

# TOWARDS AN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF JEWISH ORAL TRADITIONS

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In this article we propose to discuss and illustrate the need for pursuing the study of the oral aspect of Jewish traditions on a well-defined interdisciplinary basis. We shall discuss the concepts of oral tradition and of interdisciplinary methodology in the context of Jewish studies; the theoretical framework in which such an interdisciplinary methodology can be contained; and the tools to be used in the collecting and analysis of data. Throughout, we shall keep in mind the advantages and implications for the different domains of Jewish studies arising from the implementation of a multi-dimensional point of view in research. In attempting to construct a coherent theoretical and methodological whole, we shall base ourselves on a series of research enterprises relating to different aspects of Jewish traditions, as they have been undertaken by teams of specialists in different disciplines.

The first part of this paper will discuss the state of research with regard to concepts of oral tradition and interdisciplinary methodology. The second will try to show, on the basis of research in progress, the benefits of an interdisciplinary study of Jewish oral traditions. The third part suggests a methodological framework and tools for the use of linguists, historians, musicologists, anthropologists, and others.

## CONCEPTS AND FIELDS OF RESEARCH: STATE OF THE ART

The concept of oral tradition is entirely pertinent in characterizing societies that do not possess a written linguistic code. A researcher studying such a society cannot make use of local writings about the musical theories of the community, nor of musical scores for the vocal or instrumental repertoire. He does not find published collections of tales or legends, or manuscripts mentioning technological innovations, or war chronicles, or agricultural information, or books of recipes, medical treatises, dictionaries or grammars, all documents that might have been produced if writing had been part of the local culture. This kind of context implies certain consequences.

The student must observe every extant phenomenon of this culture, so that he will understand and be able to describe the kinship systems, the ways of growing vegetables, the musical theories and repertoire, the history, the politics, the language, eating habits, economic system. To this end, language must be conceived as leading to a whole series of data relating to an enormous number of social, cultural and economic elements specific to the civilization being studied. However, not everything is attainable through language. The student must thus attempt to uncover the different semiological systems at work in this society.

What has been the tendency of research in confrontation with societies of the written word? Scholars have been tempted to overlook the priceless information that the spoken language could offer them, to neglect the living phenomena, and to restrict their theoretical frame of reference.

In the Jewish sphere, written records are abundant. Moreover, the Book is a basic element of Jewish culture. This does not necessarily mean that people behave and think according to what is written in the traditional works of Jewish law, or, at least, not exclusively. The student must look at the people themselves to know what they are, and must ask whether people belonging to the Jewish cultural sphere have developed customs, products and other elements which have left no written trace. It would then be necessary to describe the oral aspect of the tradition and to carefully study the links perhaps established between the written and the oral. Finally, one must seriously ask oneself if historical research should rely only on the written sources. Can one justifiably deny that the oral dimension of tradition can transmit a part of the collective memory? Would it not be desirable to see how far the oral traditions allow us to go back into the past, and how far they reflect the different constituent elements of Jewish traditions?

## LITURGICAL TRADITIONS

It has of course been recognized that these living traditions can illuminate "the meaning of past historic sources" and even "reach a real historical significance", if they are confirmed by data arising from early written sources; thus, the historian cannot hope to fully understand Jewish liturgical music if he does not attentively consider the dialectic movement that has installed itself between the written and oral aspects of the traditions.(Adler 1984:88)

Nevertheless, the amount of systematic research devoted to the living oral traditions since A. Z. Idelsohn's pioneering work has not been very great.<sup>1</sup> But

1 One may cite, apart from A. Z. Idelsohn, research by R. Lachmann, E. Gerson-Kiwi, J. Spector, L. Levi, U. Sharvit, A. Shiloah, Y. Mazor, R. Katz and D. Cohen. The great number of recordings in the National Sound Archives at Jerusalem also represent a remarkable effort of collection and cataloguing.

this quantitative limitation is not the only one. The work done in the field was carried out by specialists who believed and still believe that “only the ‘musical’ part of the tradition has been orally transmitted.”(Adler 1984:88)

In a preceding study (Alvarez-Pereyre 1985a) we have tried to show, however briefly, the possible advantage musicologists might derive in their work on oral traditions if they were not almost only working on the basis of the tables of melodic formulas (*lûah zarqâ*) in their analysis of the living traditions of the cantillation of the Torah and Prophets. This musical material could usefully be approached with certain linguistic tools, leading to recognition of the fact that the oral traditions were transmitted by an ensemble of oral parameters that the classical concept of music does not in itself cover.

