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Autor: Bekkum, Wout van
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Jewish Liturgy in the Netherlands: Liturgical Intentions and Historical Dimensions

By *Wout van Bekkum**

Abstract

The history of Jewish liturgy and poetry involves a perennial process of preference and selection, moving from variety in more ancient times to fixity in later days. The Amsterdam Mahzor is a valuable starting point for the study of alternation and adaptation in synagogue worship of the western Ashkenazi branch during the late Middle Ages. Amsterdam was internationally famous because of its Hebrew press in the domain of synagogue liturgy and poetry, but the spirit of modern times asked for new national and religious expressions of worship. This study shows that there is almost no parallel to the situation of Dutch Jewry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which left its imprint on the content, appearance and purpose of Dutch siddurim and mahzorim, both Ashkenazi and Sefardi. The problematic status of Piyyut or synagogue poetry reflects the changing perspectives in Dutch-Jewish worship practices.

Die Geschichte der jüdischen Liturgie und religiösen Dichtung geht einher mit einem ununterbrochenen Prozess von Aneignung und Aussonderung, der von Vielfalt in älteren Zeiten zu genauer Festlegung in jüngeren Tagen führt. Einen guten Ausgangspunkt für eine Untersuchung von Wechsel und Anpassung im synagogalen Gottesdienst des westeuropäischen aschkenasischen Judentums im späten Mittelalter bietet der Amsterdamer Mahzor. Amsterdam war international berühmt für seinen hebräischen Buchdruck auf dem Gebiet synagogaler Liturgie und Dichtung; der Geist der Neuzeit aber verlangte nach neuen nationalen und religiösen Ausdrucksformen des Gottesdienstes. Vor diesem Hintergrund zeigt der Aufsatz, dass es fast keine Parallele zur Situation der niederländischen Juden im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert gibt, die ihre Spuren in Inhalt, Form und Zielsetzung niederländischer aschkenasischer ebenso wie sefardischer Siddurim und Mahzorim hinterlassen hätte. Abbild des Wandels in der niederländisch-jüdischen gottesdienstlichen Praxis ist dabei der problematische Status des Piyyut, der synagogalen Dichtung.

In 1837, the Christian reverend Alexander McCaul (1799-1863) composed his book *The Old Paths; or, A Comparison of the Principles and Doctrines of Modern Judaism with the Religion of Moses and the Prophets*. McCaul was rector of the church of St. Magnus, St. Margaret, and St. Michael at London Bridge, and prebendary of St. Paul's cathedral. His curious work was soon after publication re-published in a Hebrew version and translated

* Prof. Dr. *Wout J. van Bekkum*, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Faculteit der Letteren, Centrum voor Midden-Oosten Studies, Oude Kijk in 't Jatstraat 26, NL-9712 EK Groningen Nederland.

into German, French, Yiddish, and Dutch.¹ In his so-called ‘Voorloopig Berigt’ (‘Preliminary Message’), the anonymous translator/editor states that the author wished to focus on synagogue prayer texts as the most reliable source for the argument that one should make a distinction between Judaism as a religion and the Jews as a people. Judaism is simply to be considered as an errant faith, and therefore the contemporary Jews are the innocent victims who cannot be blamed personally, because their prayer books have led them into confusion. Throughout the centuries synagogue prayers had been corrupted by the tales and legends of the Rabbis, who manipulated both liturgical and poetic passages, and so deceived the worshipping Jew.

It is not so much this observation which catches our attention, because the Reverend McCaul also for some time served as the Head of the *London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews*. It is rather his deliberate effort to impress upon the reader that synagogue prayers and poems are the ultimate reflection of תורה שבעל-פה (*Torah she-be'al peh*), the Oral Torah which represents the intolerance of contemporary Judaism as contrasted with an ever tolerant message of the Christian New Testament. How could it otherwise be explained that Jewish prayer contains allusions to the Gentiles by the employment of appellations such as Edom or Edomites, a consistent reference to the Christians who should be put to the sword according to a hymn for Pesach.² It is not just this text, recited only once

