

Catalogue of the Jewish Music Collections at the Vernadsky Library in Kiev (Preliminary Edition)

Introduction by Israel Adler¹

In the summer of 1994, the director of the Vernadsky Central Library of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in Kiev, Prof. Alexii Semenovich Onishchenko, visited the Jewish National and University Library (JNUL [today National Library of Israel]) in Jerusalem. In the framework of this journey, he visited the National Sound Archives that are located at JNUL and met the sound technicians who were engaged at that time in transferring the historical recordings of the Robert Lachmann cylinder collection. Prof. Onishchenko showed an unusual interest on their work because, as he revealed, his library housed about a thousand cylinders with recordings of Jewish music. Later on, thanks to the efforts of Rabbi Menachem Feldman, we received a copy of the inventory of this cylinder collection from Kiev. This document was already enough for us to assume that we were possibly confronted with the sound archive of Moshe Beregovski, the “Cabinet” of Jewish music that all specialists had thought that it had disappeared more than half a century ago. To verify this assumption, I embarked to Kiev in order to visit the Vernadsky Library and see with my own eyes if this was indeed the truth.

At this point, something should be said about the extraordinary work of collecting and researching Jewish music in Russia and the later Soviet Union during the first half of the twentieth century. The first initiatives in this field were pursued already towards the end of the nineteenth century, especially by the composer Joel Engel (1868-1927). The ethnographic effort centered mostly around two institutions: the Society of Jewish Folk Music founded in 1908 in Saint Petersburg and the Jewish Historical and Ethnographic Society founded there on the very same year (Bayer 1971-72) as a successor of the Historical Committee (founded in 1891) of the Society for the Cultural Promotion of Russian Jewry (Slutsky 1971-72).² All this took place under the guidance of the celebrated author of the theatre play *Dybbuk*, the folklorist Sh.

¹ Some sections of this introduction were published in “A la recherche de chants perdus: la redécouverte des collections du “cabinet” de musique juive de Moisei I. Beregovski”, *Ndroje balendro: musiques, terrains et disciplines: textes offertes à Simha Arom*, ed. V. Dehoux and others (Paris, 1995), 247–67.

² See *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (15:58): According to the *EJ* this society had been founded in 1863, according to Weisser (1981/82:2) it was founded in 1892. [See now: James B. Loeffler, *The most musical nation: Jews and culture in the late Russian Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013]

An-Ski (1863-1920) who participated during the years 1911-1914³ in the Jewish Ethnographic Expedition Baron Horace Guenzburg, which was organized by the Jewish Historical and Ethnographic Society. In a report dating from May 7th, 1915, An-Ski makes mention, among other objects having been gathered during this expedition, of a thousand folk songs that had been recorded on five hundred cylinders (Weisser 1981-82: 5-6). The collected material was unified and kept at the Jewish Ethnographic Museum founded in 191[7] in Saint Petersburg, afterwards closed by the Bolshevik authorities in 1918 and again reopened [in 1923 until 1929] (*Encyclopaedia Judaica* 12:540; Weisser 1981-82:6 [See now: Binyamin Lukin, An-ski Ethnographic Expedition and Museum, *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, 25 July 2017. Accessed, 6 February 2021 https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Anski_Ethnographic_Expedition_and_Museum])

After the dissolution of the Jewish Historical and Ethnographic Society (towards the end of 1929), one part of the collection, and in particular the musical collections, were transferred to Kiev. In February 1930, they were given to the care of Moshe I. Beregovski (1892-1961), director of the Music-ethnographic Cabinet of the ethnographic section of the Jewish Cultural Institute⁴ (Beregovski 1934:28 [= Slobin 1982:40]; cf. also Beregovski 1962:3-10 [=Slobin 1982:285-290]; Weisser 1981-82:6; Mlotek 1977-78:83, note 6).

