann explains, "the voice, instead of following purely musical impulses [...] primarily serves to support speech; thus in place of consonant tonal relations [...] the voice travels along lines intermediary between speech and song" (ibid.:3).

Finally, the Djerban women's songs belong to the class of rhythmic song:

the forms of which are essentially dependent not on the connection with the text, but on processes of movement. Thus we find here, in place of the free rhythm of cantillation, and its very intricate line of melody, a periodical up and down movement (ibid.:84).

140 Festlieder

18 | 10.

♩ ca. 90.

piyyut.

1 *ah* *ka-a-ra* *na-* *son* *li-hap-pa* *ti-* *ah*

2 *yo-* *mi-hi* *hāp-* *pa-i* *li-il* *so* *ti-* *gi-a-* *ah*

3 *an-* *nā* *zi-kur* *nā* *ti* *bi-gim* *hō-hi-* *yah*

4 *au-* *qal* *wilom* *ni-* *a-qal* *si-ham* *mech-bi-* *yah*

5 *bi-* *a* *ha-ril* *nus-* *sa* *bi-se-fo* *ha-sa-* *na*

6 *hāb-* *bi-nā* *šir* *mō-* *lad* *li-hā* *mis-sa-* *na*

7 *qō-* *meha-a-* *ti-* *hā* *ti* *li-ya-* *ō-lā* *hā-* *na*

8 *i-* *me-naf* *ši-* *hā* *bū* *ad* *mi-od* *naq-* *šū-* *na*

Figure 8. Lachmann's transcription of his recording of the piyyut for Rosh Hashana "et sha'arai ratzon" by Rabbi Yehuda ben Shmuel ibn Abbas (12th century Aleppo; b. Fez, Morocco). The piyyut tells the story of the binding of Isaac. Singer: Hwida Huri. Hara Sghira, Djerba, (Tunisia), April 1929. (Lachmann 1978:140).