1 London, The London Society's Office, 1837 (2nd ed., 1846); Hebrew version: נתיבות עולם: יכלכל ערך העקרים והיסודות של דת היהדות נגד תורת משה והנביאים, London: A. McIntosh, 1838 (2nd ed., 1863; 3rd ed., 1870; 4th ed., 1882; 5th ed., 1898; 6th ed., 1910), German translation: *Nethivoth Olam, oder Der wahre Israelit. Ein vergleich zwischen dem modernen Judenthum und der Religion Moses und der Propheten*, nach dem Englischen herausgegeben von Rev. W. Anerst, Frankfurt am Main: Wilhelm Kuchler, 1839 (2nd ed., Frankfurt am Main: C. Naumann, 1863); French translation: *Les sentiers d'Israël*, par Philipp Jacob Oster, Paris: Chez Delay ; Metz: Chez Devilly, 1844; Yiddish translation: נתיבות עולם, די אַלטע שטעגן, Varshe [Warsaw] : Tipograffī A. Ginsa, 1876; Dutch translation: *De oude paden, of, de ware Israëlïet, Het hedendaagsche Jodendom vergeleken met de leer en godsdienst van Mozes en de Profeten*, door Rev. Alexander M'Caul, D. D., Professor der Godgeleerdheid, aan het Koninklijke Collegie, te London, Prebend. van de St. Pauluskerk, Predikant, enz. enz., London: The Society's House, 1853.

2 “The night of watching, they ate the Passover lamb hastily.” *Nethivoth Olam* (n. 1 above), p. 110 with reference to the words פסח חרב חדה על אדום / ביד צה ואדום / כימי חג פסח – “Pesach, a sharp sword over Edom, in the hand of God who is radiant and ruddy, like the days of the Pesach festival.”

per year, but also the daily prayers which equally condemn the Epicureans, as McCaul phrases it, without any sense of compassion and forgiveness, such as *אל תהי תקוה ולמלשינים* (*we-la-malsbinim al tehi tiqwah*), etc. As a matter of fact, McCaul's misinterpretation is part of a long tradition of textual adaptations in statutory prayer, varying from *מלשינים* (*malsbinim* 'slanders') to *משומדים* (*meshummadim* 'apostates'), *מינים* (*minim* 'heretics', hence the name of the prayer is *ברכת המינים* *birkat ha-minim*), and *זדים* *zedim* ('the arrogant').³ Religious pressures and historical realities were taken into account even into modern times, when prayer reform began to make apologies for this benediction, which was often perceived as an ugly malediction and therefore modified or even omitted.

The *Werdegang* of *ברכת המינים* (*birkat ha-minim*) is only one example of how the intentions of synagogue *תפילות* (*tefillot* 'prayers') and *פיוטים* (*piyyuṭim* 'hymns') were misunderstood, a phenomenon of all times. This is a continuing problem in the study of the transmission of Jewish liturgical materials up to and including the 19th and 20th centuries. The history of Jewish liturgy and poetry involves a perennial process of preference and selection, moving from variety in more ancient times to fixity in later days. The existence of a statutory and obligatory set of prayers, *שמע* (*Shema*) and *תפילת שמונה-עשרה* (*Tefillat Shemoneh 'Esreeb*), with optional extras was not exclusively a matter of halakhic authority as reflected in Talmudic or geonic sources, but was also subject to the cultural spirit and literary taste of Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Of course, no one was to doubt the centrality of the two aforementioned prayers; they were common to Jews everywhere, as were other forms of worship, such as the reading of Bible and Prophets.⁴ As against this uniformity from one late antique or medieval synagogue to the next, prayer service varied in different locales, just as was indubitably the case with types of Aramaic Bible translations, the several *targumim*, or the sermons which were offered, the *derashot*, and all the poetic additions and embellishments, the *piyyuṭim*. The result is a

3 *Nethivoth Olam* (n. 1 above), p. 114; see also REUVEN R. KIMELMAN, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Prayer in Late Antiquity", in: E. P. SANDERS (ed.), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, 2 vols., 1981, vol. II, pp. 226-244; WILLIAM HORBURY, "The Benediction of the 'Minim' and Early Jewish-Christian Controversy," *Journal of Theological Studies* 33 (1982), pp. 19-61; JOEL MARCUS, "Birkat Ha-Minim Revisited", *New Testament Studies* 55 (2009), pp. 523-551; RUTH LANGER, *Cursing the Christians: A History of the Birkat HaMinim*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011, pp. 141-155.

4 STEFAN REIF, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer, New perspectives on Jewish liturgical history*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993, pp. 61-64.

rich tapestry of communal and local preferences, and the picture held by modern researchers of the varied attitudes toward synagogue liturgy in the Jewish world has therefore to allow room for considerable nuance.

The best, and the best-known, text of medieval Jewish liturgy, one which tells us much about the institution and adaptation of Jewish prayer in different communal settings, deserves to be mentioned here. It is a beautifully ornamented and written manuscript, one of the earliest codices of medieval Ashkenazi liturgy known as the Amsterdam *Mahzor*, mainly because it forms part of the collection of the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam.⁵ Close investigation of the liturgical and iconographical aspects of the Amsterdam *Mahzor* revealed that the codex actually originated in Cologne, and preserved the order of prayer texts and *piyyuṭim* according to the rites of the Rheinland district.⁶ Numerous marginal annotations proposing liturgical changes give evidence of its use in a diversity of communities, showing that each user had his own preferences. The original contents of the Amsterdam *Mahzor* represent the crystallized shape of the western Ashkenazi rite, whereas the numerous *piyyuṭim* often reflect considerable antiquity: some of the latter can be attributed to the seventh-century hymnist El'azar birabbi Kalir or Kilir (c. 570-c. 640), a composer of almost mythical stature and one whose presence in Ashkenazi liturgy can be called canonical.⁷ It cannot once be said that the Amsterdam *Mahzor* is a valuable starting point for the study of alternation and adaptation in synagogue worship of the western Ashkenazi branch during the late Middle Ages.

