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Four Yiddish Songs – One Melody

Oren Cohen Roman

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Abstract

This article discusses four early modern Yiddish booklets containing songs that were to be sung to the same melody: one concerns the expulsion of the Jews from Vienna in 1670 (n.p., n.d.); the second describes two Jews who were executed for theft in Prostějov in 1684 and refused the offer to convert in return for a pardon (Wilmhersdorf 1684); the third depicts the effects of a plague epidemic on the Jewish community of Prague in 1713 (1st edition n.p., n.d., 2nd edition Amsterdam 1714); and the fourth (two editions, both n.p., n.d.) is a rhymed prayer, asking God to eliminate all misfortunes and evil decrees, including an ongoing plague epidemic, apparently composed in Prague in 1680. According to all four, the melody to be used when singing them was *niggun akeda*, a melody strongly associated with the Binding of Isaac (Gen. 22). It was originally used in the synagogue to accompany liturgical poems relating the biblical narrative and other cases of Jewish martyrdom. In addition to contextualizing the four texts within Yiddish literature, this article explores the relationship between text and melody in general, and the particular significance of *niggun akeda*.

Keywords

Yiddish literature; chapbooks; expulsion; martyrdom; plague; the Binding of Isaac; the Sacrifice of Isaac.

Czech abstract

Čtyři jidiš písně – jedna melodie

Článek pojednává o čtyřech raně novověkých jidiš drobných tiscích obsahujících písně, které se měly zpívat na stejnou melodii: jedna se týká vyhnání Židů z Vídně v roce 1670 (bez místa a roku vydání); druhá popisuje dva Židy, kteří byli v roce 1684 popraveni za krádež v Prostějově a odmítli nabídku konvertovat výměnou za milost (Wilmhersdorf 1684); třetí líčí dopady morové epidemie na pražskou židovskou obec v roce 1713 (1. vydání bez uvedení místa a roku, 2. vydání Amsterdam 1714); čtvrtá (dvě vydání, obě bez místa a roku) je veršovaná modlitba, žádající Boha o odstranění všech neštěstí a zlých nařízení, včetně probíhající morové epidemie, složená zřejmě v Praze roku

1680. Podle všech čtyř tisků se při jejich zpěvu měla používat melodie *niggun akeda*, melodie silně spojená s Izákovým spoutáním (Gn 22). Původně se používala v synagoze jako doprovod k liturgickým básním vztahujícím se k biblickému příběhu a dalším případům židovského mučednictví. Kromě kontextualizace čtyř textů v rámci jidiš literatury tento článek zkoumá vztah mezi textem a melodií obecně a zvláštní význam *niggun akeda*.

Klíčová slova

Jidiš literatura; kramářské tisky; vyhoštění; mučednictví; mor; spoutání Izáka; obětování Izáka.

Yiddish Literature

It is assumed that Jews began speaking their own language known today as Yiddish in the tenth century, when they first settled in the German-speaking area (known in Hebrew as *Ashkenaz*). This language, written in Hebrew characters from the outset (TIMM 2001: 50–51),[1] combined medieval German urban dialects with Hebrew and Aramaic influences, and, to a lesser degree, the Romance vernaculars previously spoken by Jews (TIMM 2005: 33–40). From the thirteenth century onward, Jews began to move eastward across Europe. In an unprecedented manner, those Jews who settled in Eastern Europe (e.g., in contemporary Poland, Ukraine, and the Czech Republic) did not adopt the local Slavic vernaculars but continued to speak Yiddish. However, their speech was influenced lexically and otherwise by co-territorial Slavic languages, leading to a distinction between the dialect groups of Western and Eastern Yiddish (SHMERUK 1978: 72–89). Thus, in the Early Modern Period, the time frame under discussion in this article, all Ashkenazi Jews, from Amsterdam in the west to Vilnius in the east, spoke Yiddish.[2]

Within traditional Ashkenazi Jewish society, a model of *diglossia* prevailed, granting the upper hand to the ancient "Holy Tongue" of Hebrew[3] over Yiddish. Hebrew was reserved for most literary and liturgical functions, including

* I would like to thank Daniel Soukup for his help in preparing this study.