Moshe Beregovski was born near Kiev in 1892 and was raised in a Jewish environment (atmosphere). According to Beregovski himself, he was “singing at different synagogue choirs, where I acquired the basics of music theory and solfeggio.”⁵ Furthermore, he studied at the Kiev and Petrograd conservatories for example with Boleslav Yavorsky (1877-1942), one of the leading musicologist in Russia. Beregovski was in particular interested in the study of the Jewish modes. He taught at Jewish institutions of learning.

³ Concerning the initial date of this expedition – 1911 rather than 1912 – cf. Weisser 1981/82:3. [See also: Rivka Gonen (ed.) *Back to the Shtetl: An-Sky and the Jewish Ethnographic Expedition, 1912-1914*, ed.. Jerusalem: Israel Museum, ca. 1994; Gabriella Safran, Steven J. Zipperstein (eds.), *The worlds of S. An-sky: a Russian Jewish intellectual at the turn of the century*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2006].

⁴ “Institut far yiddisher proletrisher kultur fun der alukraynisher visnshaft-akademi. Etnografishe sektsie. Kabinet far muzik-folklor”. The *formulars* of large format (ca. 20x28cm) contain the musical transcriptions of the series A and B (cf. *infra*), show on top of the page printed in Yiddish in Hebrew characters: “Institut far yiddisher kultur. Etnografishe sektsye. Kabinet far muzikaler etnografye.”

⁵ Joachim Braun, “The Autobiography of Moshe Beregovski,” *Tatzlil*, 19/10 (1979), p.159 [In Hebrew]

Beregovski was since the end of the 1920s engaged with the collection of thousands of documents of Jewish music, sound recordings and transcriptions of music and text, mostly folk songs in Yiddish, but also liturgical chants and Chassidic songs. From 1927, he worked at Jewish folklore institutions affiliated with the Academy of Sciences of the Ukraine and came into closer contact with the ethnomusicologist Klement Kvitka (1880-1953).

Beregovski lead those archives from the date of their foundation, about 1928, until his deportation to Siberia in 1949. Here, according to his own testimony, the chronological summary of major stages of his life⁶:

- in 1927 he began working in Kiev in a systematic way in the field of Jewish music folklore which he pursuit during a period of twenty years
- in 1928 foundation of the sound archive of his “Cabinet”
- in 1930 he received all recorded material from the Jewish Historical and Ethnographic Society in Saint Petersburg, i.e. 435 cylinders (containing recordings made by Sh. An-Ski, Joel Engel and Sussmann Kisselhoff [Kisselgof] (1876-1939, cf, infra, 2.1. re: cylinders 254-684]
- beginning of 1949 (before his deportation), the collection of sound recordings contained more than 1200 cylinders.

From this date on, in the frame of the anti-Semitic measures, it has been assumed that those archives had disappeared.

After his return from the deportation in 1955 until his death in 1961, Beregovski tried to continue researching and publishing about Jewish music folklore. He stated repeatedly during this last period that the important archives of his “Cabinet” of Jewish music at the Academy of Science of the Ukraine had disappeared without leaving any trace. The specialists (researchers) of Yiddish music and Beregovski’s work testified this and some even thought that the archives had been destroyed.

Beregovski seemingly believed in the dream of a Jewish culture [prospering] in a socialist multinational state. In 1948-51, however, he witnessed the total destruction of Jewish culture in the USSR and the ruin of his own work. From 1951 until 1955 he was imprisoned for [alleged] anti-Soviet activities. It seems that after these events, Beregovski took steps to preserve his work and sent

⁶ Beregovskaya 1994, p. 161

some of his manuscripts outside of Moscow and Kiev. Until his death in 1961 he continued to make corrections and additions to his unpublished works.⁷

Our assumption that the inventory of the cylinders in Kiev might very well be that of the lost sound archive of Beregovski's Jewish music "Cabinet" was, beyond our hopes, confirmed during our visit in Kiev in October 1994 and July 1995. A large part of the 1274 cylinders that had been described in the inventory seemed intact and apt to be copied onto DAT tapes. The recordings ranged from 1912 and 1947. In cooperation with the sound archive (Phonogrammarchiv) of the Academy of Sciences in Vienna, we have taken up the negotiations with the authority of the library to transfer these documents onto DAT cassettes. But the other parts of the music archives are not less important than the cylinders. There are thousands of transcriptions of music and texts that contain references to informants, date and place of recording.