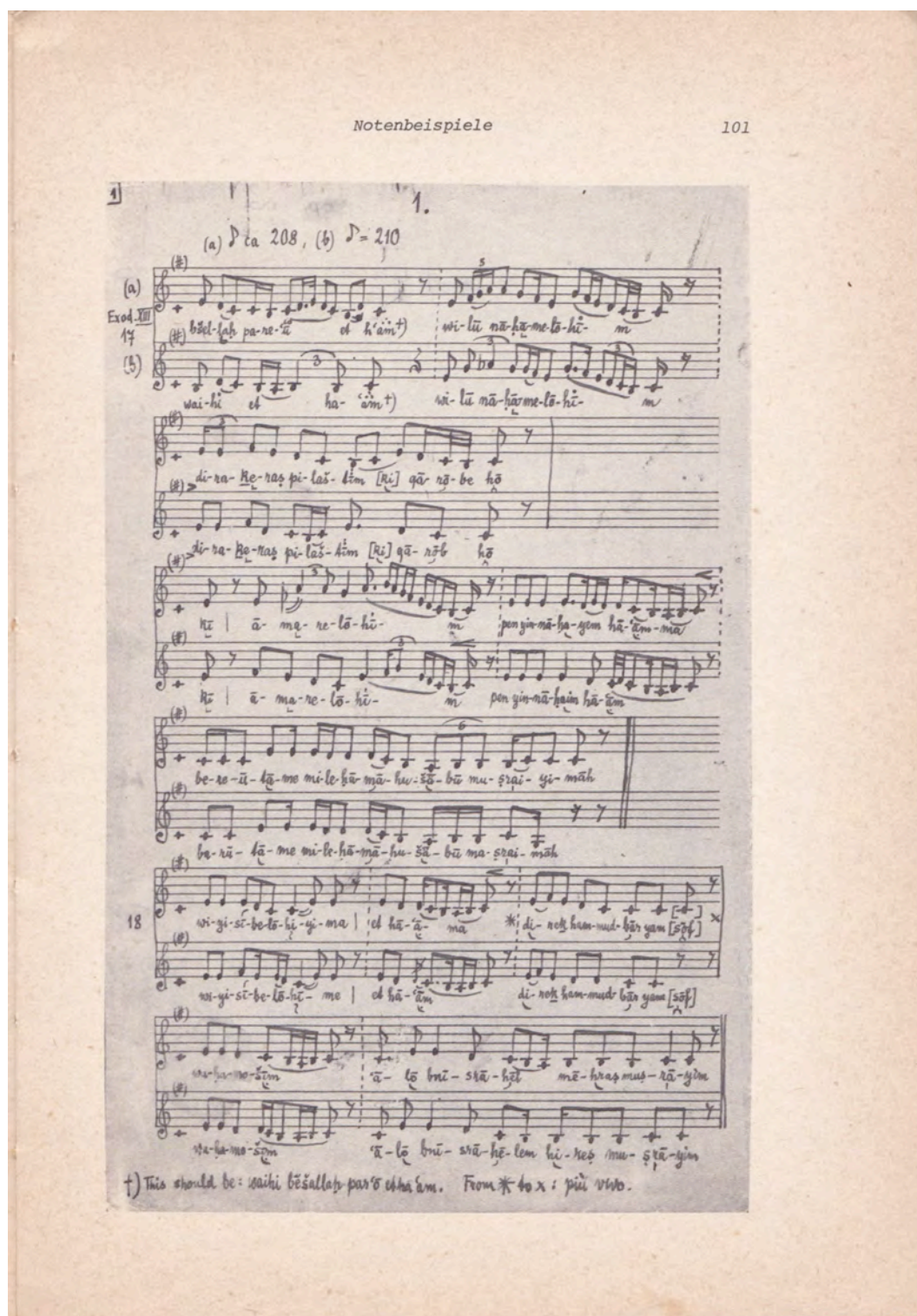


Figure 9. Lachmann's transcription of his recording of Exodus 13, 17–18: "the beginning of the passage recited by the rabbi on the seventh day of Passover" (Lachmann 1940:25). Singer: Sim'on. Hara Sghira, Djerba (Tunisia), April 1929. (Lachmann 1978:101).

176 *Frauenlieder*

27] 16.
Women's song.
J (Phon. 27) = 130; (Phon. 316) = 138-146

I a

yā mū- lā- nā ne- lā- le- bek dī- ma dī- ma wa-

hā- nī bō- te qad- de hā- ke le- hā- sū- na

a

b

wā- mā- nā be- le- mā- sū- qah ya- qī- nā

wū- qū- mū- mē- kī- n'ay- ya- ū min da- fī- na

II a

yā mū- lā- nā n- lā- le- bek fī- lo- 'a- šī- ya

qal- bi dī- yaq wa- du- mū- 'i sa- hay-

ya

b

qa- le- bi day- yaq wa- du- mū- 'u- i sa- hay- ya

Figure 10. Lachmann's transcription of his recording of a women's song. Hara Sghira, Djerba (Tunisia), April 1929. (Lachman 1978:180).

With the Djerban women's songs, Lachmann introduces another basic division in Arab music: that between urban music, represented by the men's festival songs, and "the sphere of rural Arab music – the music of the Bedouin and the Fellahin"¹² to which the women's songs belong (ibid.:82).

