

## MUSIC IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY KABBALAH IN NORTHERN AFRICA

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### THE ZOHAR IN THE POST-EXPULSION PERIOD

More than any other Jewish group, the Northern African community has adopted the book of the Zohar as a canonical text. The nature of this canonization differs from those prevalent in other parts of the Jewish world; its most characteristic feature is the ritualistic study of the book, which is quite rare outside North Africa.<sup>1</sup> It is in this geographical area that commentaries on the book of the Zohar were compiled, the first and most important being that of Rabbi Shimeon ibn Lavi. Expelled from Spain, he lived for several years in Fez and then in Tripoli (Libya) where he composed his book in 1570. This commentary was destined to be one of the most important interpretations of the Zohar. Written by an isolated Kabbalist — who unlike the Kabbalists of Safed such as the disciples of Cordovero and Luria did not belong to any group — this book embraces a looser ideological approach. Lavi did not attempt to ensure the conceptual harmony between the two strata of the Zohar — namely the body of the Zohar on one hand, and the *tiqqunei zohar* on the other — as did Cordovero (Sack 1995: 244–286). Neither did he endeavor to introduce a full-fledged theosophical system, as did R. Isaac Luria (Scholem 1967). This does not imply that Lavi was a Kabbalist without an agenda of his own, but only that his strategy was less evident and weaker in comparison to those of his illustrious contemporaries in Safed.

Boaz Huss (1997) has recently examined the particular thought of this Kabbalist in detail. Here I would like to address Lavi's attitude to music, and explore its systemic aspects in relation to his overall Kabbalistic approach. Kabbalists, just as many modern scholars, have always considered the interpretation of the Zohar as a challenge and, to a

1 See Goldberg (1990). On the processes of canonization of the Zohar see Huss (1998).

certain extent, an artistic endeavor. A message conveyed in symbolic terms is by definition open to different interpretations; but its esotericism and complex theosophy further complicate the interpretation of the Zohar. Although they enrich immensely the fabric of the Zoharic text, these features confound any possibility of an unequivocal interpretation. The problem naturally intensifies as the complexity of the Zohar text grows; this is well demonstrated here with the text chosen for discussion.

### THE ZOHARIC TEXT

In the Zoharic *tosefta* (addendum), on the pericope *wa-yehi*,<sup>2</sup> there is a dense and enigmatic discussion of the “voice of the sphere” that attracted the attention of Lavi, and was interpreted by him at length. His rich treatment of this relatively brief passage of the Zohar will be exposed here only from some limited points of view. According to Lavi, this *tosefta*’ is enigmatic and furthermore was transmitted in a corrupt form as was common with many such enigmatic texts. Therefore, before commenting on this enigma, *qodem bo’i leva’er zōt ha-ḥidah*, he endeavored to establish a correct version of the text, which was based on the examination of several manuscripts.<sup>3</sup> The following is the text in the version preferred by Lavi and my translation.

קל גלגלא מתגלגלא בנעימותא מתתא לעילא רתיכהא סריקהא<sup>4</sup> אזלין ומתגלגלין<sup>5</sup>  
 קל נעימותא סלקא ונחתא אזלא ושטיא בעלמא קל שופרא נגיד מעומקי דרגין<sup>6</sup>  
 סוחרנהא יתבין תרין דרגין מגרופיין<sup>7</sup> מימינא ושמאלא<sup>8</sup> בתרין גוונין משתאבין  
 דא בדא דא חוור<sup>9</sup> ודא סומק ותרויהו<sup>10</sup> סחרין גלגלא לעילא אסחר לימינא  
 חוורא<sup>11</sup> סלקא ואסחר לשמאלא סומקא נחתא וגלגלא אסחר תדיר ולא שכין תרין  
 צפרין סלקין ומצפצפן<sup>12</sup> חד לסטר דרום וחד לסטר צפון פרחין באוירא צפצופא  
 וקל נעימו דגלגלא מתחברן כחדא כדין מזמור שיר ליום השבת וכל ברכאן נגדין  
 בלחישו בדא נעימו מגו רחימו דקל<sup>13</sup> שופרא לקבלא אינון ברכאן נחתין מעילא<sup>14</sup>  
 לתתא ואתגניזו כחדא בגו עומקא דבירא נביעו דבירא לא<sup>15</sup> פסקא בלחישו עד

2 Vol. 1, fols. 233b--234a.

3 *Ketem paz*, Livorno 1839, reprinted in Jerusalem 1981, fol. 416a–b.