A brief word is also appropriate here concerning the Sefardi liturgical tradition in which a variety of rites and customs existed, and in which two

5 A comprehensive study of the Amsterdam Mahzor was published by ALBERT VAN DER HEIDE AND EDWARD VAN VOOLEN (eds.), *The Amsterdam Mahzor: History, Liturgy, Illumination*, Leiden: E. J. Brill 1989 (= *Litterae Textuales*, A Series on Manuscripts and Their Texts).

6 See EZRA FLEISCHER in *The Amsterdam Mahzor*, chapter III, "Prayer and Liturgical Poetry in the Great Amsterdam Mahzor." This chapter was translated into English but the original Hebrew version will be published in a forthcoming collection of articles on Hebrew prayer by Ezra Fleischer, edited by SHULAMIT ELIZUR and TOVA BEERI.

7 See, e. g., EZRA FLEISCHER, *Hebrew Poetry in the Middle Ages*, supplemented and annotated by SHULAMIT ELIZUR and TOVA BEERI, Jerusalem: Keter, 2007; SHALOM SPIEGEL, *The Fathers of Piyyut, Texts and Studies toward a History of the Piyyut in Eretz Yisrael*, selected from his literary estate and edited by MENAHEM H. SCHMELZER, New York and Jerusalem: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1996.

major trends can be discerned exerting influence on communal prayer practice: one is the application of liturgical guidelines from geonic response, and the other is the effect of kabbalistic or pietistic devotion. Generally speaking, after 1492 the Sefardi Diaspora tended to look for a more unified form of liturgy as much as Ashkenazi communities, when printing was invented and widely adopted. The printed form of Jewish prayer, both the technical process and the impetus for canonicity, would lead to remarkable liturgical adjustments. Elements of revision and even censorship can be detected in the prayer-texts of Isaac ben Moses ha-Levi Satanow, David Friedländer and Wolf Benjamin Zeev ben Samson Heidenheim.⁸ Modern Jewish liturgical research has therefore to take account of these and other problems of revision and omission. Can we really study these prayer books without preconceived notions about the accuracy of their transmission and ways of standardization or rather authorization? To pose the question is tantamount to giving the answer.

Amsterdam was internationally famous because of its Hebrew press in the domain of synagogue liturgy and poetry, but the spirit of modern times asked for new national and religious expressions of worship. There is almost no parallel to the situation of the early nineteenth-century Dutch Jewry which left its imprint on the content, appearance and purpose of the *siddurim* and *mahzorim*, both Ashkenazi and Sefardi. The composers of these volumes were not and did not wish to be in the same position as the *hazzanim*, who in earlier days dominated the cantorial-liturgical directions per community or even per synagogue, each following its own inherited or imported ritual. The great German scholar Leopold Zunz noted, for example, that in Saloniki around the year 1540 there were at least fourteen different Jewish congregations operating more than twenty synagogues and identifying themselves by their places of origin, the latter including Aragon, Catalonia, Portugal or Lissabon, Evora, Italy, Calabria, Apulia, Sicily, Greece and the Provence.⁹ Strong commitments but also tensions played a powerful role, and the question was whose religious and cultural authority would emerge the strongest.

8 E. g., ISAAC SATANOW (1732-1805) in his edition of penitential hymns or *selibot* (1785); DAVID FRIEDLÄNDER (1750-1834) in his prayer book with German translations (1786); WOLF HEIDENHEIM in his numerous editions of *mahzorim* since 1800.

9 LEOPOLD ZUNZ, *Die synagogale Poesie des Mittelalters*, Zweite Abtheilung: *Die Ritus des synagogalen Gottesdienstes, geschichtlich entwickelt*, Berlin: Verlag von Julius Springer, 1859, p. 146.