For Lachmann, the distinguishing factor in all types of purely vocal music is that "the unaccompanied voice, as against certain forms of musical instruments, neither prompts the vision of a scale nor does it yield clues for fixing intervals" (ibid.:2). The very concept of the musical scale consisting of a set of discrete pitches separated by standard intervals has its origins, Lachmann argues, not in vocal music but in the construction and playing technique of certain musical instruments. Citing as examples "pipes with series of finger-holes, harps and lyres mounted with series of strings, lutes with frets, etc.," he concludes, "Obviously, an interrelation exists between the construction of such instruments and the conception of a scale as consisting of a sequence of fixed intervals" (ibid.:4). Drawing on theories developed by Curt Sachs and Erich von Hornbostel in the 1920s,¹³ Lachmann attributes the very notion of standard intervals to the magical beliefs of certain Asian high civilizations, which ascribed to certain physical measurements powers of cosmological significance. Musical instruments, he observes, were particularly implicated in these beliefs. In ancient China, for example:

the fall of a dynasty was attributed to the pitch of the imperial orchestra being faulty and its re-tuning, therefore, was the first measure for the new government to take [...] The music played in the temples of China, Samaria, Babylonia and Ancient Egypt was not a mere embellishment of the ritual; the adaptation of the instruments to cosmological measures was held to be indispensable for the bringing about of favourable results. (ibid.:4–5)

In time, Lachmann explains, the ancient musical cosmologies gave way to new mathematical formulations, which took into account "the growing demands of the ear" (ibid.: 5–6). Nevertheless, he concludes, "ancient Greek and Chinese musical theory and their Indian, Arabian and European offshoots ultimately go back to cosmological ideas as their common basis" (ibid.:6).¹⁴

Lachmann similarly claims magical origins, albeit of a rather different kind, for liturgical cantillation and poetic recitation. Acknowledging the deep gulf that separates these forms from their putative predecessors, he maintains that both liturgical cantillation and poetic recitation, nevertheless, "represent late stages in a [process of] development ultimately going back to magic incantation" such as "the incantations of the medicine men in

shamanistic ritual." In Jewish and Christian cantillation, however, "the course of the voice has smoothed down so as to proceed in regular musical intervals as against the irrational steps and glides used in magic and similar recitation" (ibid.:7).

Lachmann's theories about, on the one hand, the cosmological ideas underpinning the musical scale and, on the other, the magical origins of the recitative vocal style suggest to him the possibility of constructing a relative chronology of different vocal and instrumental traditions according to the degree to which their "non-rational" musical systems have been penetrated by the "rational elements" of urban music (ibid.:84). On Djerba, he observes, the liturgical cantillation "has without doubt, assimilated traces of Andalusian music of Tunisian stamp." In this respect, it was consistent with Jewish cantillation elsewhere, which "can be subjected, more or less easily, to the scale systems of urban music – in Oriental communities, to the Arab system, and in European communities, in spite of some reservations, to Major and Minor" (ibid.:7).

Summarizing his results from Djerba, Lachmann considers the question of "Jewish music" in relation to the music of the non-Jewish environment. In so doing, he distinguishes between "musical characteristics that are transmitted and those that are inherited" (ibid.:85). To the former belong tonal and rhythmic systems and, to some extent, melodic material, which may, in principle, be taught. The latter, by contrast, "introduce us into more deep-lying strata of musical expression. They are expressed less in the musical material as such than in what is made of it [...] The individuality of the interpretation has as yet baffled analysis; we are reduced to relying on impressions" (ibid.:86).

From Djerba to Jerusalem: the "Oriental Music" broadcasts

In his reports from Jerusalem, Lachman consistently stresses the urgency of collecting the oral musical traditions before they were transformed or succumbed altogether to the inexorable onslaught of Western music. Accordingly, in his Annual Report, 1935–36, he insists that, in view of "the rapidly progressing decay of local music, collecting activities proper must have precedence over the literary evaluation of the collected items" (Katz 2003:143). As a result, most of the writings he produced during this period