1) Among the earliest texts in Yiddish are the rhyme in the 1292 Machzor from Worms (SHMERUK 1978: 9–12) and the 1382 codex found in the Cairo Genizah (FUKS 1957).

2) Toward the end of the eighteenth century, Western Yiddish collapsed, when the Jews living in the German-speaking lands shifted to the newly established Standard German – *Hochdeutsch*. In Eastern Europe, however, Yiddish continued to be the spoken vernacular of millions of Jews up until the Holocaust. See SHMERUK 1978: 147–175; KATZ 1973: 81.

3) Alongside Hebrew, Aramaic is also considered a sacred language in traditional Jewish society. It appears in various liturgical and religious texts, such as the *kaddish* prayer, the biblical book of Daniel, and the Zohar. Hebrew and Aramaic often appear combined, for instance in Talmudic discourse, and are commonly known in Ashkenazic culture as *leshon ha-kodesh* ("the holy tongue"). In this article references to Hebrew as a sacred language also include Aramaic.

prayer, the ritual reading of the Torah, etc. (WEINREICH (vol. 1) 2008: 247–314; GLINERT (vol. 1) 2008: 977). However, most Jews did not have a full command of Hebrew, and, as such, Hebrew texts produced in Europe were necessarily the product of an intellectual rabbinic elite, which was almost exclusively male.

At the same time, Yiddish was the primary language of all Jews. Despite its vernacular status, it too produced a significant literature, providing lay men and women with a means of expression. Pre-modern Yiddish literature (i.e., pre-dating 1800, commonly referred to as Older Yiddish; see SHMERUK 1981: 150–151; WEINREICH (vol. 2) 2008: 733) was replete with a variety of genres, including religious and moralistic works, ego-documents, epics, dramas, historical writing, and more (BAUMGARTEN 2005). Indeed, it was considered a popular literature, often transmitted orally rather than in writing, but it is hard to overestimate the value that Yiddish literature holds for the study of Jewish culture and history.

Unsurprisingly, Yiddish literature was more strongly influenced by co-territorial German culture and literature than its Hebrew counterpart. This is due to the linguistic similarities between the former two languages as well as the similar functions they served, as vernacular and often oral literatures. For example, the Old Yiddish literary canon includes texts written to the melodies of German songs (e.g., *Herzog Ernst*, *Der Graf von Rom*) as well as transcriptions of German works into Hebrew characters (e.g., *Her Ditraykh* [*=Dietrich von Bern*], *(Jüngeres) Hildebrandslied*) (BAUMGARTEN 2005: 69; FRAKES 2014: xxix–xxxi; SHMERUK 1978: 29–35, 60–61). In some cases, Jews even used German literary forms and themes to retell traditional Jewish narratives, such as biblical scenes (TURNIANSKY 1991; FRAKES 2014). Thus, while the Latin script acted as a cultural barrier for most Jews, the acoustic transmission of German literature (be it in public performance or through the mediation of a German reader) facilitated its dissemination among Jews.

The advent of print in Europe affected Jews and, beginning in the middle of the sixteenth century, gave rise to an extensive and thriving Yiddish literature (BAUMGARTEN 2010; BERGER 2019). The possibility of producing and selling paper books, booklets or broadsheets for a relatively low price was received enthusiastically by Jewish readers across Europe. To appeal to a broad, pan-Ashkenazic readership, Western Yiddish (bare of Slavic borrowings) was used across Europe (KATZ 2008: 979–987; SHMERUK 1978: 176–180). Unfortunately, very few printed Yiddish materials from pre-modern times have survived, and those that have reached us are often the sole remaining copy. This scarcity is attributed

to the fact that Hebrew texts, traditionally considered holy, were always given preference over Yiddish ones in terms of preservation and protection. A unique collection preserving the lion's share of Older Yiddish literature is the private book collection of Prague's Chief Rabbi David Oppenheim (1664–1736), today stored in the Bodleian Libraries in Oxford (TEPLITSKY 2019). All four texts discussed in this article are part of that collection.