4 In the standard editions of the Zohar, e.g. Margalioṭ (henceforth M), the word is טריקהא.

5 M ומתגלגלי

6 M בעומקי דרגי, in the depth of the degrees. M has here an additional phrase (ס"א) אסחר דגי (גלגלא).

7 M תרין מגרופין 8 M ומשמאלא 9 M חויר 10 M ותרויהו 11 M ותרויהו

12 M דקא מצפצפן 13 M דקול 14 M מלעילא 15 M דלא

דאתמליא ההוא<sup>16</sup> גלגלא סחרא אינון תרין מגרופיין<sup>17</sup> סחרן חד דימינא קרי בחיל  
 ואמר זהירו זהרין סלקא<sup>18</sup> ונחתא תרין אלפיין<sup>19</sup> עלמין אזדהרו עלמא דאמצעייתא  
 בגוייהו<sup>20</sup> אזדהר בוזהרא דמארך כל אינון מארי עייניין<sup>21</sup> אסתכלו ופקחו עיניכון  
 ותזכו<sup>22</sup> להאי נהורא להאי עידונא<sup>23</sup> אלין אנון ברכאן דנגדין<sup>24</sup> מלעילא מאן דזכי  
 גלגלא סלקא אסחר לימינא<sup>25</sup> ואנגיד ואמשיך לההוא דזכי ואתעדן מאלין ברכאן  
 עלאין דזהרן זכאין אינון דזכאן בהו וכד לא זכי גלגלא אסחר וההוא מגרופא  
 דלסטור שמאלא אסחר ונחת לתתא ואמשיך דינא על האי דלא זכי וקלא נפקת ווי  
 לאינון חייבין דלא זכו מההוא סטרא נפיק אשא דשלהובא דדליק דשארין על  
 ראשיהון דחייבא זכאין אינון כל אינון דאוליין באורח קשוט בהאי עלמא למזכי  
 לההוא נהורא עלאה ברכאן דצחצחון כד"א והשביע בצחצחות נפשך

The voice of the Sphere revolves melodiously, [ascending] from below upwards, [while] its vehicle<sup>26</sup> and its jewels<sup>27</sup> proceed and revolve [with the Sphere]. The sound of the melody ascends and descends; it traverses<sup>28</sup> and roams the world. [At the same time,] the voice of the *šofar* emerges from the depth of the degrees.<sup>29</sup>

Flanking [the Sphere], two string instruments reside,<sup>30</sup> [one] on its right and [the other] on its left. [The instruments are] of two colors that intermingle with each other,<sup>31</sup> [the one on the right side] is white and [the one on the left side] is red, and both encompass the Sphere from above. When the Sphere revolves to the right, the white [instrument] ascends and when [the Sphere] revolves to the left, the red [instrument] descends. And the Sphere revolves continuously,<sup>32</sup> without cessation.

Two birds ascend and chirp they float in the air,<sup>33</sup> one to the south side and one to the north side. [When] the chirping [of the birds] and the melodious sound of the Sphere unite, then [the mystical

16 M ההיא 17 M מגרופין 18 M דזהרין דסלקא 19 M תרי אלפי 20 M בגוייהו

21 M דעיינין 22 M ותזכו 23 M עדונא 24 M דנגדי

25 Here ends Lavi's quotation from the Zohar.

26 The rest of the text is given here according to Margalio's version.

27 Lit. it chariot

28 The interpretation of סריקהא as 'her jewels' follows the interpretation offered by Lavi in fol. 417a.

29 "Degrees" is used here for *sefirot*, especially the higher ones.

30 In the text יחבין, lit. sit.

31 Literally "are absorbed in each other".

32 The source of this statement is Maimonides's *Mišneh Torah*, *hilkoṭ yesode torah* 1:5; cf. Liebes (1976: 328).

33 These birds are interpreted by Lavi as the two angels, Michael and Gabriel. See *Ketem paz*, fol. 417b

meaning of] *Mizmor šir leyom ha-šabbat* [the song for the Sabbath Day (Ps. 92), is realized], and all the blessings spread out in whisper within this melody.

