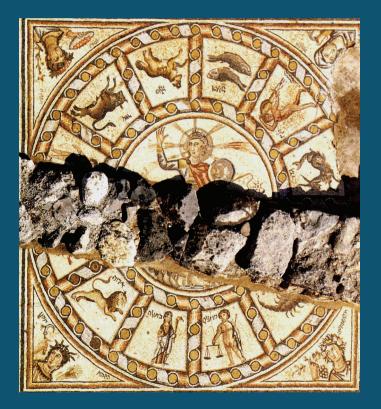# Diversity and Rabbinization

Jewish Texts and Societies
Between 400 and 1,000 CE

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Cover image: Zodiac motif and figure of Helios on the mosaic floor of the fourth-century Hammat Tiberias synagogue. Moshe Dothan, *Hammath Tiberias* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983), plates 10/11. Courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society. © All rights reserved.

Cover design: Anna Gatti

2. SOCIETY AND THE SELF IN EARLY PIYYUT

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The question raised by this volume, that of diversity within Judaism of Late Antiquity and the process of rabbinization, is at the forefront of the scholarly agenda for those who study rabbinic literature, ancient history, and the history of religions. And yet this question is not always faced head-on, especially in a forum that allows us to look at it from so many angles. This volume is therefore an opportunity to examine the complex relationships between the rabbis and others without necessarily presuming one or another was 'central' or 'marginal'. Because of the nature of the evidence, this means taking a new look at the relationships between the rabbinic canon and corpora that have been considered to be at the margins of rabbinic literature, or for which the relationship has been contested. These corpora include the literature of early Jewish mysticism, ancient Jewish magical texts and artifacts, and the poetry of the ancient synagogue known as piyyut. This essay is an exercise in exploring methods by which we can determine the social location of the liturgical poets, known as paytanim, from internal evidence in the poetry itself.

1.0. Who Weren't the Rabbis?

This examination comes at a time when approaches to religious diversity in antiquity are undergoing key shifts. It is generally

agreed that the destruction of the Jewish Commonwealth in 70 marked, in Shaye J. D. Cohen's formulation, the "end of sectarianism."[1] There is no such agreement about how to understand the varieties of expression of Judaism in the later Roman, Byzantine, and Persian empires before the rise of Islam.

For much of the twentieth century, discussion of the social structure of Judaism in Late Antiquity tended to centre on whether or not the majority of Jews in Palestine and Babylonia held to something called rabbinic or 'normative' Judaism.[2] Opinions on this question could be characterized as maximalist or minimalist. Historians such as Gedaliah Alon and Ephraim Urbach argued that the rabbis were the leaders of the people as a whole following the destruction of the Temple.[3] In contrast, Erwin Goodenough held that the rabbis were a small, sheltered community and had little influence on the majority of Jews, who practiced a Hellenistic, 'mystic' form of Judaism.[4] Although Goodenough's picture of

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1   Shaye J. D. Cohen, 'The Significance of Yavneh: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism', *Hebrew Union College Annual* 55 (1984): 27–53.

2   The following is meant to be only a brief summary of the complex history of the range of debates on this question. For more comprehensive surveys see Seth Schwartz, 'Historiography on the Jews in the 'Talmudic Period' (70–640 CE)', in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. by Martin Goodman, Jeremy Cohen, and David J. Sorkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 79–114; idem, 'The Political Geography of Rabbinic Texts', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. by Charlotte E. Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 75–96; and Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 1–42.

3   See, for example, Gedaliah Alon, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age*, trans. by Gershon Levi (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs,* trans. by Israel Abrahams, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975); on this tendency in Israeli scholarship, see Schwartz, 'Historiography', 88–91.

4   Erwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, 13 vols. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953–68); see also the abridged edition

a popular mystic Judaism subsequently won little support, the minimalist position was taken up by historians, such as Morton Smith and especially Jacob Neusner, who would occasionally contrast the rabbis to the "inchoate masses".[5] This debate has not subsided.[6]

Another pattern has emerged alongside these paradigms, one which can be characterized as denominational. According to this paradigm, Jewish society in these times and places constituted identifiable ideological sectors characterized by distinctive features manifest in literary evidence, such as rabbinic Judaism, a priestly Judaism, visionary mysticism, Enochic Judaism, synagogal Judaism, and so on; this paradigm might be characterized as denominational.[7] It can be presumed that this

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(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), with a foreword by Jacob Neusner.

5   This approach can be seen in much of Neusner's vast *oeuvre*, especially from his *A History of the Jews in Babylonia,* 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1965–1970), to his work on the Mishnah, culminating in his *Judaism: The Evidence of the Mishnah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); for the expression "inchoate masses" see Neusner, *History,* vol. 3, 99, and idem, *Talmudic Judaism in Sasanian Babylonia: Essays and Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 34. For Smith's assessment of Goodenough, see Morton Smith, 'Goodenough's Jewish Symbols in Retrospect', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967): 53–68; for Neusner's assessment see Ernest S. Frerichs and Jacob Neusner, *Goodenough on the History of Religion and on Judaism* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986), xi–xix.