refer only sporadically, if at all, to his research in Palestine, and rely instead on research carried over from his Berlin years. Apart from his Djerba monograph and two other works produced in the year of his arrival, which were intended for publication in the resurrected ZMW,¹⁵ these writings take the form of public lectures and broadcasts that were conceived as part of a wider strategy to promote the work of his Archive.¹⁶ The most substantial of these writings, and the only work to focus almost entirely on his field research in Palestine, is his series of twelve radio programs entitled "Oriental Music," transmitted by the Palestine Broadcasting Service between mid-November 1936 and the end of April 1937.¹⁷ Apart from program 1, which introduces the series as a whole, and programs 10 and 11, which are based on commercial recordings and survey music from across the Maghreb and wider Middle East, Lachmann's lectures are illustrated by live studio performances by musicians and singers living in and around Jerusalem – including Yemenite, Kurdish and Baghdadi Jews, Coptic and Samaritan priests, and Bedouin and Palestinian Arabs – simultaneously recorded onto metal disc. The successive programs effectively track Lachmann's collecting activities during the same period, as each program features the particular musicians and repertoires he was recording at the time. Yet, the "Oriental Music" broadcasts are not only, or even primarily, an introduction to specific musical traditions of Palestine; rather, the musical examples provide a backdrop for an exposition and synthesis, in a succinct and relatively accessible format, of fundamental ideas about the nature and evolution of musical systems and practices in relation to their social and cultural environment that had preoccupied Lachmann over the course of his scholarly career. And, while certain ideas presented in "Oriental Music" are replicated in other lectures he gave around this time, they receive their most expansive and comprehensive treatment in his monograph *Jewish Cantillation and Song in the Isle of Djerba* (Lachmann 1940).