One of the surprising effects of modern Jewish emancipation in Western Europe was that what was left to the inner religious domain of Judaism—such as synagogue liturgy—was put into the hands of a limited circle of rabbis, composers and printers. The very few modern studies of Dutch-Jewish liturgy touch on the transformation and printed representation of (Orthodox) prayer-texts, whether or not with the aid of translation into the Dutch vernacular. In this context we may turn to the epoch-making article of the late Joost Divendal (1955-2010), who published a survey of the life and works of one of his own ancestors, Mozes Cohen Belinfante (1761-1827).¹⁰ As early as 1791-1793 Belinfante was in charge of a comprehensive translation of Sefardi *tefillot*, with the title *Prayers of the Portuguese Jews translated from the Hebrew*, four volumes for daily prayer, Sabbath and festivals, fast days and individual events of which the first was published in The Hague by Lion Cohen (1770-1849).¹¹ The project was not entirely Belinfante's personal enterprise; members of the society *Talmidey Sadic* with reference to Sadic Cohen Belinfante (1732-1786), Moses' father, were involved as well. Their justification of translating religious texts into Dutch is clearly inspired by ideas of Mendelsohnian *Bildung*.

Jewish knowledge of the Holy Language Hebrew has weakened. Hebrew study is required, but in-depth understanding of Jewish liturgy is lacking, therefore devotional intention has diminished. Already in earlier times rabbis and sages were forced to adopt a language like Chaldean (that is, Babylonian Aramaic) for Talmudic expositions. The language of synagogue chants has lost its purity and accuracy, for which poetic devices like meter and rhyme are to be blamed. Previous translations into Spanish and Portuguese were too literal and lack explanatory notes. Translations into antiquated English and French are judged to be of higher quality, but quoting the Bible in English is too much a pro-Christian gesture. The Ashkenazim enjoy the German translation of David Friedländer (1750-1834) [in Hebrew characters], but the Sefardim have no valued Dutch prayer book, so the Society *Talmidey Sadic* was to provide this desideratum.

Several instructive pieces about the Jewish calendar and the holidays precede the translated texts, each one introduced with one or two initial

10 JOOST DIVENDAL, "Mozes Cohen Belinfante, Jew to the Depth of His Soul", *Studia Rosenthaliana* 31 (1997), pp. 94-138. I am indebted to Chaya Brasz for the reference to this important article.

11 In Dutch: *Gebeden der Portugeesche Jooden, door een Joodsch Genootschap uit het Hebreuwsch vertaalt*, 's Graavenhaage, by LION COHEN, 1791, see DIVENDAL, "Mozes Cohen Belinfante" (n. 10 above) footnote 32.

words from the Hebrew original. The Dutch rendering is formal and the amount of explicatory notes is surprisingly low. Each of the four volumes followed fixed patterns, omitting most of the non-biblical hymnody.¹²

Obviously, these and other similar translation activities were the result of intellectual developments without much bearing on public Jewish ritual, but such attempts did pave the way for the inclusion of vernacular European languages without any specific association with Jewish tradition in the prayer book. A new and distinct balance of interests was needed in Orthodox texts and practice: vernacular items could be introduced, but the Hebrew original should be retained. By the nineteenth century the arrangement of vernacular alongside Hebrew became the norm in Western Europe, also in the Netherlands. It remains to be seen to what extent Jewish prayer texts in Dutch would ever reach equal validity with their Hebrew counterparts, but surely they were helpful in advocating Jewish goodwill in the non-Jewish world—for instance, the Dutch version of the prayer for the royal family would unequivocally prove general Jewish support for the House of Orange.

Despite this, one should not be led to think that due to the changing historical circumstances the development of Dutch-Jewish liturgy and worship in the modern era follows a linear pattern. Words like tradition, progress and change should be used with caution, given the fact that the nineties of the eighteenth century seem to display more eagerness to internal changes than the twenties or the thirties of the nineteenth century. For instance, in 1793, during a short first invasion of the southern Dutch provinces by the French revolutionary army, the chief rabbi of Rotterdam, Aryeh Loeb ben Hayyim Breslau (1741-1809) selected and composed a series of prayers which were translated into Dutch by ‘learned Jewish men’ and edited by a Christian clergyman.¹³ Such a local publication may have been intended as an example of interfaith cooperation (although Dominee Scharp’s missionary activities are suspect); they also arouse scholarly inter-

12 The reason for the omission of piyyutim is described as follows: “De berymde Zangen zyn allen met vroomen inzichten opgesteld; maar by sommigen is de zuiverheid van taale verbastert, naardien de woorden veelyds naar den klank en menigte van lettergreepen geboogen zyn” [All rhymed hymns are composed with pious insights, but some have corrupted the purity of language, because words are often adapted according to sound and a large number of syllables].