6   See for example, Lee I. Levine, *The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1989); Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 BCE to 640 CE.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 35–46; and Stuart S. Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique Ereẓ Israel: A Philological Inquiry into Local Traditions in Talmud Yerushalmi* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

7   See for example, Rachel Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005); Jodi Magness, 'Helios and the Zodiac Cycle in Ancient Palestinian

model differs somewhat from that of sectarianism, in that it does not presuppose that individual ideological sectors had rigidly defined boundaries of membership, calendar, and hierarchical organization.[8] Nonetheless, it does presuppose fairly cohesive communities united by belief and practice.

This debate relied in part on the assumption that it was possible to determine the religious loyalties of large sectors of the populace—people who left few documents or material indications of their cultural lives. Most recently, historians of the religions of the Mediterranean in Late Antiquity have suggested another approach, one that has attracted attention in the study of ancient Greek and Roman religions and the trajectories of polytheism and Christianity in Late Antiquity. Several colloquia, special journal issues, and monographs argue that social network analysis, a method that has taken shape in the social sciences since the 1970s, can help us understand the complexities of social and religious interaction in antiquity. Social network analysis does not presuppose a society composed

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Synagogues', in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina*, ed. by William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 363–92. The term 'Enochic Judaism' has been used for a form of Second Temple Judaism that is sometimes considered to have survived in Merkavah mysticism: see Gabriele Boccaccini, *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998); cf. John J. Collins, 'Enochic Judaism: An Assessment', in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Contemporary Culture* ed. by Adolfo D. Roitman, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Shani Tzoref (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 219–34. For synagogal Judaism see Simon C. Mimouni, *Le judaïsme ancien du VIe siècle avant notre ère au IIIe siècle de notre ère* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), 533–67; cf. José Costa's contribution to this volume. Cf. Stuart S. Miller, 'The Rabbis and the Non-Existent Monolithic Synagogue', in *Jews, Christians and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue*, ed. by Steven Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 57–70.

8   Cf. Cohen's designation of Judaism after the first century (Cohen, 'Sectarianism') as "pluralistic".

of static groups and classes that relate to each other, but sees those relationships as dynamic, provisional encounters that adapt and shift depending on the circumstances. At the centre of such networks are what are called nodes—often conceived in network theory as individuals—who initiate a series of transactions of varying degrees of directness and consequence, branching out from persons they encounter personally to secondary relationships, and so on. There remain many questions about how these methods can be applied to ancient societies. For example, some of the models are quite individualistic; others rely on the collection of evidence to which we as historians simply have no access. They have led to interesting results in the study of ancient Judaism. The most notable example is Catherine Hezser's *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Palestine*. In this study Hezser examines Palestinian rabbinic literature for evidence of how the rabbis interacted with each other and other members of their communities.[9] Hezser's principal data consists of narrative material in Palestinian rabbinic sources, especially the Palestinian Talmud, which,

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9   For Catherine Hezser's use of social network analysis see Hezser, *Social Structure*, 47–49, 233–39. *Mediterranean Historical Review* dedicated a special issue (vol. 22, no. 1 [2007]) to the application of social network analysis to the study of the ancient Mediterranean: see especially Irad Malkin, Christy Constantakopoulou, and Katerina Panagopoulou, 'Preface: Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean', *Mediterranean Historical Review* 22 (2007): 1–9. Among the most relevant expositions of social network analysis are J. Clyde Mitchell, 'Networks, Norms, and Institutions', in *Network Analysis: Studies in Human Interaction*, ed. by Jeremy Boissevain and J. Clyde Mitchell (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 15–36; Jeremy Boissevain, *Friends of Friends: Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974); *Social Structures: A Network Approach*, ed. by Stephen Barry Wellman and Stephen D. Berkowitz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications*, ed. by Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Hannah Knox, Mike Savage, and Penny Harvey, 'Social Networks and the Study of Relations: Networks as Method, Metaphor and Form', *Economy and Society* 35 (2006): 113–40.

according to her analysis, attested to the relationships among individuals, kinship units, professions, classes, and institutions. By definition, her wide-ranging study excluded non-rabbinic sources.

But it should also be worthwhile to start outside the rabbinic canon and ask some of the same questions. Those who study corpora outside that canon have few if any such social narratives to draw on. Rather, most of the sources are found in medieval manuscripts of individual mystical, ritual, and liturgical texts, and artifacts from ancient material culture, such as inscriptions and iconographic sources from the ancient synagogue and amulets and magic bowls. These materials are often fragmentary or unsystematically gathered. Moreover, they are not designed to give an articulate account of the sector of society that produced them.