Melodies Accompanying Yiddish Texts

Many printed Yiddish texts contain indications that they were meant for musical or prosodic performance; for example, they indicate the melody to which they were to be sung, or they employ a metric or even stanzaic structure, set rhymes, a recurring refrain, etc. However, since Ashkenazi Jews did not use western musical notation in the Early Modern Period, instructions regarding the melody to be used were necessarily indicated via a verbal contrafactum reference to a more well-known song, using the words *be-niggun* ("in the melody of…") or *in ton* ("in the tune of…") (MATUT (vol. 1) 2011: 47, 260; ROMAN 2015: 145). The melodies were chosen from three different pools: German ones (e.g., *die Schlacht von Pavia*. See TURNIANSKY 2000; ULMER 2001), Jewish liturgical ones (e.g., the funerary *El male raḥamim*. See SHMERUK 1978: 70), or melodies that originated in Yiddish literature (e.g., *Shmuel-bukh*, a popular epic retelling of the book of Samuel. See ROMAN 2015).

Indeed, the melody chosen to accompany a song is a powerful tool, and its importance goes far beyond merely determining metrical form or line length. From a practical point of view, a melody can help singers memorize texts and even facilitate aural transmission.[4] From an aesthetic perspective, at times the accompanying melody merely embellishes the respective text—an important factor in its own right for a product sold in the free market. In other cases, however, it also infuses the text with meaning, evoking an association with the original song. Sometimes the melody and its cultural significance is applied straightforwardly, at other times it is used for parody. Moreover, certain melodies were so popular and widely used that they possessed a strong character

4) Likewise, the simple alphabetic acrostic that appears in many works may have helped to memorize them. By contrast, other texts are very lengthy and include complicated acrostics, which would appear to indicate that they are of a literary, written nature. See for instance "The Prague song", the third song discussed below.

of their own. The following discussion will focus on one such popular melody, known as *niggun akeda*, which was used for a number of Yiddish texts.

The Melody Known as *Niggun Akeda*

The biblical story of the Binding of Isaac (Gen. 22, commonly known in Hebrew as *akedat Yiẓḥak*, or just *akeda*; in Christian discourse it is often referred to as the Sacrifice of Isaac) has held a central place in Jewish religion and culture since Antiquity (COHEN ROMAN 2021). It was traditionally understood as an example of outstanding religious piety, demonstrated by Abraham and Isaac's willingness to obey God's commands without question. Moreover, the entire narrative was perceived as a source of protection for Jews across every generation, stemming from God's promise to Abraham after withstanding this trial (Gen. 22:16–18). This concept is known in Judaism as *zekhut avot* ("the merit of the ancestors"; See SHMIDMAN 2007). Within the Ashkenazic diasporic center, the Binding of Isaac came to be strongly associated with the massacres of the First Crusade (1096). Accordingly, the Jewish martyrs who chose death over forced conversion were venerated as the spiritual successors of Abraham and Isaac, and their sacrifice was regarded as exemplary. Such acts of martyrdom are called *kiddush Hashem* ("the sanctification of God's Name"). Some medieval traditions even connected stories of parents who killed their own children to avoid their forced conversion to Christianity with Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his son for the sake of God (GROSSMAN 1999; SOLOVEITCHIK 1987; SPIEGEL 1967).

