

## Ezra Aharon (“Azuri”): A Documentation (5)

### A Network of Relocated Oriental Jewish Musicians: Raphael Yair Elnadav, Itzhak Eliyah Navon and Ezra Aharon

A handwritten letter dated October 19, 1941, penned by the twenty-year-old Jerusalemite cantor and musician Raphael Yair Elnadav (Nadaf), of mixed Yemenite–Sephardic background, and addressed to the eighty-two-year-old Ottoman–Turkish–Sephardic poet, composer, and publicist Itzhak Eliyahu Navon (1859–1952) in Tel Aviv, offers valuable insight into the relationships among Jewish musicians from Islamic countries active in British Mandate Palestine. Beyond the intimate teacher–disciple relationship between Elnadav and Navon that emerges from this document, the letter also mentions a third figure: the Iraqi Jewish oud player, singer, and composer Ezra Aharon. Aharon’s presence introduces a triangular network connecting Oriental Jewish musicians of different generations.<sup>1</sup> Another individual referenced in the letter, [Karl Salomon \(aka Karel Salmon\)](#)—then director of music programming for the Hebrew section of the Palestinian Broadcasting Service (PBS)—appears as an external authority, situated beyond the more intimate circle of the three Oriental musicians.

Addressing Navon with an honorific title (*kevodo*), Elnadav apologizes for his inability to promote the performance of Navon’s songs on the radio, thereby revealing the restrictions posed on musical production under the constraints of wartime Palestine. The ongoing world war brought about a shortage of broadcasting opportunities and a military draft—one that Elnadav, rather surprisingly given his later involvement in the [Irgun](#), sought to avoid. From the letter, it also becomes clear that Ezra Aharon exercised firm control over the limited airtime allotted to Oriental Hebrew music on PBS. Out of deference to Aharon, Elnadav offers a long and tortuous explanation to justify Aharon’s refusal to perform Navon’s compositions on the radio. He speculates that Aharon’s decision might pressure the station’s administration (namely Salomon) to expand Aharon’s “private” (as Elnadav calls it) broadcast slot devoted to Oriental Hebrew music, thereby allowing him to increase his income.

Elnadav’s respect for, and connection to, Aharon also stemmed from his participation in Aharon’s choir, where Elnadav taught singers music notation. This may have been a source of livelihood that the young Elnadav was reluctant

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<sup>1</sup> We use the adjective “Oriental” following its common usage by the musicians themselves as well as its inclusion in announcements of their performances or in the names of their radio programs during the British Mandate period.

to endanger. The letter further reveals that Elnadav had mastered the ability to read and write Western musical notation—a rare skill among Oriental musicians of the time—through his studies at the [Jerusalem Conservatory of Music](#) (today the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance). This proficiency gave him an advantageous position within the modernizing musical scene of Oriental music in British Mandate Jerusalem and likely also earned him the Aharon's esteem, As for Aharon writing down music was second nature.

The letter concludes with a veiled expression of anxiety about the global war that, by late 1941, was casting its shadow over Palestine. It also conveys Elnadav's wishes for the upcoming Jewish New Year, framed in the messianic language characteristic of devout Jews. Elnadav was not only a musician trained in Western music and a rising star of the Sephardic cantorate, but also a student at Jerusalem's prestigious Porat Yosef and Sha'arei Tziyon rabbinical academies. His multifaceted personality—poised between East and West, between the religious and the secular—resonates with those of his elder mentors and associates, Itzhak Eliyahu Navon and Ezra Aharon. Elnadav would go on to refine his musical craft under the guidance of [Moshe Cordova](#), a master of Ottoman music who had emigrated to Tel Aviv in the mid-1930s—another leading figure in the scene of Jewish musicians from Muslim countries active in British Mandate Palestine.

יבואים כ"ז אלול תש"ו  
(19.9.41)

ע"ב

מ"י היקר חייב יצחק ואלה רבין ה"ו ונ"ב בק"ה הנכבדה ת"א שלום וברכה.  
אחריכ"ס הנני מדויעצך כי אנכי נאצו בק-הבריאלת תל"ת ונק חסר  
4 כולל ענין הקרי"מ. אי אודע לו אב על פנימא השלום אנן לי  
ואינטימא שקדושת"י ה"לדו ססר רבין, על לבין כי היא יצרה שקדושת אלו  
ודועה נוטם טוב.

בהנלא לטמו סביר נהנו באמרי הקולמ, קבלת צה מקיבו וכתב אמר שלום  
על יתצאלת שקדושת צמ או צמא ולבין, של הוא כתב כי הילת וצמ  
השקור הצקרי ככ"יו מוא מקבל אמר צמא ה"פאת השקדושת חז"לית וכו'  
קבל או ילדוון אצמא אבין אמר היצרות של כ"ה נכ"צ באמת אבונקדושת  
הקדושת כמא צמא אבין סדק, (הנ חושב כי) <sup>במא צמא</sup> אבונקדושת <sup>הקדושת</sup> אמר, מוא  
צמא אמר בהשקת ה"לדו, אמר אי אמר אמר אבונקדושת <sup>הקדושת</sup> אמר כ"צד השקדושת  
ה"לדו אמר אבונקדושת אמר כמא כי בללו הכי אי לבין מדויעצך אמר כי אמר  
אשרי או אשרי צמא, אמר אמר אסדק, יצמק ה"פאת אבונקדושת לשקדושת  
ה"לדו כמא אמר אבונקדושת ה"פאת כמא אמר אבונקדושת כמא  
כמא על ה"פאת הקדושת, אמר צמא הוא צמק אבונקדושת צמא אמר אבונקדושת  
צמא) באמרי כמא אמר אבונקדושת על כל האמור ומוא אבונקדושת אמר אבונקדושת  
דקרי צמא אמר אמר אמר אבונקדושת על צמא אבין, כמא אמר אמר  
יצמא ע"כ כמא שקדושת כי ה"ו האבונקדושת הוא אבין אמר צמק  
אבונקדושת קצת בהשקת, בינתיים כמא אמר השקדושת כמא אבונקדושת קמ"מ  
ע"כ על צמא ה"לדו, הנני אמר אמר אבונקדושת כי אמר אמר אבונקדושת  
אמר אבונקדושת על צמא אבין (כי ס"ד אמר באמרי) אמר אמר כי בקבלת הכא