Social network analysis can help us precisely with this type of evidence. Rather than treating those sources as manifestoes, as it were, of systematic ideological communities, it may be more productive to look at those texts as artifacts that are the products of individual encounters and that function as actors in a multitude of contexts. This method also has the advantage of shifting the focus from abstract forms of 'Judaism' or 'Judaisms' to the human beings who created and used those sources.[10] This does not mean that ideologies, worldviews, and legal systems are irrelevant, especially since they can provide markers of function and social location. Moreover, where there is coalescence among texts—for example, in the high degree of formalism in magical texts, in the rise of individual authorship in piyyut, in expressions of patronage in synagogue inscriptions, and so on—it may be possible to identify small clusters from which patterns of influence would have radiated. These texts can therefore be seen as products of local centres of cultural production, equivalent to the nodes of network theory, that are encountered and employed

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10　On these distinctions see Seth Schwartz, 'How Many Judaisms Were There? A Critique of Neusner and Smith on Definition and Mason and Boyarin on Categorization', *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 2 (2011): 208–38.

by their listeners, clients, and others and then intersect with other such centres. The individual's relationship to each of them is an open question. This model allows for the possibility that actors or social groups who are unattested in the extant sources might interact with any number of these nodes in the course of a year or a lifetime and might shift their practices and beliefs accordingly.

2.0. Social Indications in Piyyut

How is early Palestinian liturgical poetry, piyyut, relevant to this larger historiographical question, and how might we arrive at a social network model based on this corpus? Piyyut is a vast body of Hebrew and Aramaic literature from Late Antiquity that clearly lies outside the rabbinic canon. On the one hand, piyyut has many affinities to rabbinic Midrash. The genre relies on dense allusions to biblical exegesis as a major component of its poetic methods. On the other hand, it does not often refer to rabbinic texts or genres such as the Mishnah by name[11] and rarely cites rabbinic authorities.[12] Piyyut often includes aggadic details and motifs that diverge from most of the early rabbinic canon. In addition, this literature can reasonably be located in a physical setting, the Palestinian synagogues of the fourth through seventh centuries. This provides us with a *Sitz-im-Leben* in an institution that, thanks to the archaeology of the past century, we can picture quite vividly. To be sure, no single paytan can be located definitively in an extant synagogue site, but those finds do give us a sense of the range of physical environments that served as

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11 For Yannai's citation of Mishnah chapters, see *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai according to the Triennial Cycle of the Pentateuch and the Holy Days,* ed. by Zvi Meir Rabinowitz, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1985–1987), I, 55 (Hebrew).

12 One possible exception is a *Qedushta* on the Ten Martyrs for the first of the three Sabbaths preceding Tishʿah be-Av, which may have been written by Yannai: see *Liturgical Poems of Yannai: Collected from Genizah Manuscripts and Other Sources*, ed. by Menachem Zulay (Berlin: Schocken, 1938), 374–75 (Hebrew). My thanks to Ophir Münz-Manor for this reference.

the stages for piyyut. Joseph Yahalom and others have been able to demonstrate affinities between synagogue iconography and motifs common to piyyut.[13] Moreover, piyyut is largely the product of individual poets, whereas rabbinic literature is almost exclusively a corporate enterprise. These works thus represent a sustained discourse marked with the style and ideological interests of those individual composers. In fact, the first extant literary works in Hebrew written by a single named author since Ben Sira in the second century BCE are the piyyutim of Yose ben Yose in the fourth or fifth century CE.

There are a few methods we can use to identify the creators of this literature as a centre of cultural production and their relationship to other sectors of their communities. One method, which has been carried out throughout the history of the field and especially in the last few decades, is the analysis of exegetical, ideological, and halakhic positions taken by the poets in relationship to cognate literatures—both rabbinic literature and, increasingly, early Christian exegesis and liturgy.[14] Another is the analysis of the use of ideal figures and construction of a past in certain genres.[15] This study will focus on a third model, the construction of a liturgical 'self' in the introductions to

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13   Joseph Yahalom, *Poetry and Society in Jewish Galilee of Late Antiquity* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999) (Hebrew); idem, 'The Sepphoris Synagogue Mosaic and Its Story', in *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Lee I. Levine and Zeev Weiss (Portsmouth; RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2000), 83–91.

14   See, for example, Zvi M. Rabinowitz, *Halakhah and Aggadah in the Liturgical Poetry of Yannai* (Jerusalem: Alexander Kohut, 1965); on relationships to Christian liturgy and exegesis see Ophir Münz-Manor, 'Liturgical Poetry in the Late Antique Near East: A Comparative Approach', *JAJ* 1 (2010), 336-61.

15   On this method see Michael D. Swartz, 'Chains of Tradition from *Avot* to the 'Avodah Piyutim', in *Jews, Christians, and the Roman Empire: The Poetics of Power in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Natalie Dohrmann and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 189–208, and idem, 'Rhetorical Indications of the Poet's Craft in the Ancient Synagogue', in *Beyond Priesthood: Religious Entrepreneurs*

piyyutim.[16] It will be argued that, based on these criteria, ritual practitioners in the synagogues of Late Antiquity sought to distinguish themselves as worthy of consideration as members of a vocation that claimed a pedigree, identity, and singular status.

The following observations are inspired by pioneering work done recently in other fields, such as analysis undertaken by Peter Lenhardt, following Ezra Fleischer and other earlier scholars, on the *Reshut* form in classical piyyut,[17] in which the poet requests 'permission' or 'authority' to commence his discourse; and Derek Krueger's exploration of the construction of the past and the development of a liturgical 'I' in Byzantine hymnography.[18] These findings can to lead to further analysis of the vast corpus of Hebrew hymnology of the Roman and Byzantine eras.