Alongside a vast literary corpus that mentions and retells this complex religious theme in both Hebrew and in Yiddish (YASSIF 1978; HEIDE 2017), a musical expression firmly associated with this story also developed. This melody, *niggun akeda* ("*akeda* melody"), exhibits medieval traits, and it was originally used for Hebrew liturgical poems retelling the biblical narrative (ROMAN - SCHLEIFER 2020). These poems, *akeda piyyutim*, are recited during the penitential prayers (*seliḥot*) said before and during the High Holy Day season. They laud Abraham and Isaac, and at times also Sarah, for their pious obedience, and ask God to keep His promise of protection and apply it to contemporaneous Jews – their descendants. Around 30 such poems exist, most of them composed in Germany between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. In terms of form, these poems were mostly composed in four-lined stanzas with a significant

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variation in the number of syllables in each line, usually with the rhyming pattern aaaa, bbbb, etc. (WEINBERGER 1998: 223–224; ROMAN 2016: 182–183).

Thanks to its importance in Jewish liturgy, a recent study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century musical notations succeeded in reconstructing this centuries-old melody (ROMAN – SCHLEIFER 2020: 13–35). Its pentatonic character attests to its medieval origin, and, similarly to the liturgical poems, the melody comprises four musical phrases to be repeated for each four-lined stanza

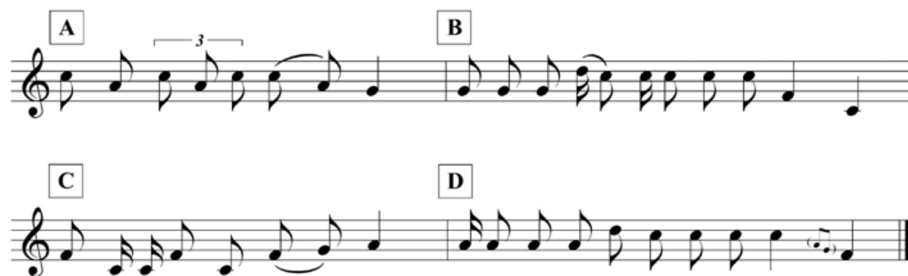

Figure 1. Akeda Melody (ROMAN – SCHLEIFER 2020, p. 34, example 16).

Texts Written to *Niggun Akeda*

Apart from *akeda piyyutim*, further texts in both Hebrew and in Yiddish indicate that they should be sung according to *niggun akeda*. While many of these texts directly touch upon the biblical story, others do not mention it at all, instead referring to the associated notion of Jewish martyrdom or appealing to God's mercy based on the "merit of the ancestors". This suggests that over time *niggun akeda* became so strongly associated with this theme that it *ipso facto* invoked it, including its various cultural interpretations. Other Hebrew texts sung to this melody include liturgical poems from categories other than *akeda piyyutim* (ROMAN – SCHLEIFER 2020: 5–6), whereas in Yiddish the first text that should be mentioned is *yudisher shtam* ("The Jewish Tribe"), an epic poem retelling the Binding of Isaac (DREEßEN 1971; FRAKES 2014: 149–155). Like the *akeda piyyutim*, it too is written in four-lined stanzas with the rhyming pattern aaaa, bbbb, etc. Considered the most popular poem in Older Yiddish literature, *yudisher shtam* has survived in four manuscripts and four print editions, among them two print editions from seventeenth-century Prague. *Yudisher shtam* has been the subject of extensive publications, and its connection to the theme of

the Binding of Isaac needs no further explanation (ROMAN 2016). By contrast, the four texts that constitute the focus of this article have received less scholarly attention, and it is worth exploring why they were sung to *niggun akeda*.

Three of the four texts presented below are "historical songs", a genre of informative works in Older Yiddish literature. Printed as octavo-sized pamphlets close to the occurrence of the events they report, these songs were disseminated throughout the Yiddish speaking world (WEINREICH 1927; TURNIANSKY 1989). These songs replaced previous means of imparting news, for instance, by word of mouth. As such, they represent the appearance of a new mode of disseminating information that emerged following the advent of print in Europe, offering a more stable and reliable way to transmit news. Indeed, the historical songs in Yiddish paved the way for modern newspapers, similar to parallel genres in other European literatures such as the German *Flugschriften* and *Neue Zeitungen* (STÖBER 2005: 32–51) or the Czech *kramářské písně* (FUMERTON – KOSEK – HANZELKOVÁ 2022). Nevertheless, they also exhibit unique Jewish traits, such as the choice of themes and the perspective of narration, as well as quotes and formalistic borrowings from Hebrew literature, in particular the genres of dirges (*kinot*) and penitential prayers (*seliḥot*) (SHMERUK 1978: 69; YERUSHALMI 1982: 45, 118, n. 30). The extant corpus of Yiddish historical songs includes some fifty works from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it is believed that many more such songs have not reached us.