Linguists, for their part, have not reversed this situation, for they have not yet analyzed the extant musical material in the hope of establishing its laws of linguistic organization, which go well beyond the principles traditionally attributed to the accentuation signs in the Masoretic period and afterwards. Nor have they looked for supplementary oral parameters. Both linguists and musicologists have held to an explicit and classic conception of the accentuation signs and their function, and thus they have indirectly led to the almost complete neglect of other traditional material such as the “reading” of the Mishnah or the Zohar.<sup>2</sup>

## JEWISH LANGUAGES

During a lecture held at a seminar for teachers of linguistics specializing in Jewish languages,<sup>3</sup> Professor H. Rabin remarked that research relating to these languages was developed for the sake of illuminating the corresponding literatures. The studies devoted to Hebrew have been primarily prescriptive and not descriptive, and the lack of grammatical studies for the spoken languages is striking. Up to the present, linguists have taken far greater interest in the written aspect of Jewish languages than in the oral.

In fact, as in the field of music, linguistic studies have indeed devoted some effort to the living aspect of Jewish traditions.<sup>4</sup> However, the general situation described by Professor Rabin is confirmed by other specialists in speaking of

2 But cf. Bayer 1982 for an attempt to treat the text of the Mishnah. See also Bayer 1971 for musical rendition of the Talmud.

3 Institute of Jewish Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1983.

4 See, for instance, Morag 1962 and 1963, K. Katz 1981, Bar-Asher 1978, Chetrit 1980, Beem 1967, Guggenheim-Grünberg 1958, Herzog 1965; and the collective research carried out within the Language Traditions Project, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Judeo-Spanish, Judeo-Arabic and Yiddish.<sup>5</sup> If this is the case with the better-known examples, what can one say of the many Jewish languages which have not been favoured with any research, and which include some that offer no written sources at all to the student?

One may hope that more and more specialists will come to agree with the arguments presented by J. Mansour in justifying his study of a spoken Jewish language, the Judeo-Arabic of Baghdad. He declares that this variety of language has preserved elements not found in written Arabic or even in upper-class spoken Arabic, for the spoken language, in so far as it has not been influenced by the written — defined by its own specific features — contains linguistic particularities that do not occur at all in the written. Moreover, Judeo-Arabic, like every Jewish language, contains numerous Judaistic and Hebrew linguistic elements (Mansour 1985, see also Blanc 1979).

It is hoped that more and more living material will be systematically and carefully collected and studied, in such a way that the functional and complementary concepts of “tradition of reading”, “Jewish interlinguistics” and “Jewish intralinguistics”, as defined by S. Morag (1965 and 1969), P. Wexler (1981) and D. L. Gold (1981), will be concretely illustrated.

At this point a fundamental question arises. Can the synchronic identity of a Jewish language be properly established if this is done by comparison with another language, Jewish or not, in a context where these languages have not been described in themselves? This is the essential question confronting the linguist who deals with Jewish languages, and he will carry a heavy responsibility if he treats only one aspect of these, without applying his analysis to the general and structural study of his chosen language.

The results achieved by a systematic, multidimensional and interdisciplinary interest in the oral aspect of Jewish traditions, it seems to us, might enable a significant change in the theoretical and practical hypotheses of historians in this domain.

Jewish oral tradition is of course not the only field where the quantity of information that can be gained from the patient and systematic collecting and study of the oral sources has been underestimated. It is only recently that European society has come to recognize, not without resistance, the existence of a field of study preoccupying a new generation of linguists, anthropologists and musicologists who for some time have been devoting their time and their knowledge to civilizations without writing. To give a striking example, a pluralist

5 Sala 1976 comments that the numerous Judeo-Spanish dialects have not yet been minutely and exhaustively described; Bunis 1983 appeals for a more detailed knowledge of Judezmo in itself and points out that field research is still possible.

study of the dialects of French still seems strange even to those who defend regional languages for political reasons, as well as to linguists who, precisely because they neglect the oral and contemporary evidence, believe that everybody talks the same kind of oral French.