3.0. The Rise of the Author

Although piyyut is the only major literary genre in Hebrew from Late Antiquity known to be written by individual authors, we know very little about the paytanim as individuals. The earliest piyyutim are anonymous, although among them are several fully developed masterpieces that were undoubtedly written by individuals.[19] The first two names of poets known to us

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and *Innovators in the Roman Empire*, ed. by Richard L. Gordon, Georgia Petridou, and Jörg Rüpke (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 235–51.

16 See also Swartz, 'Rhetorical Indications'.

17 See Peter S. Lenhardt, *Yotser, Piyyut, and Qahal: Studies in the Development of the Paytanic School in Italy* (Jerusalem: Magnes, forthcoming) (Hebrew); Ezra Fleischer, 'Studies in the Formation and Development of *Reshut* Piyyutim', *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* 3 (1977): 359–62.

18 Derek Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

19 See, for example, the 'Avodah piyyut *Az be-En Kol* in *Priestly Palestinian Poetry: A Narrative Liturgy for the Day of Atonement*, ed. by Joseph Yahalom

are Yose ben Yose and Yannai, two giants of the genre.[20] Both lived in Palestine, Yose ben Yose in the fourth or fifth century CE and Yannai probably in the sixth century CE. Yannai's name is known because he signed many of his compositions in acrostics. Yose ben Yose did not sign his name, so we must rely on attributions, as well as internal comparison, to determine his corpus. At the same time, there is no reason to doubt these attributions; unlike, for example, Rabbi Ishmael and Rabbi Akiva, to whom the Hekhalot texts are clearly pseudepigraphically attributed, Yose ben Yose is attested nowhere outside of those attributions.

We know precious little about Yose ben Yose, Yannai, and their successors as people. Anecdotes about named poets first appear in Europe in the Middle Ages, and they are singularly unhelpful. For example, Yose ben Yose was said to be an orphan; this notion seems to be based on the custom of naming a child after a deceased relative.[21] According to the twelfth-century writer Ephraim of Bonn, Yannai was the teacher of the great poet Eleazar Qillir, but he killed his student out of envy for his talent by putting a scorpion in his sandal, a story that has no basis in fact.[22]

What then is the significance of individual authorship for students of Judaism in Late Antiquity? Obviously, it is not possible to flesh out the biography or psychology of the paytan. However, it is possible to determine when, how, and why Jewish writers in Late Antiquity thought of themselves as authors and how these findings can be used to gain a clearer picture of the

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(Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996).

20　For the works of Yose ben Yose, see *Yose ben Yose: Poems*, 2nd ed., ed. by Aharon Mirsky (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1991) (Hebrew); for Yannai, see Menachem Zulay, *Liturgical Poems of Yannai*; Zvi Meir Rabinowitz, *The Liturgical Poems of Rabbi Yannai*; and Laura Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis: An Invitation to Piyyut* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 2010), with English translations.

21　See Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 13 n. 4, and the sources cited there.

22　For sources and bibliography, see Lieber, *Yannai on Genesis*, 14.

diversity of Jewish cultures in Palestine in Late Antiquity. We are fortunate in having an excellent recent model for the study of the poetic self in Late Antiquity: Derek Krueger's *Liturgical Subjects*, in which he explores the development of a liturgical self in the Christian hymnography of roughly the same period, especially in the works of Romanos, Andrew of Crete, and other early Byzantine poets.

Krueger shows that the liturgical forms in which these authors expressed the first person in performance served an emerging cultural mode in the history of Eastern Christianity, which involved the meticulous cultivation of an introspective, morally critical self. At the same time, while making this self the focus of extensive liturgical dramas, the poets also placed the individual Christian in the midst of the Church's sacred history. By this measure, the 'I' is not merely the poet, or, for that matter, the individual listener; he is every soul tormented by sin and in need of God's grace. This results in the dialectic between individuality and collectivity. At the same time, the poet does not erase himself from the scenario entirely; he also subtly fashions an image of himself as instrumental to the process of the cultivation of Christian interiority. He does this especially in the opening and closing sections of his hymns, as Krueger describes:

> Where he sings in the first person singular, the openings and closings of the hymns engage in the production of Romanos the Melodist […] The "I" of Romanos's poems participates in self-presentation and self-disclosure. It engages in introspection and divulges its interiority. It identifies itself as the subject of interrogation and accusation […] Romanos's "I" is the product of a particular knowledge of the self, formed within a Christian narrative of fault and redemption. The poet, moreover, does not claim exclusive right over his conception of the self but rather presents it with generalizing force: all those who hear him need God's assistance; all must inevitably acknowledge their sins.[23]

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23 Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 32.