The first song, *Eyn sheyn lid fun Vin* ("A beautiful song about Vienna", from here on: **the Vienna song**),[5] describes the expulsion of the Viennese Jewish community in 1670 (KAUFMANN 1889). It was printed in an eight-page booklet and contains 41 stanzas with an impressive monorhyme: aaaa, bbbb, etc. While it lacks a title page, important bibliographic information can be gleaned from the acrostic adorning its text: a consecutive array of all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, followed by the year of composition (שנת תל לפק = 1670) and the author's name (יעקב קאפיל שץ = Jacob Kopel Shatz). Unfortunately, we possess no further information about the author. The stanzas of this song also contain a recurring refrain – one short line, which apparently was sung to an additional musical motif. This refrain is in Hebrew: *ve'eykh 'enaḥem* ("How can I be consoled!?"), alluding to a lamentation for the Ninth of Av, the annual commemoration of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (KLEIN 1979: 247–251). Conceivably, this intertextuality stems from thematic similarity –

5) Signature: Opp. 8° 1103 (38) at the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.

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the Jews were once again expelled from a place they considered their home. Moreover, originally set for April 14, the expulsion date was later postponed to July 26 – the day on which the Ninth of Av fell in that year.

Thematically, the song laments the expulsion and destruction of the Viennese Jewish community. By praising the piety of its members, including how they prayed devotedly, gave charity, etc., the author stresses the depth of the calamity and perhaps also highlights its injustice.

Apart from the melodic instruction there is no direct mention of the *akeda* in this song, although some allusions to it can be discerned. One example is the phrase, "We have been slaughtered, [albeit] without a knife" (17c). Likewise, line 21c mentions the religious concept of "the merit of the ancestors", which stands at the foundation of the *akeda* story; and stanza 31 laments how children were forced to leave their parents and suffer long exposure to the sun.

A highly interesting fact about this song concerns another child, namely that of the Holy Roman Emperor, Leopold I (1640–1705). Although this emperor signed the edict to expel the Jews, the song thanks him for protecting his Jewish residents prior to this and wishes him well. The song then wishes the emperor's wife a long life and a beautiful son, "a prince with beautiful curly hair" (stanzas 12–13). Empress Margarita Teresa of Austria (1651–1673), Leopold's first wife, was intensely religious and anti-Semitic. It is believed that she inspired her husband to expel the Jews from Vienna, claiming that they were to blame for her miscarriages and children's deaths.[6] It appears that the song's author was aware of these facts.

The second song boasts a long title: *Eyn sheyn lid oyf shney kedoshim das naylekh bekehilas koydesh Prostits zayn nidn gevorn al kiddush hashem* ("A beautiful song about two *kedoshim* [martyrs] who were recently executed over *Kiddush Hashem* [Jewish martyrdom] in the holy community of Prostits [Prostějov]").[7] This song (from here on: **the Prostějov song**) indicates two possible melodies to which it could be sung: *akeda* or *Brauneslied*, both of which can he characterized as tragic. The second melody is the medieval Netherlandish/Low German ballad *Der Herr von Braunschweig* ("The Lord of Braunschweig").[8] This identification is affirmed

6) *Deutsche Biographie,* [online], https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/gnd118730991.html#ndbcontent [Accessed 20 February 2023].