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כשחפיה בתל-אביב אולי כבר דלתה את הניימאט ~~היא~~ קטילין זה פתקאלי.  
 קיטת התקדמותו בקונסרבטוריון. הנל דלוציז כי דתי בפני המנהל והמורים  
 הוא משכיר יצאון קהחלט חוש השמיעה מצדי מנתנה יפה וזני מן את  
 האוסיקה שאתי זוסק בה דמה, וחז עמי זה הנל מצטער דלוציזו  
 כי דרגלי חובת הקוס שפכביצה הסוכנות היהודית הו"י נבלתי גם  
 יוצרי ויזי טאג שקידיים שדיוקרוי אתי אני והיי סכנלי דהתקיים  
 וכתלמה מבלתי קבלתי מכתבי (סוכנין מדיוקרוי). אין אני פואק אולי  
 דל צאת כי צבת רבשי חצי נחמה, וצוד כי אה ויזיל ואה יציל  
 חם אצאק, וזני מאמין וקטח שפי ישלח את דעניו מצד אחר.  
 עינאלי הסנה החצלה הנל שאלה בבה ואת אוכל בבלתי חחמת  
 עינאלי ולקבלת היקה והאגובה אוש דמה הנל לחצלי כשהמאכילתי מצדקת  
 יהי יצאון שמה שנה זו הכולה דעלי שנה אקוד כל הקאים דעלי דעוד,  
 שנה שלמה ושמה שנה דאלה וישודו ותכבו ותחאו קיסני החיים  
 ובסני הכבנון אתי.

ובנה תלמידי סגור

כ(ח) - יצא

Source: "Selected Letters and Manuscripts Belonging to Mr. Yitzhak Navon of Constantinople" Abraham Elmalih Collection, National Library of Israel, HM2-927, letter 94. Provided by Yoram Arnon.

Jerusalem 27 Elul 5701 (19.9.41)

To my dear teacher, the rabbi Isaac Eliyah Navon, may God protect and shield him and [to his] honorable wife t"m (?), peace and blessing,

On this pleasant opportunity I am able to inform you that I am in good health thanks to the blessed God except that I miss seeing your face dearly. I thank his honor greatly for his regards to me and my family, delivered to me by the girl Sara Navon, who I shall point out is a very wise girl and makes a very good impression.

Following up on what I have already written in my previous letter, I have recently received a letter from Mr. Salomon with the results of our meeting with Mr. Ezra Aharon, in which he [Salomon] writes that considering that the time allotted to the Hebrew broadcast on the radio is now very limited because of the transmissions to the soldiers, etc., Mr. Salomon asked Mr. Ezra Aharon whether we should perform the works by his honor in one of his [Aharon's] private performances, however Ezra Aharon refused (I think that he did so for simple motives, [as] he reasoned as follows: if I will give one of my private [i.e. exclusive or fixed] appearances [on the radio] on behalf of the performance of those songs [by Navon], I will not profit anything from it because anyway I must appear, so what does it matter if [I sing] my songs or the songs of others. However, if I refuse [to sing the songs of others], the director will be forced to dedicate to those songs time beyond the hours of my exclusive appearances so that I can earn additional money beyond my fixed appearances. In my opinion he [Aharon] is right, in that one should care for one's own interests). In this letter, the director [Salomon] apologizes for the belatedness [of his reply] and he promises to find on my behalf a special time that is not [taken] from the [broadcast] hours of Ezra Aharon. Clearly, this will demand a few more weeks because the line of candidates [slotted to appear on the radio] is long and I must arm myself with patience. Meanwhile, I have already notated several of the songs even without the assistance of the violin. I'm very pleased to inform his honor that I am a tutor [lit. "guide"] of [reading music] notation [for singers] in Ezra Aharon's choir (consisting of about 40 people). I hope that in my next visit, when I will be in Tel Aviv, I will already be able to notate the melodies on the spot. Regarding my progress at the Conservatory, I am able to relay that according to the reports of the

director and the teachers it is definitely satisfactory. My [musical] hearing is developing nicely and I understand the music that I am engaged with at this moment. At the same time, I regret to inform you that following the compulsory draft dictated by the Jewish Agency of Eretz Israel [Land of Israel], I was included in it along with some clerks who work with me. We refused to be drafted and as a result we received letters of dismissal from our work. I am not much concerned by this because the misfortune of many is the consolation of the individual, besides what will be worth for or spare me if I will worry. I believe and am sure that God will send out His deliverance some other way.

On the outset of the New Year, I am hereby sending my warmest wishes to you sir and to your dear and kind wife who has done everything on my behalf when I was hosted at your house. May it be His will that this anticipated coming year will be a year of defeat for those who rise to harm us. A year of peace and serenity, a year of deliverance and redemption, and you shall be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life and in the Book of Remembrance, amen.

I am your trustworthy student,

Raphael Nadaf