Scholars dealing with Jewish oral traditions may perhaps benefit from the attempts that have been carried out over a period of many years to transform traditional linguistics when applied to "exotic" languages and, in practice, to define the interlinguistics and intralinguistics of African languages. Thanks to the methodology used these innovations have had many and important repercussions in other fields of research.<sup>6</sup>

This reference to other fields of research shows that a general situation exists where the oral aspect of traditions and of everyday realities is somewhat neglected, and where the notion of interdisciplinary research is not central. But one must not forget that several internal reasons have induced scholars in the Jewish domain to demonstrate a marked preference for written materials, and to overlook or neglect entire areas of oral information. We have already spoken of the existential and cultural importance of the Book in the Jewish world. Scholars, then, tend to believe that all is in the Book and that it is futile to assume the existence of facts of another kind. In practice, and as a direct consequence and illustration of this attitude, few specialists have taken an interest in the traditions of the cantillation of the text of the Mishnah, whether linguistic or musical, since, in contrast to the Bible, few normative written elements exist for the transmission of this text.

One must also note the curious paradox that the renaissance of Hebrew and the establishment of the State of Israel are to a great extent accompanied by the scholarly neglect of the specific languages and customs of the Jewish communities, perhaps under the influence of a false notion of integration. And this precisely when so many surviving traditions and the processes of hybridization that they are undergoing would seem to call for systematic research, in Israel and outside it.

Why then has interdisciplinary research — in the sense we are using — not been more strongly developed in the domain of Jewish oral traditions? This situation may be explained first of all by the objective difficulties that the student faces when he wishes to work on different dimensions of life and very divergent semiological systems. To this is added the difficulty of linking these different dimensions, of organizing them so as to establish a pertinent image of a cultural or social entity, or of a particular social, economic or cultural element.

6 For the theoretical and methodological frameworks of such research, see Bouquiaux and Thomas 1976, Paulian 1975, Thomas and Bahuchet 1981 and Arom 1981.

Several scholars have confirmed in their work that only integrated, comprehensive research can lead to a real understanding of a social or cultural fact.<sup>7</sup> However, to others research appears conclusive when the results that each specialist has achieved in his own domain have been set end to end, each on the basis of a separate theoretical framework (see e.g. Nketia 1986).

We shall go on to show the theoretical and practical pertinence, for Jewish traditions, of a frame of reference that articulates the oral dimension of the data and the interdisciplinary methodology.

### SOME EXAMPLES OF RESEARCH WORK

The Jewish oral traditions, we hope to show, call for an integrated methodology which will conduct the scholar to the specificity of every phenomenon, large or small, without causing the neglect of its past or present ties with society or the culture to which it belongs.

It may be useful to describe briefly certain research undertakings in order to better illustrate the ensemble of theoretical and methodological principles that will be presented afterwards. We shall refer here to a programme of interdisciplinary research carried out between 1982 and 1986 by several specialists in Jewish studies who have set themselves the task of transforming their approach to their several objects of interest. Wherever appropriate we shall also refer to research not specific to Jewish studies.

### THE JUDEO-SPANISH POPULAR SONG

Let us first speak of the attempt made to establish a typology of the Judeo-Spanish popular song. The term popular song should not lead specialists in literature, linguistics or ethnography to think that a cultural element, apparently exclusively musical, does not concern them. Equally, musicologists should be prepared to take into account the linguistic identification of the texts, and to analyse the comments of the bearers of the tradition on their own repertoire.

If you ask a literary specialist what exactly is the specificity of a Judeo-Spanish romance, he will tell you that one must examine its prosody. At the same time, you will learn that the prosodic definition suggested for the romances derives from the written sources of the last three centuries, and especially from the Spanish evidence of the romancero tradition; further, that little research has been done with a broadly anthropological approach to the living traditions of

7 For examples relating to oral literature and ethnography, see Calame-Griaule 1970 and Ferry 1977.

the Judeo-Spanish popular song. You will also discover that your informants give the same name to pieces that a specialist would distinguish under different appellations (*cantiga* or *endecha*, for instance); and that specialists sometimes substitute *endecha* for *romance* when a piece considered as identical to a romance from the point of view of music and text is sung in a mourning context.

The reason for such an apparently confused state of affairs is the simple fact that each different characterization of the same fact is based on a different criterion. This does not mean that each statement is false. However, a satisfactory image of the phenomenon will be achieved only when each point will have been evaluated in accordance with its relative pertinence, and afterwards replaced within a systematic framework of research.