7) Signature: Opp. 885 (36) at the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford. Jacob Freimann made a brief reference to this song and brought a somewhat erroneous reproduction of it (FREIMANN 1923: 3 and 46–53) . For a thorough study of this song, including an edition of its text and an English translation, see Oren Cohen Roman and Daniel Soukup, "From Thieves to Martyrs: The Story of Two Jews from Early Modern Moravia," forthcoming in *Jewish History*.

8) This identification was first suggested by Barbara Boock, former head of the *Deutsches Volkslied Archiv* in Freiburg.

by the similar metrical structure of the two texts (stanzas of four lines), and especially by the *Brauneslied*'s tragic plot—it relates the story of a cruel landowner who prosecuted a young boy for shooting a rabbit on his property, insisting that the child be executed by decapitation despite the parents' efforts to save him.

The Prostějov song is substantially longer than the Vienna song: it numbers 78 four-lined stanzas with a rhyming pattern aabb, ccdd, etc., and contains no acrostic. Its author was one Hayyim ben Shalom of Poland; again, nothing is known about him besides his name and his Polish origin. No place or date are mentioned in the song, but a recent study established that it was printed in Wilhermsdorf in 1684.[9] The song relates the story of two Jews from Prostějov who committed theft and were subsequently caught and sentenced to death. The song focuses on the piety of these two Jews, the middle-aged Leyb Wessel and the young, unmarried Peretz son of Abraham, who throughout the trial and while awaiting execution withstood efforts to tempt and/or coerce them to convert to Christianity. It also describes the violent interrogation and public humiliation of the defendants (e.g., the use of torture, stanza 17; Leyb Wessel was denied the right to wear a hat or shoes, stanza 13) and portrays anti-Jewish tendencies within Christian society, for example the Jews of Prostějov feared that they might be attacked on the day of the execution (stanza 54).

This song contains direct references to the *akeda* – at its close the author asks God to remember its merit along with that of the two martyred protagonists (stanza 76). Additional references include focusing on the protagonists' father-son relationships: while Leyb Wessel worries about his soon to be orphaned son, Zanvel (stanza 24), Peretz is concerned about the fate of his elderly parents (stanzas 36–38). These descriptions echo the behavior of Isaac and Abraham in midrashic (exegetical) retellings of Genesis 19. Likewise, the author stresses throughout that the executed men remained loyal adherents of the Jewish faith, portraying their deaths as an act of Jewish martyrdom, following the example set by Abraham and Isaac.

The third song, *Eyn nay klog lid* ("A new elegy"; from here on: **the Prague song**), relates the suffering of the Jewish community of Prague during the bubonic plague epidemic of 1713 (TURNIANSKY 1988; TEPLITSKY 2020). It is one of the few known historical songs that were printed more than once. The first edition survived in a lithographic copy without any indication of the year

See: BRENDICH (vol. 3) 2011: 1135–1136; ERK – BÖHME (vol. 1) 1893: 224–227; RÖHRICH – BREDNICH (vol. 1) 1965: 212–217.

9) Olga Sixtová of Prague was able to identify the place of printing. See COHEN ROMAN – SOUKUP, forthcoming.

or place of printing, although we may presume it was printed shortly before the second edition. The second edition was printed in Amsterdam, apparently in 1714 (NEUBERG 2021: 33, 87–89).[10] Both include the instruction *Beniggun prostitser kedoshim lid* ("In the tune of 'the martyrs of Prostits' song"). Since we do not know of any other case of martyrs from Prostějov, this appears to refer to the above-mentioned Prostějov song (STEINSCHNEIDER 1852–1860: 1800, no. 6458, 3; TURNIANSKY 1988: 191), which was sung to the *akeda* or *Brauneslied* melody. Due to this song's content (see below), it is safe to assume that the reference here is to *niggun akeda*.