13 In Dutch: *Plegtige gebeden voor de joodsche gemeente te Rotterdam ... in de Hebreeuwsche taal opgesteld door den eerv. opperrabbijn der joodsche gemeente te Rotterdam. In 't Nederduitsch vertaald, door geleerde joodsche mannen ... met eene voorrede, uitgegeven door DOMINEE JAN SCHARP, predikant te Rotterdam, 1793.*

est on the part of the Christian Hebraists to come closer to contemporary Jewish prayer texts. By the way, the Dutch word ‘plegtig’ (here with a meaning close to English ‘decorous’) seems to play a major role in many titles and descriptions of how synagogue readings and rituals should be regarded and performed. ‘Plegtig’, ‘decorous’, stands for the forceful guidance of the Jewish worshippers towards an organized and standardized synagogue practice and performance policy, which was in many ways derived from the surrounding Protestant Christian, and to a lesser extent from the German Jewish example. The introduction of formalized services was not an entirely orthodox prerequisite but was also emphasized in the few reform attempts within modern Dutch Judaism, be it as early as 1796 in the secessionist *Adath Yesburum* congregation of Amsterdam, or the *Shoharei Deab* association of Rabbiner Dr Isaac Löb Chronik (1825-1886) in 1856 [who propagated reform ideology but was strongly opposed – he only reached agreement on the introduction of a choir and was then forced to leave], or as late as 1931 in the developing Union of Liberal-Religious Jews. Significant liturgical adaptations would not have been realized, were it not for the sake of enhancement of the decorum of prayer recitation and melodious chant in the synagogue.

When one surveys the activities of composers and translators in nineteenth-century Netherlands, aptly described by J. H. Coppenhagen in *The Israelite ‘Church’ and the Dutch State, Their Relations between 1814 and 1870*.¹⁴ Some of the latter were outstanding figures: Samuel Israel (ben Azriel) Mulder (1792-1862), religious teacher, translator, curator of the Seminary, secretary of the Major Synagogue, and inspector of Israelite schools for many years, was a clear exponent of Jewish orthodoxy in combination with academic scholarship.¹⁵ In 1843 Mulder received a Ph.D from the University of Giessen, and in 1844 he published his *Scattered Fruits of Writing* in Leiden, a collection of published or unpublished essays about subjects, varying from a literary study of biblical psalms to a

14 In Dutch: *De Israëlitische ‘Kerk’ en de Staat der Nederlanden, Hun Betrekkingen tussen 1814 en 1870*, pp. 82-96. In Coppenhagen’s list one comes across more or less familiar names, such as S. I. Mulder, G. I. Polak, G. A. Parsser, M. L. van Ameringen, M. S. Polak, S. Heijmans, M. Lehman, M. M. Cohen, D. J. Lopes Cardozo and R. D. Montezinos.

15 See IRENE E. ZWIEP, “A *maskil* reads Zunz, Samuel Mulder and the earliest Dutch reception of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*”, in: YOSEF KAPLAN (ed.), *The Dutch intersection: the Jews and the Netherlands in modern history*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2008, pp. 301-318.

mathematical study of the number seven. Closest to our theme is his article on the art of translation, a written up speech from January 17, 1824.¹⁶ The scientific-historical contents of Mulder's arguments and his discussion of aspects of what could be defined as comparative linguistics, are surprisingly modern. He is well informed about the new theories considering the classification of the world languages, despite the fact that they were supposedly all derivatives from the valley of Sinear, a reference to the biblical Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11. The art of translation is in Mulder's view always a choice of keeping the middle way eschewing either slavish rendering or free paraphrase, both to be considered as the extremes. What is idiomatic for the source language—his meaningful expression is 'what is national about the source language'—, should be transposed into the target language with account of the original intentions and the result should be of good quality. The greatest difficulty is to respect rabbinic opinions and at the same time to reach at a useful and elegant translation.¹⁷

Mulder's observations are significant, when we turn to his Hebrew-Dutch translation work on Bible books, synagogue prayer and hymnody. While scholars like Gabriel Isaac Polak (1803-1869) and Moses Loeb van Ameringen (1826-1915) initially edited prayer books without the vernacular, in later editions they added Dutch translations of liturgical or poetic segments with the Hebrew en face. These prayer books clearly reflect a deeper intrusion of the vernacular into the religious domain. It may seem to us quite puzzling, how these Ashkenazi and also Sefardi prayer books in those generations could contribute to more familiarity, as they were mainly intended to encourage decorum and propriety. Certainly, some standard editions with *הסכמות* (*haskamot*) or rabbinic approbations dominated the Dutch-Jewish synagogue customs, but it is doubtful to what extent printed Jewish liturgy in this respect could have been attractive, had it not been for the melodious cantor or even for the harmonised chant of the choir. The physical representation of prayer texts and particularly *piyyutim* appeared to have been reduced to the minimum needed for marking strophic structures, rhyme schemes, and alphabetical acrostics. Annotations are only sporadically inserted, mostly in the form of instructions for cantor and congregation. Source citations and contextual explanations are hardly encountered. A festival *piyyut* which included the name acrostics of the composer would

16 *Verspreide Lettervruchten van S. I. Mulder, Doctor in de Wijsbegeerte, en Inspecteur der Godsdienstige Israëlitische Scholen*, Leyden: D. du Mortier en Zoon, 1844. His *Verhandeling over de Kunst van Vertalen* is the first contribution, see esp. pp. 62-64.