Due to [their] yearning for the voice of the *šofar* opposite them, the blessings descend from above and hide, [all] as one, inside the depth of the cistern.<sup>34</sup> The efflux of the cistern<sup>35</sup> does not stop whispering until the revolving Sphere [above] is filled up [by the stream emerging from the cistern below].

The [instrument] on the right side calls out loudly<sup>36</sup> and says: “O light of lights [that] ascends and descends two thousand worlds, and by which the world of the middle is illuminated, shine in the light of your master! O all possessors of eyes, observe and open your eyes, and you shall merit that light, that pleasure. These are the blessing that streams down from above.”

If a man<sup>37</sup> is meritorious, the Sphere ascends [and] revolves to the right<sup>38</sup> and it causes [the blessing] to pour down and to flow towards that meritorious [man], and he gains pleasure from the supreme shiny blessings. Happy are those who merit it!

And if a men is not meritorious, [but is a sinner,] the Sphere revolves [to the left] and the musical instrument on the left side revolves and descends straight down, drawing judgement upon [the man] who is not meritorious. And a voice goes out calling: “Woe to those guilty [men] who are not meritorious!” Out of that [left] side, a burning flame of fire emerges [and] rests on the heads of the guilty [men].

Happy are those, all those, who walk in the way of truth in this world, [they] will merit the supreme light, the shiny blessings, as it is written [Isaiah 58, 11] “And He shall satisfy your soul with the shining ones“.

34 עומקא דבירא: This is a sexual symbol of the last *sefirah*, viewed as a feminine power.

35 נביעו דבירא: According to Lavi, *Ketem paz*, fol. 417b, this expression is related to the ninth, male *sefirah* of *yesod*.

36 In the text בחילא, powerfully.

37 Lit. whoever

38 Perhaps the phrase should read: מאן דזכי, גלגלא אסחר לימינא ומגורפא סלקא “If a man is meritorious, the Sphere revolves to the right and the musical instrument [on the right side] ascends...”

Without referring to Lavi's commentary, the following is a brief summary of this passage. The cosmic sphere is connected to two other powers, the two musical instruments which correspond to the two colors, white and red, which, in turn, are symbols of the two divine powers, *hesed* and *gevurah* respectively, namely the attributes of mercy and judgement. The motion of the revolving sphere corresponds to the merits of the individuals below: for a meritorious person, the sphere will revolve to the right and thus bestow blessings on him. For the sinner, however, the opposite is true. The blessing drawn down by the sphere does not come from the celestial or sidereal world. The sphere stands here for more than an astral entity revolving in heaven. In fact, the sphere is conceived as reaching the higher divine attributes on the one hand, and as pouring down upon the humans here below on the other hand. It rather stands for a scale that metes justice and implements it.<sup>39</sup> The blessings stem from the higher divine world, which emanates them as a response to the melody of the sphere. The responsive emanation from the higher divine manifestations is alluded to by the phrase "the voice of the *šofar*" and this issue will be discussed in more detail below. An intra-divine process of generating blessings is necessary in order to transmit them on the low later. The sphere is therefore not an astronomical entity, but a mythical being that is involved in enticing the divine efflux to descend within the lower divine realms and then transmitting it onto the lower world. What counts here is the religious merit, not an ontological worldview that inspires the concept of the sphere. Fulfilling the commandments is the moving force behind the cosmos; different divine powers are only implementing the dynamics that were generated by the ritualistic performance. For this reason, the Zoharic *tosefta* deals only with man and not with any other terrestrial being.

#### LAVI'S FIVE PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

As mentioned above, Lavi conceived this passage to be an enigma. In order to decode its meaning, he exposes what he describes as the five principles that one must take into consideration when interpreting this text, or any other text of the Zohar.

- (1) The text is formulated in code, using allegories or symbols in order to convey its content.

39 This is the concept of the *tiqla*, a very important topic in the Zohar. See Liebes (1976: 327–331).

(2) The lower world is feminine and the higher one is masculine and both correspond to each other in structure.