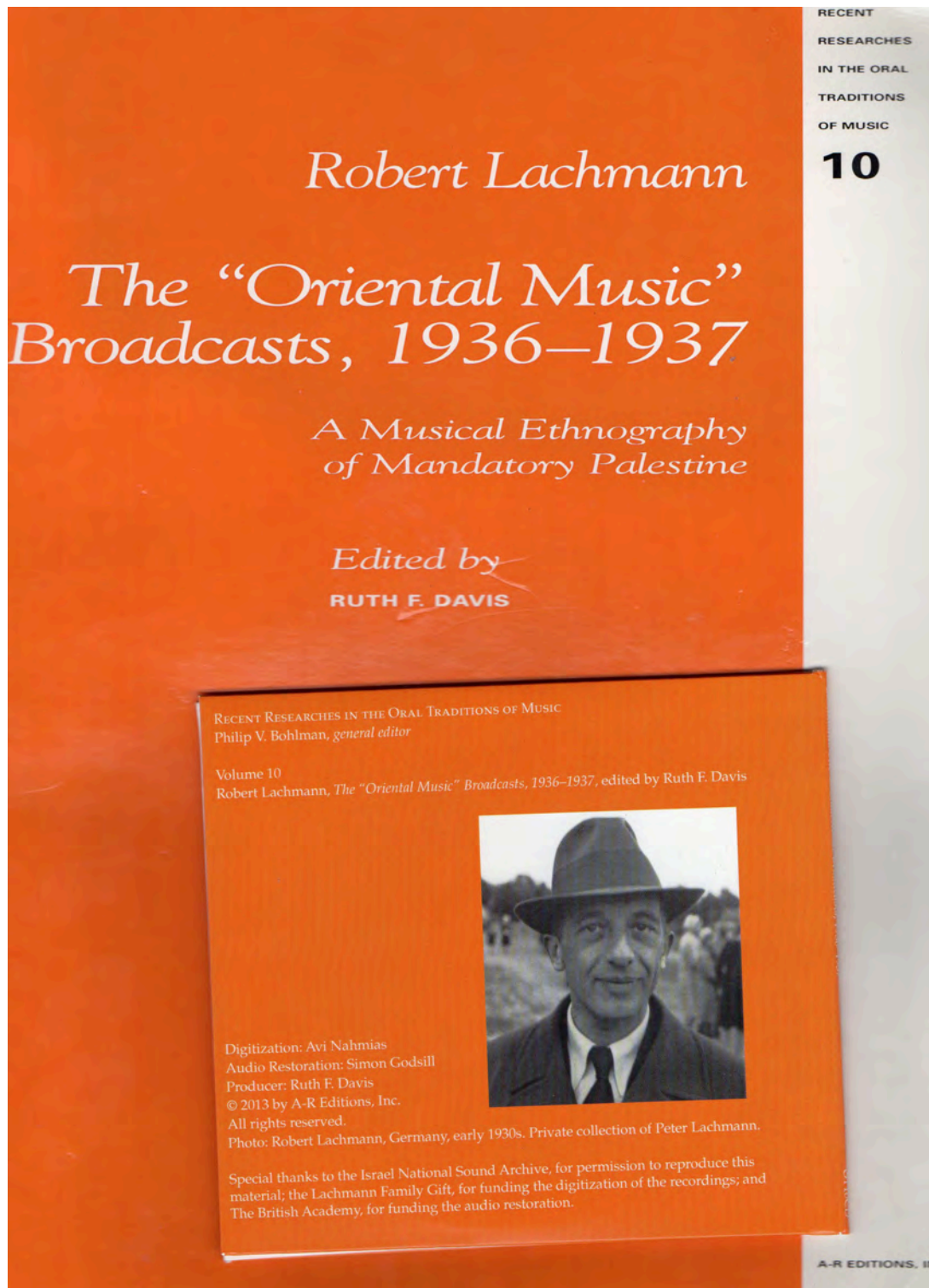


Figure 11. Cover of Davis 2013b. Critical edition of Lachmann's "Oriental Music" broadcasts with 2-CD set of selected digitally restored recordings.

In terms of content, the three repertory types Lachmann recorded on Djerba (liturgical cantillation, festival songs and women's songs) map directly onto the three Yemenite Jewish repertory types – liturgical cantillation, men's

wedding songs and women's wedding songs – featured in programs 2, 7 and 8 of "Oriental Music"; in both the Djerban and Yemenite examples, the men's repertoires are sung to Hebrew texts, and the women's songs are in the Judeo-Arabic vernacular. Programs 2, 3, 4, and 6, featuring, respectively, Yemenite Jewish cantillation, Coptic chant, Kurdish Jewish cantillation, and Samaritan cantillation, and program 5, featuring Arab poetic recitation accompanied by the rababa, provide fertile territory for the unfolding of Lachmann's ideas about the origins and nature of those types of repertory in which "the voice [...] primarily serves to support speech" (Lachmann 1940:3). Arguing that both the various traditions of sacred chant and the sung recitation of Arabic poetry have their origins in magical cantillation, he observes that "in both cases, a single person, priest or poet keeps a large audience spellbound" (Davis 2013b:38). In the cantillation of the Samaritans – an ancient people, with a history of continuous settlement in the region that precedes the exile of the Jews to Babylon in the 6th century BCE – Lachmann found "a sphere of expression with a reality of its own." He views the extraordinary vocalizations of the Samaritan priests as vestiges of the disguised voice of the shaman, or medicine man; yet, for all their apparent spontaneity, he argues, the expletives that characterize the vocal line are subjected to a system which binds them to certain stereotypical properties of the text. Samaritan cantillation, Lachmann posits, represents an intermediary stage of development between magical incantation and the cantillation of the Jewish and Christian liturgies.



Full audio file also is available as part of
the web version of this publication

Audio 1. "Shirat ha-yam" (Song of the Sea), Exodus 15, 1 (excerpt). Recited by Ibrahim Kohen, Samaritan priest from Nablus. Lachmann collection D529, Jerusalem, 3 February 1937. Israel National Sound Archive. For the complete recording with and without sound restoration, see Davis 2013b, CD1, tracks 13–14.

Link to [audio file](#)

Programs 7, 8 and 12, in contrast, are devoted to songs accompanying rituals associated with marriage, performed by men and women, respectively, at a Yemenite Jewish wedding, and by men at an Arab village wedding. Like the festival songs and the women's songs of the Jews of Djerba, these three programs illustrate different functions of music in communal life.