In light of the dynamic of sin and redemption that Krueger describes, it is possible to select a couple of genres of piyyut that can serve as appropriate *comparanda*: Yose ben Yose's compositions for the three shofar services at Rosh Hashanah and some elements of his confessional compositions. The extant works of Yose ben Yose are all for the High Holy Days, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The most extensive of his compositions are *ʿAvodah* piyyutim, an epic genre in which the sacrifice for Yom Kippur in the ancient Temple is described in great detail, preceded by an elaborate narrative of how God's creation of the world and selection of patriarchs and biblical leaders culminated in the creation of the Jerusalem Temple and the priesthood. Examination of national and priestly identity in Yose ben Yose's *ʿAvodah* piyyutim shows that they are striking for their emphasis on the corporate dimension of Yom Kippur, embodied in the sacrificial ritual.[24] The other compositions for the High Holy Days concentrate on the individual's sinfulness and the drama of confession and forgiveness that forms the structure for the Days of Repentance. In those genres, Yose ben Yose does not neglect the national saga of sin and redemption but does allow here and there for a shift from the plural to the singular.

4.0. The Confessional 'I'

Hebrew liturgical poetry introduces the first person due to a useful coincidence: most piyyutim are alphabetical acrostics, and the first-person singular imperfect or cohortative begins with the first letter, *alef*. This means that an author often begins his composition by expressing his relationship to the liturgical task at hand, for example, by declaring his intention to recite praise, thanks, or narration in the first stanzas. This way of opening a composition is common whether or not the subject of the piyyut is ostensibly the individual, as in the confessions for the High Holy Days, or the nation, as in the *ʿAvodah*. For example, a survey

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24 Swartz, 'Chains of Tradition'.

of the first lines of the extant nine full piyyutim of Yose ben Yose shows that all but one of them begin with the first person, and two of those with the first person plural.[25] Of those, two main genres are represented, the *ʿAvodah*, which describes the Yom Kippur sacrifice, and the *Teqiʿata*, a set of three piyyutim that accompany the liturgical triad for Rosh Hashanah known as *Malkhuyot, Zikhronot*, and *Shofarot*. These three liturgical units consist of a series of verses recited at *musaf* for Rosh Hashanah, recalling God's kingship (*Malkhuyot*), his remembrance of Israel (*Zikhronot*), and the sounding of the shofar (*Shofarot*). Each unit came to be composed of ten verses, framed by prayers and accompanied by the sounding of the shofar.

In the *ʿAvodah*, the first-person imperfect is used to declare the poet's intention to praise God and tell of His works.[26] This is how it is used in the first of the three piyyutim for Rosh Hashanah (*Malkhuyot*), *Ahalelah Elohai* 'I shall praise my God'.[27] However, in the other two, the poet uses the first person to describe his response to his sinfulness: *Efḥad be-Maʿasai,* 'I fear because of my deeds' (for *Zikhronot*)[28] and *Anusah le-ʿEzra,* 'I flee for help' (for *Shofarot*).[29]

The three extant piyyutim for Rosh Hashanah by Yose ben Yose begin with several stanzas and then attach the last stanzas to the verses of that particular unit. We do not know whether these were the only three that Yose ben Yose wrote or whether

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25 For details, see Swartz, 'Rhetorical Indications', 234-35. The survey includes only those fully attested piyyutim that Mirsky considers definitely attributable to Yose ben Yose.

26 *Azkir Gevurot Elohah,* 'I shall recount God's deeds' (Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 127–72); *Eten Tehillah,* 'I shall give praise' (Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 173–78); and *Asaper Gedulot,* 'I shall tell (God's) great deeds' (Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 203–10). One *ʿAvodah* piyyut, *Atah Konanta ʿOlam be-Rov Ḥesed,* 'You established the world' (Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 178–203), begins with the second person singular.

27 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 93–101.

28 Ibid., 101–09.

29 Ibid., 109–17.

he originally intended them to be recited together. One way or another, the three piyyutim do fit together thematically in a kind of three-act drama, one implied by the structure of the *Malkhuyot, Zikhronot,* and *Shofarot* triad itself.   These three piyyutim, especially the second and third, focus on the individual's sins and his deliverance by God. In the first, the paytan recounts God's aid to his ancestors; in the second, he fears that his deeds will condemn him; in the third, he flees to God for refuge. The focus on the individual in this confessional mode should not be taken for granted. Traditional Jewish prayers for forgiveness are more often than not cast in the first person plural, especially the two acrostic litanies of transgressions (the *vidui* and the ʿ*al ḥet,* which form the core of the confession ceremony of Yom Kippur). These presumed expressions of individual contrition nonetheless reflect the poet's consciousness of his environment and vocation.

5.0. Kingship, Remembrance, and Redemption

In his *Teqiʿata,* Yose ben Yose creates an 'I' that is at once corporate and individual, and at the same time, effaces his identity as a poet. These passages form the best opportunities to compare piyyut with Christian hymnography as Krueger describes it, with important differences. If we take the three compositions together, they form a remarkable sequential pattern. Formally, each line of each poem ends with a keyword indicating the unit: *melukhah* 'kingship' for the first, *zikaron* 'remembrance' for the second, and *qol* 'voice, sound' for the third. The tone of each of the three poems is very different. In the poem for *Malkhuyot, Ahalelah Elohai,* the poet emphasizes the triumph of God's power over Israel's enemies. For the first several stanzas the poet declares his intentions to praise God, to whom high stature, strength, and kingship truly belong:

> I shall praise my God,
> I shall sing of His might,
> I shall tell of his glory
> I shall adorn [His] kingship.