(3) The jewels of the bride, or the feminine divine attribute, are the religious deeds of the righteous. This may be called the theurgical principle.<sup>40</sup>

(4) The desire of the lower to receive the influx from higher beings, namely from the *sefirotic* realm, is called *širah*, song. This desire is characteristic of all the lower worlds<sup>41</sup>. It is designated — following what Lavi calls '*hokmat ha-meḥqar*', the 'inquirers' or the philosophers — by the phrase 'melody of the world', *niggun ha-'olam*, which may be translated in a less literal manner as 'the cosmic music'. This music functions, like religious deeds, in a theurgical manner. It should be emphasized that Lavi addresses the music of all beings and not only the acts of man, as the Zohar does.

(5) The most propitious time for this music is '*erev šabbat* (the Sabbath Eve), when the erotic union between the feminine and the masculine takes place. Just as music is involved in a human wedding, so is the cosmic melody synchronized with the moment of the sexual encounter, taking place on high.

By means of these principles, Lavi offers his interpretation of the 'enigma'.

Lavi is indeed correct in his mapping of the main literal strategies used by the Zohar. Indeed, this is a symbolic corpus, based upon the principle of alloforms, which are activated by the rituals, which are in turn connected to propitious moments of the divine rhythms. These five principles are indeed relevant to the discussions that constitute the bulk of the Zohar. However, the assumption that the cosmic music is a concept in Zoharic hermeneutics is rather bizarre. Though music is often mentioned in the Zohar,<sup>42</sup> it is quite difficult to imagine music as a main topic or as a hermeneutical concept in this passage. Indeed, our notion that Lavi is at odds with the normative interpretation of the Zohar is corroborated by the fact that only in the case of cosmic music does he

40 On theurgy in Lavi's Kabbalistic thought see Huss (1992: 19–39); Mopsik (1994: 427–441).

41 '*Olamot ha-taḥtonim*.

42 See the texts collected by A. Shiloah and R. Tene (1977).

invoke the authority of the 'inquirers', namely the philosophers. Let me therefore focus my discussion on the introduction of the cosmic music in Lavi's commentary, its nature, its function and sources.

#### THE COSMIC MELODY

Lavi's fourth principle is one of the longest and the most significant one from the cultural point of view. The following is the beginning of his formulation<sup>43</sup> and my translation thereof.

רביעית אצ"ל [אתה צריך לדעת] כי בהיות העולמות התחתונים כלם מבקשים את פני האדונין אדון כל הארץ להפיק רצונם ומזונם כל א' [אחד] המזון הראוי לו הנה התשוקה ההיא והפניה ההיא תקרא שירה בהיותם יודעים ומשיגים כל עלת לעלתו והצטרכו אליו עד הגיע התשוקה ההיא והפניה ההיא מעילא לעילא עד עילת כל העילות יתברך שמו וזאת היא שירתם איש איש ממלאכתו אשר המה עושים ואשר התפקדו עליו הבכור כבכורתו והצעיר כצעירתו ממיכאל השר הגדול עד השלשול הקטן אשר בים הגדול כי לכך נוצרו וזה הענין כלומר קבוץ כל התשוקות והשיריות [ת] מהקטן עד גדול יחד כלם קראוהו חכמי המחקר ניגון העולם כלומר קבוץ כל הקולות כשווי אחד וזה קלוסו של הב"ה [הקדוש ברוך הוא] העולה מלמטה למעלה כל כת וכת מדברת בלשון עמה השמים מספרים כבוד אל כלשונם אין אומר ואין דברים כלשונו בפה ובשפתים כמו שנתבאר במזמור ההוא וכן כל הנמצאים למיניהם עופות וחיות ובהמות ואילנות כפי בקשתם ייוחס להם השירה כמוזכר בפ[רק] שירה ושירה של ישראל עולה על כלה ביען ידיעתו הכללית.