In program 9, featuring solo improvisations (taqāsīm) for the 'ūd, Lachmann distinguishes between the music of rural and urban societies, the former belonging to an entirely oral culture, the latter associated with a highly developed theoretical and philosophical literature that includes, among other topics, the relationship between music and cosmology.

Finally, in program 11, in which he introduces the diverse urban musical traditions of the Mashriq and beyond, he distinguishes between musical characteristics of an expressive nature that are inherited, such as are associated with ethnicity, race and nation, and those of a more technical nature that may, in principle, be taught.

Jewish women's songs from Djerba and the Yemen

Concluding his Djerba study from his vantage point in Jerusalem, Lachmann observes: "It is obvious [...] that there is a demand for further collections – as extensive as possible – of Jewish and other traditional music in the Near East and for a careful examination of the same" (ibid.:86).

That he was taking steps to prepare such collections is clear from his statement in his report for the Information Bulletin of the Hebrew University dated 4 May 1937:¹⁸

Several branches of oriental music have been studied closely with the object of publishing collections of tunes fully representative of each particular branch [...] Above all, a very full collection of Yemenite Jewish records has been made, [making] it possible to furnish a complete musical supplement to the study of the manners and customs of the Yemenite Jews [...] – a fact which should be greatly appreciated by students of ethnology [...]. (Katz 2003:192)

Lachmann's "very full collection of Yemenite Jewish records" includes "a full collection [...] of women's songs. These very simple types of song represent an early stratum in original musical development and have been recorded for the first time" (ibid.:192).



Figure 12. Original disc of recording D596, 23 February 1937. Side A of 2-sided disc. Photograph by Jill Furmanovsky.



Figure 13. Original disc of recording D596, 23 February 1937. Detail.



Full audio file also is available as part of
the web version of this publication

Audio 2. Yemenite Jewish women's song for the henna ritual "Sa'at r-rahman dal-hin" (It is the hour of mercy) (excerpt). Two Yemenite Jewish women with daff (medium-sized frame drum without jingles) and cymbals. Lachmann collection D596, Jerusalem, 23 February 1937. Israel National Sound Archive. For the complete recording with and without sound restoration, see Davis 2013b, CD1, tracks 21–22.

Link to [audio file](#)

The idea that women's songs, particularly those sung in the domestic sphere, represent a relatively early stage of musical development was widely held at the time (see von Hornbostel 1927:425ff; Sachs 1943:91; Bartok and Lord 1951, cited in Edith Gerson-Kiwi 1965:102). Apparently, Lachmann's interest in women's songs, whether on Djerba or among the Yemenite Jews of Jerusalem, consisted not so much in that they were performed exclusively by women as in that they exemplified what he considered to be a fundamental musical type, "which – like the recitation of magic or liturgical texts – goes back to prehistoric times" (1940:84). It was a type, moreover, that was not restricted to women. In the second of his "Four Lectures on Eastern Music" presented to the Palestine branch of the International Association of University Women,¹⁹ he includes in the same class of songs:

Lullabies sung by mothers while they rock the cradle [...] occupation songs such as those of women turning a hand mill [sic] or pounding seeds in a mortar [...] boatmen's songs on the Nile and elsewhere [...] refrains sung by a community in response to a priest's or another protagonist's solo; songs sung to primitive dances; and many others [...] Most of these kinds of song address themselves to an audience; they grow out of the common spirit of a group and everybody present is supposed to join in. (Katz 2003:393)

Nevertheless, Lachmann's recordings of the Jewish women's songs of Djerba hold a special significance in providing unique, if not the earliest, documentation of the domestic songs of women in an Oriental Jewish community. In contrast to his recording sessions with the men of Hara Sghira, whose circumstances are scarcely mentioned, Lachmann gives a vivid account of his single session with the women, which took the form of a communal gathering:

The Head of the Community of Hara Sghira had six or eight women brought to his house. These women – some with their children and other members of the family – sat closely huddled together in the little room which was allocated for the purpose of recording. In addition, the master of the house had admitted a number of privileged onlookers who filled not only the room itself but also the inner court of the house [...] the crowding was such that there was barely enough elbow-room for adjusting the apparatus [...] While one of the women sang in the trumpet, others signified by gesticulation or by whispering that they were not satisfied with the recitation (and that they could do it better); and this was repeated at every change of singer [...]