Description of the collection

The description of the material in the musical 'cabinet' of Moshe Beregovski is based upon what we were able to see during our visit between October 8th and 14th, 1994 at the Vernadsky Central Library at Kiev. This material includes:

- wax cylinder recordings
- archives of Moshe Beregovski's musical cabinet, containing the inventory, formularies and the dossiers with transcriptions of music and text of the cylinder collection as well as other documents concerning Jewish music in Eastern Europe since the end of the 19th century until 1949.

The phonotheque [sound archive]

The inventory of the cylinder collection allows the enumeration of 1274 cylinders. The description in the inventory of about 280 cylinders mentions *opgeraynikt* meaning that those cylinders have been erased. Hence there are 993 cylinders of which according to the estimation of Dr. Dietrich Schueller from the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna about 80% are in a condition can be copied without greater difficulties.

Order of the [recorded] collection:

1-125: recordings dating from March until October 1929, mostly made Beregovski in the Ukraine (Kiev, Belaye Tsrekov, Slavuta, Skvira)⁸

⁷ Joachim Braun, "The Unpublished Volumes of Moshe Beregovski's *Jewish Musical Folklore*," *Israel Studies in Musicology*, IV (1987), pp. 125-126.

126-154: 29 cylinders which have been transmitted to Beregovski by Engel's daughter in 1930; most of those recordings date from 1912 and were made in the area of Ruzhany (in Belarus) and of Skvira

155-253: recordings dating from June 1929 until June 1930, mostly recorded by Beregovski in Odessa

254-684: 431 cylinders mostly recorded during the Jewish ethnographic expedition Baron Horace Guenzburg, conducted by Sh. An-Ski. The Jewish Historical and Ethnographic Society in Leningrad have transmitted these items to Beregovski's "Cabinet" in 1930.⁹ A large number of these recordings have been attributed to Kisselhof and date from the years 1913 and 1914. According to An-Ski's report from 7 May 1915, the material was mostly collected in "60 cities in Podolie, Volhynie and the provinces of Kiev" (Weisser 1981-82:5). Cylinders 614-684 date from 10 July until 1 August 1913. These are recordings of prayers and piyyutim of chazzanim from the Middle East, North Africa and even Ethiopia

Morocco: 638-642 Salomon ben David Shelush and 644 Joseph ben David Shelush

Ethiopia: 667-678 Salomon ben Issac (also 615: abisinishe lider bay der arbet in feld), dated from 11 July 1913, St Petersburg

Iran (Shiraz): 614, 617, 618 Benjamin HaParsi, 620 Benjamin HaLabi ? de Shiraz, 625-628 Salomonm ben Aga Kohen the Blind (seggi nahor)

Iraq (Bagdad): 649-653 Hayyun ben Samuel, 657-663, 669-673 (Ezra ben Hakham David (maybe Ezra Hakham David ben Meir of Baghdad, recorded by Idelsohn in Jerusalem 7 November 1911? See: Exner 1922, Platten 1604, 1938)

Palestine (Petah Tikva): Jakob of Petah Tikva (who sings the Bialik song Ben nehar prat u nehar hidekel)

Syria (Aleppo): no 620 Benjamin Halabi? De Shiraz, 619, 621-624, 629-632 Hazzan of Aleppo, no 634 child, no 666 hazzan of Aleppo and Hakham Nisim [of Urfa/Turkey?]