The fourth principle. You should know that since all the lower worlds desire to see the face of the Lord, the Master of all the earth,<sup>44</sup> in order to obtain their wish and nourishment, each of them [looking for] the food that is appropriate to it; therefore this desire and this urge<sup>45</sup> is called *širah*. They know how to relate each cause its cause, and they need it,<sup>46</sup> until this desire and urge reaches higher and higher up to the Cause of all Causes, blessed be His name. And this [desire] is their song, each of them according to its work<sup>47</sup> that he does and [the task] that he was appointed for

43 *Ketem paz*, fols. 416b–417a.

44 *Adon kol ha-arez*. According to Zoharic symbolism the earth may stand for the last *sefirah*, that of *malkut*.

45 *Tešūqah u-feniyyah*.

46 From *hiḏtarek*. I wonder whether a better reading would be *hiḏtaref*, which would mean that the lower worlds are joining the causes on their way upward to the higher cause.

47 *Mi-melaḳto*.

– ‘the senior according to his high rank and the junior according to his low rank’,<sup>48</sup> from Michael the archangel<sup>49</sup> down to the smallest worm in the great sea — because they were created for this purpose. This issue, namely the assemblage<sup>50</sup> of all the desires and songs, from the smallest to the greatest all of them together, this was called by the sages of inquiry<sup>51</sup> ‘the melody of the world’, namely the collection of all the voices in an harmonious manner. And this is the praise of God, blessed be He, which ascends from below upwards. Each group<sup>52</sup> ‘speaks the language of its nation’.<sup>53</sup> ‘The heavens tell the glory of the Lord’<sup>54</sup> in their language, [though in that language] ‘there is no speech and there are no words’ as in our language [which is expressed] by [means of] mouth and lips, as is explained in that psalm.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, all the beings according to their species:<sup>56</sup> birds, wild beasts, domestic animals, trees, a song was attributed to all of them according to their request, as mentioned in *Pereq širah*.<sup>57</sup> But the song of Israel is sublime above all the others, because of their [Israel’s] comprehensive knowledge.

Lavi assumes that all beings long toward the Source of all sources, which is their ultimate source of nourishment. This longing or desire is understood as a melody, and the assumption is that each species has its own melody, which ascends on high in order to receive what is needed. Lavi capitalizes upon the view found in *Pereq širah*, a Hebrew version of *Physiologus*, which deals with the biblical verses which are ascribed to each being, and are understood as a song characteristic to that particular species (Beit Arieh 1966).

48 The text quotes Gen. 43, 33

49 Lit. The great minister

50 *Ha-gibbuz*.

51 *I.e.* the philosophers.

52 *Kat.* Literally ‘sect’.

53 Wording based on Esther 1, 21

54 See Psalm 19, 2. This verse has been interpreted by means of the Pythagorean view of the music of the spheres also by another North African Jewish author, the fifteenth-century R. Shimeon ben Tzemah Duran. See the text from *Magen Avot* printed in Adler (1975: 133).

55 Ps. 19, 4

56 Wording based on Gen. 1, 24

57 The last statements of this passage occur already earlier in Lavi’s commentary; see *Ketem paz*, fol. 21d–22a.



Lavi's version is much closer to a vision reminiscent of the great chain of being, as it includes the whole series of beings from the greatest angel, to the smallest species. What is even more characteristic of his view is the emphasis on the collective songs and praise, which ascend, to the last *sefirah*. The formula *niggun ha-'olam* implies a vision of a harmonious cosmos, whose beings sing separately and all of them together, a cosmic song. The song of all beings is presented in terms of desire, *tešūqah*. The nexus between the two concepts is reminiscent of the affinity between the Greek *mousikeh* — music, and the verb *maein*, which means 'to seek after', 'to crave' or 'to covet' (Huizinga 1971). This song of the world is absent in the Zoharic passage under scrutiny here, and it stems, at least in part, from a non-Kabbalistic source. Locating the precise source is not only a matter of scholarly curiosity or antiquarian search of sources, but will help us to better understand the different perception of music in Lavi's passage. After all, under discussion here are not only technical terms, but also the vision of the chorus of beings that collectively projects the harmony on the high. As described above, the cosmos starts with the angelic realm and descends to the lowest creature; it does not include the divine realm. The cosmic melody is therefore ascending on high, but the sphere and its voice are not part of the cosmos. "And because the collection of all those songs and the praise ascends nicely<sup>58</sup> built as it is in a proper manner out of the desires of all beings, the bride, which comprises everything<sup>59</sup> hinted at [above], is then called 'Song of Songs', [namely] the song that all the songs and praises ascend to it, and they are her jewels and ornaments."<sup>60</sup> Thus, the last divine power is the hypostasis of all the songs and praises. She is called Song of Songs either because she is made of this song or because she receives all songs. The feminine divine attribute is adorned by the ascending songs and she herself ascends to sexually unite with the male divine potency, the *sefirah* of *tiferet*. As such, the cosmic songs have a theurgical effect, as they intend to cause the union between the bridegroom to the bride, namely between two divine powers.<sup>61</sup> According to Lavi, the feminine divine power is explicitly identified with "the sphere" mentioned in the Zohar