17 See *De Nederlandsche Spectator* of 14 February 1863.

perhaps lead to a short introductory note in very small Hebrew typeface, clearly not meant for historical or devotional clarification.

No wonder that the complex poetry of the earlier mentioned El'azar birabbi Kilir and other revered hymnists was recited or sung in an abbreviated form or often entirely omitted. An example of a well-known piyyut which cannot be ignored from the traditional point of view is the seasonal composition by Kilir (with the opening words *מחוסן ביום אלים* *Elim beyom mechussan*), describing the theme of טל (*tal*), 'dew', to be granted by God during the approaching dry hot summer. This most elaborate poem in rich and flowery Hebrew is recited on the first day of Passover in the *Musaf* prayer. In these verses Kilir combines the name of the twelve months, the twelve signs of the zodiac and the twelve tribes of Israel, featuring multiple acrostics, alliteration, assonance and internal rhyme in twenty-one strophes. By example, the first two strophes in Hebrew original are presented with the Dutch Polak / van Ameringen translation:¹⁸

אלים ביום מחוסן / חלו פני מנוסן
 טל אורות לנוססן / להטלילם בעצם ניסן
 אשאלה בעדם מען / גבורות טל להען
 טל אב הבטח לשען / יתן להמתיק לען
 ככתוב בתורתך ויתן לך האלהים מטל השמים ומשמני הארץ ורב דגן ותירוש
 בשמך טל אטלה / בילדות טל להטלה
 טל בו איתן מטלה / בדיו ירעו כמו טלה
 ברית כרותה לראש אבות / חיליו בטל להרבות
 טל בל יזיו מבני אבות / להרסיס עם נדבות-
 ככתוב בדברי קדשך עמך נדבת ביום חילך בהררי קדש מרחם משחר לך טל ילדתך

De machtigen (Israël), smeecken op dezen uitstekenden dag voor het aangezicht huns Toevluchts, om hen met lavenden dauw te verkwikken, hen daarmede te omschaduwen in de daartoe bestemde maand Nisan! Ik wil hunnentwege met gebeden smeecken, dat hun de wonderkrachtige dauw geworde, – de dauw, den aartsvader (Abraham) als eene ondersteuning toegezegd, verleene Hij (God) dien, om der gewassen bitteren smaak te verzoeten.

Door Uwen naam ben ik als met dauw omschaduwd, door de jeugdige verdiensten van Abraham, die door dauw verheven werd, beschermd; wil ook zijne nakomelingen als een LAM weiden. Een verbond immers sloot gij met den eersten der vaderen (bij de ten offer brenging Izaks), om zijne telgen door den dauw te vermenigvuldigen. – De*

¹⁸ According to the critical edition of YONAH FRANKEL, *Mabzor le-Shalosh Regalim*, Jerusalem 1993, p. 225.

dauw wijke niet van de kinderen der aartsvaderen, hij droppele steeds neder op het volk, gewillig om den Eeuwige te dienen!

*Het hemelteeken RAM heet in het Hebreeuwsch LAM.

The elaborate structure of Kilir's poetic language deserves to be considered in its own right in spite of the verse mannerisms.¹⁹ Kilir composed in all more than 1,500 hymns with wide-ranging stylistic innovations, and these opened new opportunities for enhancing the aesthetic component of Jewish liturgy and worship in his own days and in the subsequent centuries. His work became a formal and thematic model for succeeding generations of Jewish poets in Babylonia, Italy, and central Europe, and so entered the Ashkenazi prayer book.

In current Hebrew hymnological research there has been much discussion, as to whether, and if so how, these texts were understood by their listeners and readers. Those who were well versed in Jewish literary and folk sources, scholars, preachers, rabbis, other learned men of the community— such people may have caught and understood the paytanic message and enjoyed the playfulness of Kilir's verse; however, they may not have grasped in full all of his references, allusions and connotations, and therefore needed commentaries.²⁰ The presence of Hebrew compositions