⁸ These and the following numbers contain those entries that have been *opgereynikt*, ie erased.

⁹ Cf. *supra* according to Beregovski's testimony quoted after Beregovskaya 1994:161.

Turkey (Urfa?) no 665 Hakham Nisim with choir, no 666 hazzan of Aleppo and Hakham Nisim, no 667 Hakham Nisim of Urfa?, no 668 Hakham Nisim of Urfa.

Yemen no 679 Abraham ben Zekharyah, no 679 Shimon ben Shalom, no 680 Zekharyah ben 'Ovadia, 681-682 Ben Zion ben Moshe de Sana, 633, 635-637, 643, 645, 647, 648, 654-656, 674-676, 462.

And others.

We have tried to find a connection between these recordings and those which A.Z. Idelsohn (1882-1938) has made in Jerusalem for the sound archives in Vienna and Berlin from 1911 on – both pioneer work in the field of advanced ethnomusicological recordings of Jewish musical traditions. Beregovski, foremost so meticulous about indicating the collectors and researchers who were involved in these recordings is silent about this point.

Amongst the founders of the Jewish Folk Music Society in St Petersburg was the composer Lazare Saminsky (1882-1959), active participant of the Jewish Ethnographic Expedition [of] Baron Horace Guenzburg. [Saminsky] was particularly interested in Oriental and Sephardi Jewish traditions that he learned about in 1913 during his trips to Georgia (in Tiflis, he visited amongst others the Persian synagogue), Turkey and Palestine.¹⁰ We managed to confirm that Saminsky was involved in recording the cylinders 614-684.

685-1118: recordings dating from 1929 until 1940¹¹, mostly collected by Beregovski himself and with the collaboration/cooperation of S. Shnayder [Schneider] in the Ukraine and Belarus.

1119-1213: recordings by S. Kisselhof (1878-1939) dating from 1914 until 1926 (K 1-95). According to Mme Mila Goisman-Sholohova, this collection has been offered to the musical "Cabinet" in 1940 by Kisselhof's daughter.

1214-1247: Recordings dating from 1944 until 1947, made by Beregovski in Kolomiyya and Lvov.

¹⁰ See the chapter *Native Synagogues of the Near East* in Saminsky 1934: 143-167 and his work *On Jewish Music* in Russian, Saint Petersburg 1914, pp. 28-29.

¹¹ See for example no 956 from Kaliningrad 1912-1914 (this is the date which Beregovski normally indicated for those recordings of the Jewish Ethnographic expedition Baron Horace Guenzburg lead by Sh. An-Ski which were lacking the date of recording, see Beregovski 1934:28 [=Slobin 1982:40])

To conclude this section, something should be said about the genres of the recorded pieces. About two thirds of the pieces are various folk songs in Yiddish and folk instrumental music of the Klezmer genre. Another third consists of:

1. Prayer chants and hazzanut recorded on 258 cylinders, in particular
 - i) 614-684 recordings of liturgical music traditions from the Middle East and North-Africa
 - ii) 757-793 systematic recordings of the hazzan Yanl Vaysman (Weissmann) recorded in Kiev between July 4th and 27th, 1933, daily liturgy, Shabbat, Reading of the Torah and the Haftara, reading of the Esther scroll, Regalim, slihot, High Holidays.
2. table songs (zemirots) and other domestic songs (kiddush and havdala etc) as well as melodies sung without words (Hasidic niggunim) recorded on 184 cylinders
3. plays named Purim-shpils (short folk plays for the purim celebrations) registered on 75 cylinders.

Ahasverosh-shpil, 1004-1008, 1037-1038 (fragments), 1039 (fragment), 1050-1062, 1067-1070, 1118 (fragment), 1200-1213, 1229-1223;
 Aqedas yitskhok, 1063-1066, 1108, 1110-1115;
 Birkas yankev, 607-611;
 Golyas shpil, 600,6001
 Mekhiras yoysef/yoysef-shpil 602-606, 1039 (fragment), 1040-1045 (fragments), 1214-1227
 Purim-shpil, 847 (fragment), 963, 965.
 Also Purim Kiddush, 1228 and 1234.