The Prague song is even longer than the previous song, comprising 109 four-lined stanzas with the rhyming pattern aabb, ccdd, etc. Printed in an eight-leaved booklet, it includes an elaborate acrostic: the Hebrew alphabet from Aleph to Tav and then from Tav to Aleph, followed by the author's full name, Moshe son of Hayim Eisenstadt (Katzenelbogen),[11] as well as a further Aleph to Tav sequence. Eisenstadt (d. 1742. See HOCK-KAUFMANN 1892: 14) was a member of the Prague community, and additional works by him have reached us (WACHSTEIN 1929). In the Prague song, he reports the general anxiety that prevailed when the epidemic began, how rich people fled the city, leaving the poorer residents behind (stanzas 7–9). By contrast, he praises the community leader, Primas Samuel Tausk (FREIMANN 1899; LIEBEN 1938), for the kindness and humanity he displayed toward his suffering community members (stanzas 67–69). The Prague song reports the many deaths, over 3,000, caused by the epidemic within the Jewish community (stanza 71), and lists the names and dates of members of the rabbinic elite who perished (stanzas 67–69). It mentions the shortage of shrouds and coffins that resulted from the high death toll (stanzas 48–50) and reports very graphically the physical deterioration of the bodies that were not buried straight away (stanzas 54–56). The Prague song does not mention any Christian casualties at all, apparently because its author saw it as an internal Jewish lamentation. In this regard, Turniansky (TURNIANSKY 1988:1 89–190, 193) highlights that the plague may have affected Jews more severely than Christians, and that from August 14 the Jewish quarter's gates were closed.

10) Both copies are kept in the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford. The former's signature is Opp. 8° 632, the latter's Opp. Add. 4° IV 911. A fragment of the first edition was found in the Geniza at Veitshöchheim, Germany (TURNIANSKY 1988: 198 n. 11).

11) The name in the acrostic includes also Hebrew honorary titles משה בן האלוף מהרר חיים אייזנשטאט מבית קצנעלבוגן חזק

From a religious perspective, the Prague song calls for repentance, interpreting the epidemic as a divine punishment (stanza 97). It also mentions that prior to the epidemic one could hear Torah study emanating from many houses in Prague and that the Jewish community had been very righteous (stanza 41); likewise, during the epidemic the Jews remained pious, praying with devotion at the synagogues (stanza 75).

There is no direct mention of the *akeda* in this song. Indirect references may include the tragic description of children who perished in the epidemic (e.g., stanzas 23, 77).

Following the Prague song, the booklet in which it was printed includes two additional texts: medical and practical advice on how to protect oneself against the plague, as well as a list enumerating the death toll during the five months that the epidemic raged in Prague's Jewish quarter.[12]

A fourth song that was to be sung to *niggun akeda* is relevant here, even though it is not entirely a historical song. This is *Eyn nay lid gemakht beloshn tkhine* ("A new song made in the style of a supplication"; from here on: **the supplication song**).[13] The song comprises 50 quatrains with a rhyming pattern aabb, ccdd, etc. Each line begins with the words *foter kenig* ("Father, King!"), referencing the Hebrew litany of the High Holy Day liturgy, *Avinu malkenu* ("Our Father, Our King"), which asks God to eliminate all misfortunes and evil decrees (KLEIN 1979: 217). There are two known editions of this song, both lacking any indication of the year or place of printing.[14] The editions are similar; indeed, the main difference between them is the musical instruction. Moritz Steinschneider (STEINSCHNEIDER 1852–1860: 574, no. 3707) assumed that one edition was printed in Prague in the seventeenth century, and this one includes the contrafactum reference *beniggun akeda*. By contrast, the other edition states that it should be sung *beniggun adir ayom venora*, a song with three-lined stanzas usually sung on Saturday nights. In this case, perhaps the melody's third phrase was sung twice in order to apply the text's four-lined stanza, or perhaps this reference was simply a mistake.[15]

12) From July 22 until December 12, 1713.
13) See Neuberg's review and annotated edition (in Latin transcription) of this song (2021, 33–51). Further editions: KORMAN 1928: 9–17; FRAKES 2004: 834–842. English translation: KAY 2004: 236–243. See also TURNIANSKY 1988.
14) Signatures: Opp. 8° 460 (15) and Opp. 8° 1103 (34) at the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford.
15) Neuberg (NEUBERG 2021: 37, n. 61) points out that Berl Katz's song about the plague epidemic in Prague in 1714 is also set to that melody.