58 *Oleh yafeh*.

59 *Ha-kallah ha-keulah*. This is a classical term for the last *sefirah*, which stands in most of the Kabbalistic texts, for the presence of all the *sefirot* in the structure of the last one.

60 *Ketem paz*, fol. 417a.

61 *Ketem paz*, fol. 417b.

passage: “It called the attribute of ‘*ateret* ‘sphere’, because of two similarities them. The first similarity is the drawing of the water and the other are the pleasant voices emerging from the motion.”<sup>62</sup> Therefore, according to Lavi, the voices ascending from the cosmic realm are embellishing, namely adding power, to the last divine *sefirah* which, being symbolized by a sphere, also rotates and produces a voice of herself. Here, Lavi adduces the view of Galen, as to the unheard but pleasant voices produced by spheres in general, and mentions that the Greek thinker ‘agreed with the Kabbalists’.<sup>63</sup> This resort to an agreement between an alien thinker and Kabbalah is quite exceptional in the voluminous literature that interprets the Zohar. The book was the stronghold of the particularistic understanding of Judaism, and its commentators were more often than not on this particularistic line (Idel 1986). In any case, the ‘agreement’ between the two different sources may be understood against the background of the Renaissance theory of *prisca theologia*.<sup>64</sup> The theory of the singing spheres, better known from the Pythagorean tradition, was discussed in the Middle Ages by a variety of sources,<sup>65</sup> including Maimonides’ discourse of this topic in the *Guide of the Perplexed*.<sup>66</sup>

However, Maimonides, following Aristotle rejects the Pythagorean view and does not mention Galen in this context. Therefore, Lavi’s positive attitude towards the music of the sphere and his resort to Galen stem from other sources rather than the classical Maimonides. The regular discussions of the ritualistic use of the *šofar*, the voices produced by it are described as ascending on high; this is a topos, which occurs innumerable times in Hebrew sources. Here, however, the *šofar* is understood as a symbol for higher *sefirotic* entities, which are masculine, and are responding to the melody of the ‘sphere’ or the feminine divine attribute. This seems to be the interpretation offered by Lavi, and it is quite innovative in comparison to the Zoharic text, where the ascending and descending voices are not exposed in such a neat manner. The descent of the voice is understood, following the Zoharic text, as the

62 *Ketem paz*, fol. 417a.

63 *Ketem paz*.

64 The major works written on this approach are Daniel R. Walker (1972) Charles Schmitt (1966). See also Idel (1985 and 1989).