19 See my rendering of these first two strophes:

*The 'lesser gods' [Israel] on that very day, / pray to the God of their refuge,
To grant them the dew of the morning light, / to let dew descend in the middle of Nisan.
Let me [Kilir] ask on behalf of them [the community] in reply, / to read the prayer on
the power of dew,
Dew which was promised to support the patriarch; this is how bitter is made sweet.
As it is written in your Torah: 'May God give you heaven's dew and of earth's richness, an
abundance of grain and new wine' (Gen. 27:28)
In God's name: let Abraham find protection by dew, / as dew has graced me in my youth;
the steadfast [Abraham] abounded in dew, / his offspring will graze like a lamb [Aries];
a covenant was made to the first of patriarchs, / to multiply his descendants by dew;
dew will not leave the children of the patriarchs, / to sprinkle a willing people.
As it is written in your holy words: 'Your troops will be willing on the day of battle. Ar-
rayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth'
(Ps. 110:3)*

20 See for medieval *Piyyut* commentaries ELISABETH HOLLENDER, *Clavis Commentariorum of Hebrew Liturgical Poetry in Manuscript*, Leiden-Boston: E. J. Brill, 2005 (= *Clavis Commentariorum Antiquitatis et Medii Aevi*, vol. 4); ELISABETH HOLLENDER, *Piyyut Commentary in Medieval Ashkenaz*, Berlin 2008 (= *Studia Judaica, Forschungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums*, vol. 42); BIN-

and Dutch translations does not prevent that most communities practised local customs with regard to what should be or rather should not be recited during public service. The general impression which one gets is that the average visitor of the orthodox congregations in Amsterdam and *Mediene* was not much inspired by the lyrical intentions and deeper meanings of the poetic insertions; most compositions would simply have been perceived as obligatory by traditional observance: *kinot* for the Ninth of Av, *selichot* for the days preceding New Year, and, of course, the lengthy compositions for the high holidays and other festivals.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century synagogue attendance suffered from a demographic stagnation and congregational life went into decline for a combination of socio-historical reasons which have been explained elsewhere. There was less expectation that the synagogues would be filled with congregants for daily, weekly or annual prayer gatherings. The synagogue as a communal house of prayer and chant had become peripheral to a considerable segment of Dutch Jewry, a simple fact of modern Jewish life in the Netherlands, both prewar and postwar. One of the chief rabbis devoted much of his time and energy to synagogue liturgy, translating all essential texts and providing extensive commentary in Dutch. This was Lion Wagenaar (1855-1930), chief rabbi of Friesland during the years 1886-1895 and of Gelderland until 1918. Later he became rector of the Dutch Israelite Seminary until 1930. Wagenaar was a gifted scholar and teacher, whose voluminous prayer books appeared during the years 1899-1901. He understood that in modern days loyalty to Jewish prayer was under great pressure:

Our reality is very different; we are occupied by daily concerns; our best moments are taken away by them. Happily so, since ancient times the good God has put in the heart of people the need to leave earthly matters during a number of fixed moments and turn to the highest God in true service of the heart (עבודה שבלב *'avodah she-ba-lev*).²¹

However, Wagenaar's translations are to such an extent explicative that there is hardly any sense of linguistic or poetic beauty left. In his introduction to the translation of hymns in praise of the Sabbath,²² he apologizes

YAMIN LOEFFLER and MICHAEL RAND, "Piyut Commentary in the Genizah", *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 5 (2011), pp. 173-203.

21 See L. WAGENAAR, *Gebedenboek met Nederlandsche vertaling en verklaring* (סדר הגיון נפש), Amsterdam: Van Creveld & Co., 1901, pp. 2-3; *idem*, *Orde der gebeden voor den Sabbath-morgendienst*, Amsterdam: Van Creveld & Co., 1899.

22 Such as מה-יפית ומה-נעמת בתענוגים and מה-ידידות מנוחתך.

for the oriental excessiveness of images and expressions which seem overdone to western eyes. As late as 1933 the Amsterdam Rabbi Izak Vredenburg (1904-1943), son of chief Rabbi Joël Vredenburg, produced a *siddur Ngouneg Sjabbos* with a syllable-by-syllable translation, also known as the *driestuivertefillo*, a kind of threepenny-prayer book possibly intended to be sold to the poor Jews of, mainly, Amsterdam. It remains to be investigated, whether this sympathetic booklet proved ever functional in liturgical practice, but not a single piyyut line is included therein apart from the *erev shabbat* song לכה דודי (*Lekhoh Douidi*).²³ The hymnist Kilir was in twentieth-century Dutch-Jewish worship practically on his way to oblivion despite the increasing international scholarly attention given to his oeuvre and that of other early and medieval composers. The 1933 editions of Rabbi Dr Hans Hirschberg (1908-1980) for the autumnal festivals are intriguing exceptions: in accordance with common (maskilic-)liberal preference Hirschberg occasionally include Dutch translations of Sefardi *piyyutim*. Thus we find the *reshut* of Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021/22-c.1057) שחר אַבְקָשָׁה, צוּרֵי וּמִשְׁגָּבֵי (*shachar avaqshekha tsuri u-misgavi*) among the morning prayers for New Year. Obviously, the pre-war prayer books of the Union of Liberal Jews from the thirties, and the post-war *Seder Tov Lehodot* from the sixties, symbolically maintain a few opening lines from Kilir's most prominent works, but large portions are entirely omitted.²⁴ In our days the stronger sense of focus and self-consciousness on the part of the Liberal Jewish community and their independence vis-à-vis the Orthodox community has led to the publication of more successful and employable