There were also recordings of celebrated Yiddish authors: Sholom Aleikhem (303), Sholom Ash (458) and Issac Babel (886) – unfortunately, only [cylinder] no. 303 (Sholom Aleikhem) has been preserved. There are also recordings of Salomon Mikhoels, world famous actor and director of the State of Moscow Yiddish Theatre (27-29), of [actress] Hanna Rovina, of the well-known German Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen (584) and of the composer Mikhail F. Gnessin (1122-1123).

Furthermore there are recordings of babies crying, one four months and the other nine and a half months old (594 and 599), cantillation of the Mishna and the Gemara (1150 and 1257) and the hummed sermon (derasha) of a preacher named Israel Ba'al Darshan (394 and 556).

The archives

A manuscript note signed by Beregovski and dated February 21, 1949, describes the structure of the Archives comprising of four series designated with the letters A, B, K and C:

- I. Transcriptions (text and music) of the recordings [2.2.1 and 2.2.3]
- II. Idem (text and music), not based on recordings, i.e. oral traditions which have been transcribed directly from the performance of the informant or written sources. [2.2.2 and 2.2.3]
- K. Materials from Kisselhof's archives (2.2.4)
- III. Documents concerning material of spoken folklore (we have not localized the documents of this series designated with the letter C)

2.2.1. Series A

2.2.1.1. The inventory of the cylinder collection

The basic document concerning the Phonotheque is the inventory of the cylinder collection in two volumes: F.190, nos. 118 and 119 (2.2.1.3.) The first volume is like an inventory book with headings printed in Yiddish, as needed for the description of the cylinders. In the second volume, the headings are handwritten. The first volume consists of folios 1-199 and contains the descriptions of the cylinders 1-995, the second contains of folios 1-54 and contains the description of the cylinders 996-1274. The

1. cylinder number
2. place and date of the recording
3. name (sometimes also brief biographical details) of the singer/informant
4. contents (mostly the incipit or title of the piece)
5. place of origin of the recorded piece (e.g. details about the place where the informant has heard the piece before or about his informant)
6. name of the collector
7. technical details about the recording
8. notes

2.2.1.2. *Formulars* of the musical transcription of the series A

2.2.1.3. Records (papki) of series A

Series A contains four *papki* numbers 1-4 that contain the text of the pieces in the order of the recording on the cylinder. In general, there are several versions of each text: a manuscript version with two or three typewritten versions of which one looks ready for printing. Here the Yiddish text is given in Hebrew characters in contrast to the same text written below the music (in the fiches of the musical transcription) which is in Latin characters.

2.2.2. Series B

2.2.2.2. Other documents of series B

2.2.3 The archives of Joel Engel

2.2.4. Series K (Sussmann Kisselhof collection)

2.2.4.1 Material collected by Kisselhof

2.2.4.2. The formulas of the music transcriptions of series K

Conclusion

The rediscovery of the collections of the Jewish music Cabinet of M. I. Beregovski at the Academy of Science of the Ukraine in Kiev represents an inestimable treasure for the study of Jewish music. It offers a detailed documentation of the extraordinary and flowering history of Hebrew and Yiddish chant of the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe who were the carriers of that musical tradition at the wake of its physical extermination through the barbarism of the Nazis and at the period of persecution by the Stalinist terror.

Additional references quoted

Eda M. Beregovskaiâ. *Arfy Na Verbakh: Prizvanie I Sud'ba Moiseiâ` Beregovskogo*. Moskva: Evreïskiï universitet v Moskve, 1994.

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Mark Slobin (ed.) *Old Jewish Folk Music: The Collections and Writings of Moshe Beregovski ; Edited and Translated by Mark Slobin*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.