> I shall magnify the Maker
> Who spoke and made,
> I shall enshrine Him
> For He is deserving of kingship.[30]

The first two stanzas look like a simple declaration of the speaker's dependence on God and faith in His presence. However, through a complex process of interweaving biblical and post-biblical allusions the poet signals his function in the congregation. The language of piyyut is famous for its use of dense, ornamental phraseology, characterized by metonymy, in which a substitute word or phrase (*kinnui*), usually based on a biblical verse, signifies the subject of the discourse. By using the word *anvehu* 'I will enshrine Him', he echoes Exod. 15.2, from the Song at the Sea, which celebrates God's triumph over Pharaoh and his armies. He may also be playing on multiple interpretations of the word *anvehu*. A passage in the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael offers several interpretations of Exod. 15.2.[31] The first is based on the root *nʾh* 'to beautify or make pleasant': "*This is my God and I will beautify Him.* Is it possible for flesh and blood to beautify his maker? Rather, I will beautify Him with commandments: I will make before him a beautiful *lulav,* a beautiful *sukkah,* beautiful *tzitzit,* beautiful *tefillin.*" Another interpretation in that Midrash ties this meaning to the root *nwh* 'to dwell': "I will make Him a beautiful sanctuary. *Nwh* means nothing other than the sanctuary, as it is said, *They have destroyed His sanctuary* (*navehu*) (Ps. 79.7)." Based on these interpretations, the poet's use of the word *anvehu* may have echoes of his role as a herald of God's military power, as one who beautifies the congregation's prayer, and as one who creates a verbal Temple.

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30 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose,* 93, lines 1–2. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. In order to accentuate the poet's practice of ending every line with the keyword for each unit I have placed the keywords at the end of a stanza in translation.

31 *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael,* ed. by Saul Horowitz and Israel Rabin (Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1931), *Shirah 3,* 127 (Hebrew).

The third stanza emphasizes God's military might further, as the poet declares himself one of God's army (*tzava*), who recounts His strength:

> I will rehearse His strength forever
> For I am his host (*tzeva'o*).
> And to Him discourse is befitting
> Of the greatness of His kingship.[32]

The next three stanzas place him in relationship to his people and the peoples of the nations:

> In the congregation I shall proclaim,
>
> I shall give praise in the multitude of the people,
> To whom high stature and great strength belongs
> And to whom is kingship.
>
> Approach, O nations,
> And come, O kingdoms;
> See how magnificent He is
> In His sash of kingship.
>
> Magnify Him with me
> And let us exalt Him together[33]
> And do not be too proud
> In the diadem of kingship.[34]

In the first of these three stanzas, the poet situates himself as a representative of the multitude of Israel; in the next two, he addresses the nations of the world, warning them not to be arrogant in their assumption of earthly royal power. The section of the poem following this introduction enumerates ten enemies of Israel, all of whom met defeat because of their hubris. A few of these stanzas are notable for their historical and liturgical connotations, particularly their allusions to the minor festivals of Purim and Hanukkah. The second stanza in this series concerns Amalek, the arch-enemy of the Israelites in the wilderness:

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32 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 93, line 3.
33 Cf. Ps. 34.4.
34 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 93–94, lines 4–6.

And the first of the nations[35]
Fought and lost
For the Living One swore
On His throne of kingship;

So he is mocked in every generation
For he did not learn
Who fought at the sea
And is enrobed in kingship.[36]

The Amalekites, according to Balaam's prophecy in Num. 24, were to be defeated even though they were a "leading nation" (Num. 24.20); and so God declared eternal enmity with Amalek (Exod. 17.14–16). Because the Amalekites, therefore, refused to learn the lesson of God's victory at the Red Sea, they are to be "mocked in every generation." Here the poet alludes to the holiday of Purim, in which Haman, a descendent of Amalek,[37] is mocked and ridiculed. The Theodosian Code (438 CE) prohibits the practice of burning Haman in effigy in such a way that his hanging is made to look like the crucifixion of Christ.[38] As Wout Van Bekkum, Ophir Münz-Manor, and others have shown, Hebrew and Aramaic piyyutim for Purim also play on this typological association.[39]

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35 Amalek; see Num. 24.20.

36 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 94, lines 11–12.

37 Haman is an Agagite according to Est. 3.1 and, therefore, a descendent of Amalek according to 1 Sam. 15.8.

38 *Cod. Theod.* 16.8.18; see *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, ed. by Amnon Linder (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 236–37; T. C. G. Thornton, 'The Crucifixion of Haman and the Scandal of the Cross', *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986): 419–26.