23 *Sjabbos-Tefillo genaamd Ngouneg Sjabbos, bevattende alle gewone gebeden voor sjabbos, t. w. van vrijdagmiddag tot en met zaterdagavond, met woordelijke vertaling en aantekeningen door Izak Vredenburg (met illustraties), uitgegeven door de 'Centrale Organisatie tot de Religieuse en Moreele Verheffing der Joden in Nederland', Amsterdam: Hebr. Boekhandel E. Mozes Azn, 1933.*

24 One of the earliest prayer books of the Union was published in 1931 by the lay-leaders LEVIE LEVISSON and RAPHAEL JESAJA SPITZ under the general editorship of the German Rabbiner Dr. JOSEPH NORDEN of Elberfeld. *Seder Tov Lehodot* number one was published by Rabbi JACOB SOETENDORP and the lay-leader ROBERT A. LEVISSON in 1964, see CHAYA BRASZ, *In de tenten van Jaäkov, Impressies van 75 jaar Progressief Jodendom in Nederland 1931-2006*, Amsterdam / Jeruzalem: Stichting Sha'ar 5767-2006, p. 52. Dutch Liberal congregations also used an abbreviated version of the German *Einheitsgebetbuch* (München 1899) in a photo-offset edition, see JAKOB JOSEF PETUCHOWSKI, *Prayerbook Reform in Europe: the liturgy of European liberal and reform Judaism*, New York: World Union of Progressive Judaism 1968, p. 347.

prayer books including Dutch introductions, translations and explanations, with moderate incorporation of Hebrew prayer texts.²⁵

Half a century after the war the orthodox Dutch-Israelite community (*Nederlands Israëlietisch Kerkgenootschap*, abbreviated N.I.K.) decided to edit a new series of Ashkenazi *Mahzorim*.²⁶ The pre-war liturgy of the high holidays and the three pilgrim festivals was left intact, but the rabbis and the council of the N.I.K. accepted a radically different typographical presentation of the *piyyutim* in accordance with modern standards of scholarly editing: strophic structures were restored, rhyme schemes and acrostics were made visible, and an explanatory Dutch translation was added to each part of the piyyut compositions. Whether this adaptation in fact benefits the modern user, remains to be seen. All in all, modern revisions of Jewish prayer hardly promote creativity and spontaneity.

Let me conclude with one final generalization on modern liturgical performance according to Ashkenazi, Sefardi and Liberal Jewish liturgies in the Netherlands: some components are decisively influenced by Israeli and Anglo-American customs but obviously rudiments of distinct Dutch-Jewish liturgical customs survive until this day, most notably in the melodies and songs of the skilled cantor, either by survival in a manuscript or by publication.²⁷

25 *Seder Tov Lehodot* number two was published in recent years by Rabbi David Lilienthal; see JUDITH FRISHMAN, “Who we say we are: Jewish Self-Definition in Two Modern Dutch Liberal Prayer Books”, in: MARCEL POORTHUIS and JOSHUA SCHWARTZ (eds.), *A Holy People, Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Religious Communal Identity*, Leiden / Boston: E, J. Brill, 2006, pp. 307-319. Frishman offers a number of relevant observations on the two versions of *Seder Tov Lehodot*, the first one published in 1964 and the latter in 2000. Piyyutim, either Hebrew or Dutch, are hardly found in both editions.

26 This was after the publication and successful distribution of *Siach Jitschak, Siddeer, de geordende gebeden voor het gehele jaar*, compiled by the physician JITSCHAK (IZAK) DASBERG (1900-1997) and edited by the N. I. K. in 1977. The series of *Mahzorim* was published during the years 1991-1998 with the aid of Izak Dasberg, Abraham Wijler, Rabbi Abraham W. Rosenberg and the author of this article.

27 Handwritten document by master BENJAMIN M. STERN, *Koul Jehoedoh, Chazonoes J. I. Vleeschhouwer (1839-1913)*, Groningen 5688-1928; HANS BLOEMENDAL, *Amsterdams Chazzanoet, Synagogale Muziek van de Ashkenazische Gemeente [Amsterdam chazzanut, synagogal music of the Ashkenazic congregation]*, ed. by JOPPE POOLMAN VAN BEUSEKOM, Buren: Uitgeverij Frits Knuf, 1990.