The climax of the performance is always reached when the record is reproduced by the trumpet – the singers then hearing their own voice fill the room without their participation. Speechless wonder is succeeded by an outbreak of uproarious merriment [and] a readiness to sing again and again in order to

hear one's own voice again and again. In the case of the singers at Djerba the effect of the unusual impression was obvious. Their prematurely old faces – the faces of poor, careworn mothers – brightened: their lips moved, repeating in whispers with the utmost satisfaction the words of the text as the song sounded through the trumpet. (Lachmann 1940:67–8)

The importance Lachmann attaches to women's songs generally is apparent in a letter he wrote to his parents from Egypt in April 1932, in which he describes a recording session at the home of a wealthy farmer in the village of Dirfa, near Tanta in the Nile Delta: "What I mainly heard were women's songs which, naturally, I was particularly interested in. The difficulty in recording songs with women resides in the fact that quite in the middle, and quite unprovokedly, they break out giggling. Still, I am satisfied with the yield" (Katz 2003:320).

Epilogue

Following Lachmann's death in 1939, his archive was transferred to university accommodation on Mount Scopus. This became inaccessible when, with the partition of Palestine in 1948, East Jerusalem was annexed by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The collection was eventually retrieved by military convoy and, from 1964, it was incorporated into the National Sound Archive and Music Department of the National Library, located in the new Hebrew University campus in West Jerusalem (Gerson-Kiwi 1974:103). The Jewish Music Research Centre, located in the same quarters, was founded in the same year. In the absence of appropriate playback equipment, the fragile cylinders and rusty discs remained inaccessible to scholars until, in the early 1990s, the archive launched a digitization project funded by the Austrian Friends of the Hebrew University.²⁰

However, even as his recordings lay mute, Lachmann's vision continued to inspire the work of his former research students, particularly Edith Gerson-Kiwi and, through her, that of subsequent generations of ethnomusicologists. Gerson-Kiwi, a pianist and a scholar of Italian renaissance music, with a doctorate in musicology from the University of Heidelberg, arrived in Jerusalem in 1935 and began working with Lachmann the following year. The acquisition of a tape recorder by the Rubin Academy of Music in Jerusalem in the late 1940s catalyzed Gerson-Kiwi into resuming Lachmann's project, which was given renewed impetus by the mass exodus of Jews from Arab

lands after 1948 (Shiloah and Gerson-Kiwi 1981:202–3). Reflecting on her early initiatives, Gerson-Kiwi writes:

A major goal was to undertake an investigation of this unbelievable assembly of Jewish communities from the four corners of the world [...] The early collection and analysis projects of the Archive, located since 1953 at the Hebrew University, were of an even greater importance because the variety of Oriental traditions of the "Ingathering of Exiles" was likely to disappear as the exiles became integrated [...]. (Shiloah and Gerson-Kiwi 1981:203)

In contrast to Lachmann's Oriental Music Archive, the National Sound Archive is concerned primarily with collections of Jewish music. However, the comparative principle, insisted upon by Lachmann and reaffirmed by Gerson-Kiwi, which ensures, at the very least, that the study of Jewish music must also include the music of co-territorial non-Jewish communities, remains embedded in the national ethnomusicology, and continues to guide the work of the new national institutions.²¹ The official statement of the Jewish Music Research Centre acknowledges that:

A full appreciation of Jewish musical traditions must refer to the musical cultures of the non-Jewish societies with whom Jews shared spaces in close contact. Thus many projects are carried on in conjunction with colleagues and institutions from around the world, expanding vistas to co-territorial musical cultures.²²