65 See index in Adler (1975: 379) *sub voce* Pythagoras.

66 For a modern translation see *Guide of the Perplexed* II: 8, transl. S. Pines, Chicago, 1963, p. 267.

descent of the splendor from the higher *sefirot* to the low (still masculine) ones. The splendor stand for the influx received by the lower entities, or the nourishment mentioned in the Zohar. Perhaps the *šofar*, the ram's horn, stands for a masculine power, and symbolizes here the masculine sexual organ,<sup>67</sup> transmitting the semen stemming from the brain, called the 'depths of the degrees', to the feminine power. The intermingling between the two voices is described by Lavi as follows: "and those voices, the one that ascends and the one that descends from above, are blended, and become one."<sup>68</sup> In any case, the last part of the quote from the Zohar, which dealt with the splendor (*zohar*), may also be construed as describing sexual issues, namely the descent of the splendor (i.e. semen) toward the lower levels of the human body.<sup>69</sup> Lavi explicitly refers in the context of the splendor to the semen descending from the brain.<sup>70</sup> In this context, he also explains the occurrence of the term *bi-lehišu*, in a whisper, as pointing to the sexual union, which should be completed in silence.<sup>71</sup> However, the nexus between the *šofar* and the descent of the emanation, is reminiscent of another Greek *mythologoumenon*, that of the horn of plenty. The horn, both a musical instrument and the source of nourishment in the Zohar, is envisioned by Lavi more as the source for the descent of power, in a manner closer to the Greek *mythologoumenon* than to the Zoharic text. In Lavi's interpretation of the Zohar, as in a modern reading of the horn of plenty in Greek myths, the horn is interpreted as the phallus and part of a myth of reproduction.<sup>72</sup> The sexual reading of both the Zoharic text, and Lavi's interpretation, is corroborated by the description of the mutual absorption of the two kinds of voices into each other. This situation is reminiscent of the ancient concept of fertilization by the interpenetration between male semen and "female sperm", or in Kabbalistic terms, the male and female waters. It is plausible to assume that the voices of the sphere and those of the horn stand, respectively, for the effects of the union between the female and male divine attributes. In other words, the

67 Regularly *šofar* stands in the Zohar for the third *sefirah*, that of *binah*.

68 *Ketem paz*, fol. 417a. The union between the voices reoccurs also later on the same page.

69 On the term *zohar* in sexual contexts in the book of the Zohar, different from that discussed here, see the studies of Yehudah Liebes (1994) and Elliot R. Wolfson (1994: 388–390). As far as I could check, the Zoharic passage analyzed here was not addressed in modern scholarship.

70 *Ketem paz*, fol. 417b.

71 *Ibidem*.

72 See Burkert (1983: 71–72).

Pythagorean music of the spheres and the concept of the *cornu copiae* has been integrated in Lavi's interpretation of the Zohar, and his commentary become the locus of the encounter between two well known Greek *mythologoumena*.

#### THE JEWISH RENAISSANCE SOURCE FOR LAVI'S COSMIC MUSIC

The inquiry of the source for the phrase *niggun ha-'olam* is an important starting point for a better evaluation of the interpretive move Lavi performed in his commentary. *Prima facies* Lavi supplies the source in an explicit manner; he claims that "the sages of the Zohar" describe the ascent of the song as *nigguna de-'alma*,<sup>73</sup> which is an Aramaic counterpart of *niggun 'olam*. However, an inspection of the single instance where this term occurs in the book of the Zohar does not sustain Lavi's interpretation of the phrase as a cosmic melody. In Zohar II, fol. 93a, the song of the son that was intended to delight his parents is mentioned, and there the Aramaic phrase *nigguna de-ḳol 'alma* occurs, which should be understood as 'the song that everyone sings'. Here, the Aramaic *'alma* stands clearly for men, or persons in general, but not for the cosmos. However, Lavi's Hebrew phrase *niggun 'olam* is extensively discussed by R. Isaac Arama, a Spanish homilist of the late fifteenth century. His famous collection of sermons, which were written in Spain and Italy,<sup>74</sup> were printed for the first time in Saloniki in 1522, and then again in Venice in 1547 and 1565.<sup>75</sup> This collection of sermons became very influential in Jewish culture and I assume that Lavi was acquainted with it. One of Arama's most interesting sermons is entitled *Niggun 'olam*, and it deals with a vision of micro-macrocosmic alloforms, using music as a major simile for explaining the influence of human deeds on nature.<sup>76</sup> There is a good reason to assume that the view of music as having repercussions on the natural realm stems from magical trends in Renaissance.<sup>77</sup> A comparison of some details of Arama's discussion of music and some of the statements found in Lavi's interpretation of the

73 *Ketem paz*, fol. 47a.

74 On this author see Wilensky (1956: 22, 49, 130–131, 188), where the concept of *niggun 'olam* in his homily was discussed.

75 For the later editions see Wilensky (1956: 31, note 44).

76 For a critical edition of the musical part of this sermon see Adler (1975: 92–96). On this sermon see also Moshe Idel (1982: 35–37).