Some years ago, specialists in Judeo-Spanish traditions working in the fields of linguistics, musicology, literature and folklore undertook a study of the oral traces of Judeo-Spanish songs (*romance*, *cantiga*, *endecha*, *copla*, etc.). They proposed to establish what the informants say about the songs they sing, the names they spontaneously give them, and any other commentary — social context, linguistic variety, changes in the melody, etc.; the literary identity of the texts — the narrative structure, from the largest units to the smallest, and the prosodic characteristics; the linguistic identity on all levels of linguistic structuration; the musical identity (presence or absence of instrumental accompaniment, individual or collective character of the chant; musical structuration); and the social and anthropological characteristics of the performances including the sociological rules affecting the performance of different songs, the role of gestures and mimicry, etc. (see Alexander and others, “Towards a Typology of the Judeo-Spanish Folksong” in this volume).

The specialists concerned consider that a pertinent understanding of any category of Judeo-Spanish popular song will only be achieved when the multidimensional information acquired through parallel work on the different dimensions of the existence of the cultural fact will have been interlinked (cf. Alvarez-Pereyre 1985a). This would apply to an even greater degree if the same research sought to report on the geographic and cultural variety which may manifest itself within the Sephardi sphere.

What is the practical outcome of such research? The results may involve the historical identity of the Judeo-Spanish popular song; the synchronic structure and the variations of texts and melodies; the specificity of the oral and written aspects of the same cultural fact, and their respective dynamics; a comparison between the facts of Judeo-Spanish linguistics and the dialects of Spanish, on the synchronic and diachronic levels; the relations established and being established between the Judeo-Spanish communities and their former Spanish neighbours or their former or present neighbours in Israel or other countries; the possible

influences that each of the constituent elements (language, music, text, social aspects, etc.) exercises over the others.

What has been said above for the Judeo-Spanish popular song could just as well be said for the popular songs of other communities, including the Israeli popular song. It could be equally valid in other fields of research, such as the popular tale, for instance, or a typology of Jewish oral literatures.

### THE HASSIDIC MARRIAGE

Let us take a second example. For several years a linguist and a musicologist have been studying a specific aspect of the marriage ceremony (the symbolical dance with the fiancée) in the Hassidic communities of Israel (see Mazor and Taube, "A Hassidic Ritual Dance" in this volume). They have considered this aspect from the ethnographic, linguistic, literary and musical points of view, with the object of establishing the system of rules on which this particular moment of the wedding is based. These rules, shared by all the communities studied or only some of them, on one or another level of the general phenomenon, have been investigated for all the elements of the fact studied.

It became clear in the course of the work that the study of this particular episode was leading to an ethnography of marriage in the Israeli Hassidic communities. The study of the words spoken during this episode provides access to linguistic information which can be used in a description of the Yiddish language or in the context of a "Jewish interlinguistics"; and the study of the music allows the student to attain a broader symbolical and social comprehension of the dance in Hassidic communities. Comparative study of the individual commentaries expressed by the marriage participants, and of the different normative aspects which can be assumed to be expressed on the ethnographic level, throws light on the installation of the Hassidic communities in Israel and on the ideological options adopted by each of these communities as regards their identity, their relation to earlier Hassidism, and their philosophical and social aims in Israel today.

### JEWISH CANTILLATION

Our last example is the study of Jewish cantillation. Here three slightly different aspects can be approached: the conditions in which typology of Jewish traditions can be established; the way of studying the musical and linguistic material transmitted within a community; the historical development of a tradition as it can be established on the basis of written and oral sources. In listing these three aspects, we have in mind parallel research carried out by several scholars

documenting various aspects of the liturgical and paraliturgical traditions—cantillation or reading of the Torah, the Haftarat, the Mishnah, and so on—transmitted in several communities (cf. Alvarez-Pereyre 1985a).

A typology of Jewish liturgical music can evidently be established on the basis of different points of view or types of criteria. If one is concerned with the relation between the melodies and the context of their performance, one will have a precise image for each community, available, as a result, for future comparative analyses. A different image<sup>2</sup> will be obtained if one considers the distribution of the texts according to specific contexts of the liturgy. It may also happen that several communities call the accentuation signs (the *te'amim*) by local names, whose meaning and internal organization do not reflect the elements of the canonical list of these signs. It may also be that in several communities, and each time in a different fashion, there is no perfect correlation between the list of written graphemes and the structural definition of the transmitted oral material.