39 For the Aramaic poems for Purim, see *Jewish Palestinian Aramaic Poetry from Late Antiquity: Critical Edition with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. by Michael Sokoloff and Joseph Yahalom (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1999), 170–219 (Hebrew); on this motif see Yahalom, *Poetry and Society*, 58–60; Menahem Kister, 'Jewish Aramaic Poems from Palestine and Their Setting', *Tarbiz* 76 (2007): 105–84 (Hebrew); Wout Jac. Van Bekkum, 'Anti-Christian Polemics in Hebrew Liturgical Poetry (*Piyyut*) of the Sixth and Seventh Centuries',

The ninth stanza describes the people's redemption as told in the book of Esther, but contains no liturgical reference to customs of Purim other than the exhortation to praise God:

> The sheep[40] were thrown down for slaughter,[41]
> But plots were hatched
> When the young ruler[42]
> Wore [garments of] kingship.
>
> They were sold for no price
> And redeemed without money.[43]
> Exalt the One who diverts, like water,
> The heart of kingship.[44]

In these lines the keyword 'kingship' is used to refer not to divine, but human kingship; Mordechai wears royal garments, echoing his ancestor Benjamin's role as ruler, and God is to be praised for His power to change Ahasuerus' mind—the true miracle of the book of Esther, which does not mention God explicitly.

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in *Early Christian Poetry: A Collection of Essays*, ed. by J. den Boeft and A. Hilhorst (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 297–308; Ophir Münz-Manor, 'Other Voices: Haman, Jesus, and the Representations of the Other in Purim Poems from Byzantine Palestine', in *Popular and Canonical: Literary Dialogues*, ed. by Yael Shapira, Omri Herzog, and Tamar S. Hess (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007), 69–79 (Hebrew); idem, 'Carnivalesque Ambivalence and the Christian *Other* in Aramaic Poems from Byzantine Palestine', in *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures*, ed. by Robert Bonfil, Oded Irshai, Guy G. Stroumsa, and Rina Talgam (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 829–43.

40 The Jews.

41 Cf. Ps. 44.12.

42 Mordechai, who was descended from Benjamin, the youngest son of Jacob; cf. Ps. 68.28.

43 See Isa. 52.3.

44 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 97, lines 25–26, referring to Ahasuerus, whose mind was changed by God. See Prov. 21.1.

The following stanza, the tenth in the series recounting God's victories on behalf of Israel, describes that of the Maccabees over the Seleucid Greeks, as celebrated at Hanukkah:

> The doves[45] were sold
> To the children of the Ionians[46]
> And were carried far away
> From the border of kingship.
>
> They spurned covenant and law
> And they converted the people of God;
> But they were cast down without power,
> By the priests of kingship.[47]

These stanzas refer to not only the military attack on Judaea by the Greeks, but the attempt by Hellenizing Jews to turn the people away from God. At the end of this series, the poem then turns to the Romans, the one oppressor who still remains undefeated:

> Seir flattered
> His mentor[48] with his game[49]
> And inherited, with the sound of weeping,
> The sword of kingship.
>
> The smooth man[50] was raised up
> To be master of his brother[51]
> And once again to Jeshurun
> Will return kingship:
> As it is written in the Torah: *Then he became king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people assembled, the tribes of Israel* (Deut. 33.5).[52]

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45 Israel.

46 The Greeks.

47 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 97, lines 27–28

48 Isaac.

49 When Esau fed Isaac game.

50 Jacob; see Gen. 27.11.

51 See Gen. 27.29.

52 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 98, lines 29–30.

In the typology of the piyyut, Seir stands for Esau, representing Rome, which by the mid-fourth century had come to represent Christendom. According to Gen. 27.40, Esau inherited the sword when he and his 'mentor', Isaac, had realized that Jacob had taken Esau's birthright, but Isaac's blessing to Jacob, the 'smooth man', promises that he, not Esau, will rule. Since Rome rules over Israel in the present, the fulfillment of that blessing is in the messianic future. This stanza also begins the quotation of the series of biblical verses that form the heart of *Malkhuyot*. In this case, the first verse is Deut. 33.5, from Moses's farewell address to Israel, which recounts how God gave the people the Torah, thus becoming King. An exegesis of this verse forms the basis for the second half of the stanza, but in the poem the meaning of the verse is reversed—that is, earthly kingship will belong to Jacob. Thus, although the poet acknowledges the enduring dominance of Rome, the tone of the stanza is still triumphant, emphasizing the inevitability of Israel's victory.

In contrast, the second poem, *Efḥad be-Maʿasai*, for *Zikhronot*, is relentlessly self-critical. It is here that the work presents the most complete analogue to Krueger's portrait of the sinful self in Romanos and his heirs. It is also here that the 'I' emerges most often. The keyword is *zikaron*, usually referring not simply to God's memory, but to the Day of Remembrance, the moment when God records individuals' deeds and judges them. This poem also begins with a first-person declaration. It is not as obvious that the speaker is the messenger of the community entrusted to raise his voice in the midst of the smaller sanctuary. Rather, he is one sinner standing before God, as can be seen from the opening lines:

> I fear for my deeds,
> I worry at all times;
> I fear the Day of Judgment
> When I approach remembrance.
>
> I shall petition the Merciful One,
> I shall entreat the Compassionate One;
> I shall plead to the one who engraved [the Law] for me
> On the Day of Remembrance.[53]

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53 Ibid., 101, lines 1–2.