77 See Idel (1982: 33–34) and the bibliographical references there.

Zohar passage, proves this nexus in a rather definitive manner. Lavi describes the response of the bridegroom to the voice of the bride as referring to the words of Hosea: “In that day, I will respond – declares the Lord – I will respond to the sky, and it shall respond to the earth” (Hosea 2:23).<sup>78</sup> Precisely this verse appears also in Arama’s discussion to explain the divine response to the music ascending from below (Adler 1975: 93). Both authors resort to the term *yaḥas* in order to refer to the correspondence between the singing worlds, this relationship is described as the reason for the ability of one world to influence the other.

#### SOME REMARKS ON CULTURAL HISTORY OF SEPHARADI JEWISH

Two attitudes to music have been combined in Lavi’s commentary: the theurgical attitude found in the Zohar, and the cosmic-magical one found in Arama. The theurgical understanding of music continues the Spanish heritage, perpetuated after the expulsion from Spain (Idel 1982: 45–57) and is also evident in Lavi’s book. On the other hand, the cosmic-magical attitude integrates a view that, in my opinion, stems from the Renaissance culture in Italy, where the author spent his final years. Like other Spanish thinkers among the Jews, kabbalists and commentators, the encounter with the Italian culture, Christian and Jewish, left its imprints on his writings. The various forms of syntheses between the Spanish and Renaissance cultures, had been propagated in the Ottoman Empire, and reached even the Safedian center of Kabbalah. This trajectory, which has been documented in a tentative manner, still waits for a detailed description. What has been apparently ignored by modern scholarship is the possible impact of the Italian encounter upon the writings of thinkers in Northern Africa. Lavi’s treatment of music supplies an example for a strong reinterpretation of the canonical book of Spanish Kabbalah, in the terms of cultural views adopted after the expulsion.<sup>79</sup> As a result of the impact of Arama’s view, the greater emphasis upon the cosmic-magical aspect of music changed the theurgical understanding of music. The former emphasis upon intradivine effects of music is now contextualized differently by creating a bifocal reading of music, which combines both magical and theurgical

78 *Ketem paz*, fol. 417a.

79 Lavi’s was acquainted also with other forms of post-expulsion writings in Italy, like R. Yehudah Hayyat’s *Sefer Minḥat Yehudah* written around 1495 in Mantua.

views. This development is also evident in the view of music by Lavi's contemporary, R. Moshe Cordovero.<sup>80</sup> To a certain extent, Lavi is an interesting witness to the accelerated movement towards the forefront of the magical elements. In the sixteenth-century these elements were considered more crucial than previously thought.<sup>81</sup> The magical-cosmic approach attenuated the strong theurgical bias of Spanish Kabbalah, and created, quite modestly it should be recognized, a somewhat greater concern for the importance of the extradivine worlds. On the other hand, the combination of the two foci enabled Lavi to offer a more comprehensive reading of the role of music. He explains the ascent of the cosmic music to the divine realm, then the effect of music within the divine realm, and the descent of music into the lower worlds in the form of response or of nourishment. The cosmic circle includes now the intra- and extra-divine worlds altogether, which are concatenated in a much broader picture.<sup>82</sup> Like Alemanno and Abravanel, the lower beings crave and desire the higher ones.<sup>83</sup> The creation of broader theories, which take into consideration all the important aspects of emanative, descending processes as well as the return of beings upwards, is characteristic of the much more systematic forms of Kabbalah in the sixteenth century.<sup>84</sup> Lavi's discussion of music partakes in this tendency of creating comprehensive worldviews, though in a much more modest manner.

80 For other parallel developments between the kabbalistic thought of Lavi's and that of Safedian Kabbalah see Huss (1992a: 341–362; 1992b: 38).

81 More on this move see Idel (1995).

82 For the cosmic circle in R. Yehudah Abravanel's *Dialoghi d'Amore* and Alemanno's *Hešeq Šelomoh* see Idel (1978).

83 Cf. *ibidem*, p. 163 and p. 166 note 40 for the view of a Safedian Kabbalist, R. Elijah de Vidas.

84 See M. Idel (1992: vol. 2, 178) and Huss (1992b: 361).

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