A typology of Jewish liturgical music should in fact depend first of all on the meticulous description of all the above-mentioned elements within each community considered on its own. This first stage has the function of describing the balance and the dynamics existing between the elements studied, for a given community. After this, comparisons become possible.

One must add that applying an analysis of the atomist type to music and also to every other aspect of the oral material, will lead only to an infinite quantity of partial results if no structural framework has first been established to allow each of these results to find its functional status.

To this outline can be added the study of questions such as cultural and social changes, diachronic study of the liturgy, and the parallel use of oral and written documents in understanding a particular tradition.

As an example, let us look at a case where the investigators were in a position to collect the Judeo-Portuguese liturgical tradition in Bordeaux and Bayonne, two neighbouring towns in the French south-west (a living tradition recorded by several informants).<sup>8</sup> They were able to examine closely the statements made by the bearers of the tradition on the subject of their liturgy—its social, musical, historical and pedagogical aspects, and to discover exactly how the informants had learnt the tradition they perpetuate. They could verify all the sociological aspects linked to moments of the liturgy and procure an ensemble of musical manuscripts reflecting the oral tradition of one of the last *hazzanim* to have sung, from 1920 to 1950, the liturgy which predominated in these towns from 1750 to 1950. The same *hazzan* made available to them written documentation

8 Research in progress. See Jewish Music Research Centre, Annual Report 1983, p.24, and subsequent reports.

relating to the recent publication of a part of this liturgy. They were also able to use two works published in 1920 and 1950, which attempt to present the Judeo-Portuguese liturgy practised in the two towns. Finally, they benefited from a coherent ensemble of musical manuscripts going back to the first half of the nineteenth century, reflecting part of the liturgical tradition of Bayonne (cf. Adler 1989, vol. I, p. 7-22).

On the basis of the documentation listed above it will be possible to establish an image of the oral traditions relevant for the two towns, where the Judeo-Portuguese heritage is no longer exclusive or preponderant; an image of the contemporary Judeo-Portuguese oral tradition, with the help of oral sources that reflect the period between 1945 and 1985; and a diachronic image of the two parallel traditions, at least for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Of these three aspects it will be possible to consider the collective and individual rules and attitudes, whether social, musical or linguistic. One can expect complementary results, including a clear understanding of the mutual influences of the two towns (on this subject, we can know the respective impact of written and published sources and purely oral borrowings, and the non-musical reasons for the influences). One will also be able to make a contribution to the important question of the representativity of written sources when they are brought face to face with the complexity of oral sources.

## HISTORICAL AND LINGUISTIC RESEARCH

In two other fields of research, history and linguistics, we shall not give examples of research in progress, but rather attempt to define the methodological implications involved in the two following questions:

1. How can a historian profit from the abundant and available oral documentation existing in each society?
2. Can one pertinently undertake linguistic descriptions that depend on field research and on a broad use of the oral linguistic material?

What is the purpose of historical research? The historian owes it to his discipline to approach societies and culture from a diachronic point of view. While it is true that scientific history is no longer a chronicle of kings, queens and battles, it is equally true that historians have developed a tendency towards a synchronic image of the society that interests them. The same historian turns himself into an economist, an ethnographer, or a demographer, at different moments of his work, whatever the subject of his research.

If he systematically uses the material contained in the oral tradition, the historian in the Jewish field will acknowledge how generously the oral material

leads him towards unsuspected aspects of primary material of which the written traces, if any exist, present a more limited and official picture (such as is found in genealogies, biographies, recipes, myths, linguistic terminologies); towards facets of purely oral material concerning the basic legal frameworks of Jewish life; as well as material on relations between Jewish communities, or Jewish and non-Jewish communities, on economic organization, and so on.