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Notes

1. His thesis was published as a journal article the following year (Lachmann 1923). The following quotations are taken from the author's translation of the 1923 article.
2. The report is reproduced in full in Katz 2003:138–47.
3. Lachmann's fourth Jerusalem report, dated 17 November 1935, written on his return from his visit to the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv to make copies of the remaining recordings in his collection (see below), is headed 'Archive of Oriental Music.'
4. Lachmann dedicated the English translation of his Djerba monograph to his sponsor, Mrs. Leone Ginzburg of New York (Lachmann 1940).
5. Reproduced in Katz 2003:131–2.
6. In 1934, following the forced departure of von Hornbostel, the Phonogramm-Archiv was incorporated into the Museum für Völkerkunde under Marius Schneider and moved to Berlin – Dahlem.
7. The letter and enclosures are reproduced in Katz 2003:176–8.

8. Lachmann's visit to Djerba formed part of his last recording trip to Tunisia between mid-March and mid-May 1929. According to Israel J. Katz, who has reconstructed Lachmann's itinerary based on the detailed letters he wrote to his parents, Lachmann spent from 18 through 29 April on Djerba (Katz 2020).
9. Originally intended for publication in the first issue of the newly restored *Journal for Comparative Musicology*, Lachmann's monograph was published posthumously by the Azriel Press, Jerusalem, in an English translation partially prepared and supervised by Lachmann in the months before his death. The original German manuscript edited by Edith Gerson-Kiwi was published by the Magnes Press, Jerusalem, in 1978 (Lachmann 1978). Citations in this article are taken from the English version.
10. Hara Kebira (lit., big Jewish quarter) lies on the outskirts of Houmt Souk, the island's main port and market town, whereas Hara Sghira (lit., little Jewish quarter) lies about seven kilometres inland.
11. Lachmann also uses the Hebrew "piyyut" (lit. poem) – the community's own term for this repertory, to refer to the song texts.
12. Arabic for farmers.
13. Sachs 1921:82; see also von Hornbostel 1928; Sachs 1940:182.
14. Lachmann discerns the remnants of this magical way of thinking in the Middle Eastern system of melody types, or maqām, "each of which is assigned to a particular hour of the day, and is believed to possess certain magical properties" (Lachmann 1940:5–6).
15. Lachmann lists these works in his Annual Report 1935–36. See Katz 2003:145.
16. See Davis 2013b:xxii–xxiv.
17. Lachmann's broadcast lectures are published with editorial introduction, notes and commentary, music and text transcriptions and translations, and an accompanying 2CD set of Lachmann's recordings in both original and digitally restored versions in Davis 2013b.
18. The supplement is reproduced in full in Katz 2003:192–4.
19. The "Four Lectures" are reproduced as an Appendix to Katz 2003:379–415.
20. For more details of the digitization project, see Davis 2013b.
21. The comparative principle had been established by Lachmann's predecessor Abraham Z. Idelsohn (1882–1938), who made the first collections of the various Oriental Jewish traditions in Jerusalem between about 1906 and 1921, while also making pioneering contributions to the study of Arab music. I discuss the relationship between Idelsohn's and Lachmann's projects in Davis 2013a.
22. <https://jewish-music.huji.ac.il/content/history-goals>. Accessed 20 November 2023.

About the author

Ruth F. Davis is an ethnomusicologist specializing in music cultures of North Africa, the Middle East and the wider Mediterranean. Formerly chair of the ICTM study group on Mediterranean music studies (2014–2023) her publications focus primarily on her ethnographic research on the island of Djerba, mainland Tunisia, and among Tunisian Jewish diasporic communities, and on the intellectual history of ethnomusicology in late Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine. She is an emeritus professor of ethnomusicology and life fellow of Corpus Christi College, University of Cambridge and an associate research fellow at the Centre for Research in Ethnomusicology (CREM), Paris Nanterre University.