The author of the supplication song was a woman, Taube Pan, wife of Jacob Pan and daughter of Leyb Pitsker of Prague. Her tombstone relates that she died in 1707 (HOCK-KAUFMANN 1892: 253), thus providing information that is important in dating the song. The song's content includes requests that God provide protection from misfortunes such as sickness and untimely death, as well as from an ongoing plague epidemic (4c, 6a, 22b). The author was not alive during the 1713 epidemic, and thus it appears that she was referring here to the outbreak of bubonic plague in Prague in 1680 (TEPLITSKY 2020: 70, 73). An additional historical anchor supporting this assumption is the reference to the fact that the community's leader had passed away shortly before the calamity (stanza 35). This apparently refers to Rabbi Aaron Simon Spira-Wedeles, who died in 1679 (JAKOBOVITS 1932). Moreover, the author mentions the emperor, his wife, and their son (stanza 25). Considering the biographical data of the Imperial Roman family that ruled Prague, this seems to indicate Emperor Leopold I (1640–1705), with his third wife Eleonore Magdalene of Neuburg (1655–1720) and their son Joseph I (1678–1711) (KAY 2004: 236).

Conclusion

The four songs presented in this article, three of them historical and one supplicatory, all indicate that they are to be sung to *niggun akeda*. However, hardly any of them deals directly with the story of Isaac's Binding. How is that possible, and why was this melody chosen?

First, three of the songs mention tragic, unnatural deaths caused by an epidemic or execution and the suffering of children. The remaining song (the Vienna song) describes the expulsion of an entire Jewish community. In this sense they all call for a sad melody, which *niggun akeda* provides.

Moreover, all four songs express a strong religious sentiment that is also closely associated with the *akeda* narrative. The three historical songs praise the piety of their protagonists, insinuating that they did not deserve their deaths and/or suffering and thus presenting them as innocent victims like Isaac.

As stated above, the biblical narrative of the Binding of Isaac ends with God's promise to protect Abraham's children in the future as a reward for the obedience and faith he demonstrated. The four songs subsequently recall this promise, which in these cases appears to have lapsed, perhaps indirectly reminding God of its existence. Thus, in a sense, their portrayal of Jewish suffering trans-

forms it into a virtue that may assist other Jews, according to the concept of "the merit of the ancestors".

Finally, the setting of the *akeda piyyutim* in the High Holy Days liturgy, in which the *akeda* narrative plays a central role, adds yet another layer of meaning to the melody of the four songs. According to Jewish belief, during the High Holy Days the fate of every human being is decided in the heavenly court. This elicits sincere prayers or supplications to God, asking for His mercy. Thus, the choice of melody not only served decorative purposes but was also a tool of interpretation.

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[no date] *Eyn sheyn lid fun Vin.* ("A beautiful song about Vienna"). N. p.: N. p., ca. 1670. Sign. Opp. 8° 1103 (38), Bodleian Libraries, Oxford

Second song
[no date] *Eyn sheyn lid oyf shney kedoshim das naylekh bekehiles koydesh Prostits zayn nidn gevorn al kiddush hashem* ("A beautiful song about two *kedoshim* [martyrs] who were recently executed over *Kiddush Hashem* [Jewish martyrdom] in the holy community of Prostits [Prostějov]"). Wilhermsdorf: Isaac Jüdels Katz?, ca. 1684. Sign. Opp. 885 (36), Bodleian Libraries, Oxford

Third song
[no date] *Eyn nay klog lid.* ("A new elegy"). N. p.: N. p., ca. 1713, Sign. Opp. 8° 632, Bodleian Libraries, Oxford
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Fourth song
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