The result of all this is that absolutely new dimensions of research emerge from within the society itself. Not only the synchronic aspect of a local history appears, but also migrations, cultural contacts, borrowings. If these matters are considered in terms of the structural identity of the community, they will lead to entirely new results. The scholar will realize that the written sources often treat stereotyped or classical themes, and that they only partly reflect a given situation in cases where part of the population has not mastered the written code. The student thus bears the responsibility of going out and collecting, confronting and organizing the incredible quantity of living testimonies that the members of a community can express and provide, in different contexts and on hundreds of themes.<sup>9</sup>

This historian will also see the possibilities of continuing some of the classic and significant research already undertaken in the field of Jewish studies often on the basis of written documentation alone, or, perhaps, insufficiently exploited oral material.<sup>10</sup> What has been said for historical research can equally well apply to sociological or ethnographical descriptions.<sup>11</sup>

If we turn to linguistics, we see that the discussion begins with the frontiers of the field of research. More than one specialist is of the opinion that interdisciplinary methods can be of no use here, since linguists are preoccupied mostly with phonology, morphology and syntax. According to this conception no non-linguistic material is of value. The only justification for using non-linguistic data would then seem to be associated with the work of the socio-linguist — but this is not linguistics, in the specialists' meaning — or the lexicologist or semantician.<sup>12</sup>

9 For the principles and points of view outlined here, see Vansina 1961; for illustrations of recent interdisciplinary historical research, see Bensa and Rivierre 1982 and Latouche 1984.

10 For examples of diachronic or synchronic historical and anthropological research see Zafrani 1983, Goitein 1983, Leslau 1957, Gutwirth 1980 and Goldberg 1983.

11 For the use of linguistic data in different disciplines, see Alvarez-Pereyre 1987.

12 Not all specialists in semantics and lexicology are convinced that intensive field research and the use of interdisciplinary tools would improve their results. Perhaps they should look again at the wistful confession (Ferry 1981, p.159, in Africa): "In working as a linguist, but in sharing their lives, I was able to observe that words often had another meaning than that given in the translation."

If we think of phonology, morphology or syntax, we must insist on the kind of advantage that can be foreseen in undertaking fieldwork for “purely” linguistic reasons. The most elementary benefit is that the student is then in a position to collect an impressive quantity of linguistic material pronounced by numerous interlocutors in varied situations. The more restrictions the linguist sets up, whether theoretical or methodological, regarding the informants, the contexts and the materials, the more chance his corpus has of not being pertinent. This does not mean that any interlocutor can be an informant, or that no distinction should be made between a monolingual and a trilingual informant, at successive stages of the work. Nevertheless, is it not true that every linguistic system should reflect the most collective rules of a language, whatever the moment or the level of the description? In practice, this implies that preference will be given, in certain contexts, to monolingual interlocutors — but not exclusively, and in others to plurilingual informants.

In effect, every restriction in the sincere and entire consideration of the living material means, without the shadow of a doubt, that the linguist will establish his work on the basis of categories and principles that do not belong to the language he is supposed to describe. Such interferences can be clearly realized if the linguist rethinks for himself the practical conditions in which he constructs his corpus, and examines his theoretical definition of the object studied, the tools and procedures used during the analysis, and the general concepts, often not articulated, that he holds regarding language in general and linguistic description.

Moreover, how can the linguist attempt any comparative work if from the beginning he does not first define the specificity of each of the languages to be compared? Or if he inserts into one or other of these languages categories or principles which belong to other languages or which arise from theoretical presuppositions which have not been confronted with the linguistics of the field? For only the knowledge of differences can prove the effective pertinence of possible similarities. And if a satisfactory description of a language is not available, how can one go on to socio-linguistic, semantic or even anthropological studies?<sup>13</sup>

## THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSITIONS

While collecting material as well as later, one must distinguish the most frequently recurring dimensions of research. These are the ways in which the people themselves think and speak of the point being studied (ritual, language, repertoire, etc.); the social functions and contexts that define this point; and the study of the

13 For detailed discussion of all these points, of the tools of research, and illustrations, see Bouquiaux and Thomas 1976; Alvarez-Pereyre, 1979, 1984, 1987.

internal structure for each object dealt with. Within each of these dimensions the most collective rules and contents defining the object must be discovered. This is made possible by the parallel study of several individual performances. One will thus discover the collective systems and models valid within a community, as well as individual variations. As has often been said, no system or tradition can be studied with the help of a single informant, even if admittedly excellent. No individual variation, behaviour or style can be appreciated without knowledge of the rules shared by the whole community.

## REPRESENTATIONS, FUNCTIONS AND STRUCTURES

In dealing with informants' representations one must distinguish linguistic terminology from personal commentary. Linguistic terminology is the way in which a society or a group of individuals name the objects being studied, more or less collectively. Personal commentaries are of course individual and may take varied verbal forms. A general image may be perceived emerging from the personal points of view, although the particularities associated with one or other individual should not be neglected. A third way of conveying a society's idea of itself may be the transmission of traditional texts from generation to generation, over longer or shorter periods.

In the case of social existence of an event or an object, a ritual or a belief, one must distinguish between the sociological characteristics that define it and the function or functions that it fulfils — these not being interchangeable.

The structural and functional study of an object should at first be carried out on the synchronic level. Synchrony being but one moment of diachrony, every synchronic description of extant facts provides numerous elements for historical reconstructions.

In studying the object, whatever its size and nature, three essential rules should apply. First, the different constituent elements of the object are explicated. Then, one must define an order of priorities in the tasks to be undertaken at different stages of the research. Finally, a list of pertinent parameters are established for each constituent element. On this level the analysis cannot be based on elements from the sphere of people's representations, or knowledge of the rules governing the sociological distribution, or preliminary hypotheses concerning the structural identity of the phenomenon studied.

The potential parameters do not all have an operational status in the structural definition of a musical piece, a text or a linguistic document. Only those that play a functional role in the structural definition of the object should be distinguished and studied in full detail. The same can be said for each of the pertinent units that should be described for each constituent parameter.

The analysis of these parameters and units follows three rules. The student must know the recurrence and regularity of each of them. They should be defined on the basis of their nature and their paradigmatic and syntagmatic comportment. Finally, this definition is only made possible by the comprehensive analysis of a given piece, object or attitude, on every level of the analysis, whatever the complexity of the phenomenon and for each of the parameters and units.

Going in the other direction, from functional parameters to constituent elements or dimensions, the student will see that the pertinent parameters can function on different levels of a given code, whether musical, linguistic or behavioural, for the same or different structural "needs", and that they can function in different ways when they are placed in the various structural contexts that define the object studied.

Having presented this ensemble of tools, let us briefly illustrate it to show how it is possible to give specificity to each object studied. Our first example is the study of the contents of oral literature. Here the student must choose one of two options. Either he considers that the texts he is studying reflect the society or culture of which they are an integral part, or that they are a dynamic aspect of the society itself. If he adopts the first alternative, he will use the texts alone as a basis for his work, running the risk of restricting the pertinence of his results. In the second case he will have to be fully aware of the data appertaining the community. His work will then consist of the elucidation of the texts, in relation to the non-textual facts that are seen to be pertinent to the understanding of their content as well as of their cultural and social impact.<sup>14</sup>

A second example, the study of the reading of the Mishnah, has shown that different texts of the Mishnah can be read or sung with the aid of different parameters which, however, correspond to the same basic principles recognized by a given community, on both the musical and linguistic levels, for the reading of this text.<sup>15</sup>

#### "CULTUREMES" AND SOCIAL STRATEGIES

While it is easy to speak of phonemes and morphemes, or of narrative or musical units, it is more difficult to isolate behavioural or cultural units. But the problem is not insoluble. Several scholars have discussed it and have proposed some methods of taking into account the specific character of anthropological and historical material.<sup>16</sup>

14 Cf. Calame-Griaule 1970, Boucharlat 1975, Alvarez-Pereyre 1976 and 1985a.

15 Cf. Alvarez-Pereyre 1990, and the fifth article in this volume.

16 Cf. Pike 1964, Levi-Strauss 1964, Aroutiounov 1981 and Molino 1981.

Their contribution can perhaps be summed up as follows: every cultural fact only exists through the relations it has with other cultural facts. Cultural facts, their contexts and their functional relations should be considered in an "emic" fashion, or, in other words, on the basis of strategies internal to the society studied.

These principles can be adopted by specialists in the Jewish field even if they must keep in mind certain particularities due to the history of the Jewish communities. One must distinguish between communities which have lived in the same place for a long time — which does not mean that they have not undergone internal change or not been subjected to external influences — and those where only oral documentation is available, being provided by the members of a displaced or dissolved community. In Israel and some large cities outside it there is a third research context, that where several Jewish communities coexist (without speaking of the places where some few representatives of numerous different communities live together). These communities can be studied for themselves, or else through an interest in the processes of hybridization that do not fail to appear.<sup>17</sup>

Concretely speaking, how should the historian or the anthropologist proceed? Reference to two themes of research — prayer, and the economic organization of a community — may help us to answer this question.

In the case of prayer one is dealing with an object which depends partly on musical and textual data, and also on elements relating to the calendar, the participants, the places, and so on. The musician and the historian may concentrate on the historical dimension of this theme. The first will inquire into the sources of the musical material, its evolution in time, the borrowings perceptible to the ear and the analysis of the melodies. This diversity of interests calls for a preliminary and coherent study of the musical material available here and now, and of the information of various kinds held by the possessors of the tradition, including people who are not necessarily expert as regards the liturgy.

The historian will use the same kinds of material. Admittedly, he is not a musicologist, but he will be careful to consider the elements in the musical material that may be helpful in his work. He will also have an anthropological approach to the musical fact, asking what are the linguistic terminologies applied to the prayers, the melodies, the systems of accentuation, who are the bearers of the tradition, and what is the social context. Further, what does a lexical and semantic analysis of this material yield, and a geo-linguistic and socio-linguistic study? Other questions concern the social organization of the community

17 For methodological discussion and examples, see Weinreich 1962 and Goldberg 1983.

and how it affects the organization of the prayers, or even vice versa; the types of prayers and their sociological distribution; the musical and cultural values attached to the music and the liturgy; the relations between these aspects and other cultural aspects; the migrations, partial or complete, seasonal or permanent that may have taken place, and their consequences on the organization of the liturgy; the historical relations between Jewish and non-Jewish communities, and their consequences.

In trying to answer these questions the historian or the anthropologist must choose between the temptation to hold to the canonic image of prayer in the Jewish environment, and a readiness to allow for the emergence of every specific phenomenon of a given community. In choosing the second alternative he will obtain results some of which will reflect the ideas of classical sociology; others will lead to an understanding of the economic organization of the society, for this economic organization will have determined the particular elements of the prayer cycle; a third group will show the way to some specific preoccupation of the community studied, a preoccupation perhaps translated into a specific mythology which will have had an impact on the classical allegorical texts of Judaism.

A scholar investigating the economic organization of a community must be prepared to treat the technology, the seasonal migrations, the social organization and the language. This does not mean that every specialist must establish the syntax of the language spoken by his interlocutors. Neither will he necessarily — though the contrary may also be true — have to concern himself with the comprehensive system of family relationships as it is organized in the community.<sup>18</sup> Nor will he necessarily have to deal with all the technological processes.

Interdisciplinary research, in history and anthropology, as in other fields, is not research that treats anything and everything. It is an enterprise dealing with a given object, which attempts to establish all its constituent elements, all its basic dimensions and its pertinent parameters, whatever the nature and kind of correlation that exist between all these data.

The scholar will attempt to establish the organization that has developed between the functional dimensions and the collective and individual strategies through which the fact studied exists. To attain this end, the number and type of informants should not be limited. Each must be correctly identified; the oral

18 The subject of family relationships in the context of Jewish communities is still a neglected field of research. For an example of significant results achieved by a frank approach to the subject, see Bahloul 1985.

material must be considered in itself; the constituent elements should not be confused, and the stages of the analysis remain distinct; all available verbal documentation and all living ethnographic information should be used.<sup>19</sup>

Historical or anthropological studies of Jewish communities may benefit from the methodological and theoretical scheme proposed in this article. Musicologists, linguists and the literature specialists studying Jewish cultures no doubt owe to themselves to be historians and anthropologists as well.

19 For examples of such analyses in non-Jewish fields, see Claudot 1978, Drettas 1979 and 1980, Arom and Thomas 1974.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- EJ<sup>2</sup> Encyclopaedia Judaica. Jerusalem 1971-1972.  
EH אנציקלופדיה עברית (Encyclopedia Hebraica)  
HOM A. Z. Idelsohn, *Hebräisch-orientalischer Melodienschatz...*, vols. I-X, 1914-1932. Berlin, Vienna, Jerusalem.  
JNUL Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem.  
NGD The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, ed. Stanley Sadie.  
NSA National Sound Archives, JNUL.  
Yuval Yuval — Studies of the Jewish Music Research Centre.