One of the most striking themes of this composition plays on a key motif of the High Holy Day liturgy, the Merit of the Fathers, or *zekhut avot*.[54] The poet adopts the persona of the ordinary Israelite, whose fate is dependent on the ability of the ancestors to save him from God's wrath. It is a commonplace in the liturgy that the present generation does not deserve God's favour on its own; rather, the righteous ancestors stored up a bank account, so to speak, of good deeds on which their children may draw. Yose ben Yose's sinner has depleted that account:

> I have trusted in the fathers
> And consumed their deeds.
> They had existed for me
> Previously for remembrance.[55]

In other words, the reserve of Merit of the Fathers that would have stood on behalf of the sinner in the past has been depleted— literally; he has 'eaten' them up, like a greedy child. Even their heroic deeds cannot save a person who is without merit. He laments most bitterly that the Temple, the high priest, and their rituals of atonement are no longer there for him:

> The aroma of nard and incense
> For the One who is seated in His chambers—
> Blood, fat, fragrance,
> And bread for remembrance.
>
> I was presented on
> Empty coals,[56]
> For you did not leave me
> A widower[57] for remembrance

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54 On this concept see Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 170–98, and Shalom Carmy, 'Zekhut Avot', in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by Lindsay Jones, 2nd ed., 15 vols. (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), XIV, 9940–42. The latter is available at http://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/zekhut-avot [accessed 1 October 2018].

55 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 101, line 4.

56 See Ezek. 24.11.

57 That is, alone; see Jer. 51.5.

> […]
> All these supported me
> And I asked for Your compassion—
> If only I had not exhausted them,
> As I have nothing for remembrance![58]

Before the Temple was destroyed, Israel had recourse to the sacrificial materials, such as blood, fat, and incense. The nation could then be refined by fire like the empty cauldron of Ezekiel's prophecy in Ezek. 24.11 and was therefore not abandoned (literally, 'widowed') by God. However, the poet has exhausted his share of atoning sacrifices, just as he has exhausted his inheritance of merit from the patriarchs.

As Krueger argues, both the poetry and the iconography of the Byzantine Church placed the worshipper in the drama of history: "Through the hymns of the church, Byzantine worshippers joined a large cast of biblical characters. They lamented with Adam; repented with David; approached Christ in supplication with the Harlot, the Leper […] Like the Thief they requested his remembrance: they longed to be with him in Paradise."[59] In his *Zikhronot*, Yose ben Yose also put himself and each member of his community in the drama of history, in a trajectory of ritual atonement stretching from the nation's mythic past to that very Day of Remembrance. Unlike other paytanic motifs that construct a chain of tradition, for example from Adam to Aaron and the high priesthood in the *ʿAvodah*, this composition contrasts the heroic ancestors and the purifying cult with the inadequate individual, whom the heroes of the past and the vanished sanctuary are unable to save.

The final unit in the *Teqiʿata*, *Shofarot*, recalls prophecies in which the shofar will be sounded to signify redemption. In Yose ben Yose's piyyut for *Shofarot*, *Anusah le-ʿEzra*, the word that defines the section and ends each line is *qol* 'voice, sound'. This keyword allows the poet to signify channels of communication, between the voice of the poet and the voice of God, between

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58 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 103–04, lines 18–21.
59 Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 218 and passim.

the sound of the shofar performed by the congregation and the final shofar announcing the final redemption. In this composition Yose ben Yose brings the messages of nation and individual, triumph and despair, together.

In the opening stanzas of this piyyut the poet situates himself in his community. These lines constitute excellent evidence for the poet's consciousness of his craft and its function:

> I flee for help
> I find it facing me,
> God is near to me,
> When I call him with my voice.[60]

As in the opening lines of his *Malkhuyot*, Yose ben Yose signals his role in the community and its rituals by his use of biblical allusions. The first hemistich, 'I flee for help', is based on Isa. 10.3:

> What will you do on the day of punishment,
> When the calamity comes from afar,
> To whom will you flee for help […]?

The *kinnui* form often involves taking a verse out of context, but sometimes the contrast can be instructive. In Isaiah, the phrase is less an expression of assurance than a warning to the sinner of his future desperation. In the piyyut, the speaker is convinced of his deliverance. This is brought home by the use of the root *qrb* 'to be near'. This conceit of the poem, whereby each line ends with the word *qol*, allows the author to establish a homology between the sound of the shofar and the voice of the poet. That is, God will draw near if the poet raises his voice to call Him.

It is at this point that the poet acknowledges the liturgical setting explicitly:

> The one who, in the divine assembly,
> Stands close to me,
> And here, in the smaller sanctuary,
> I open my mouth to Him with my voice.[61]

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60 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 109, line 1.
61 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 101, line 2.

The first line of this stanza also reflects a remarkable use of a biblical source. God is referred to as the one 'in the divine assembly' *asher be-ʿadat el*. This phrase, and the word *nitzav* 'stands' in the next hemistich, are based on Ps. 82.1, in which God stands in the assembly of gods (*ʿadat el*). He accuses them of injustice and declares that he will demote them to mortals. In Jewish exegetical tradition, the phrase *ʿadat el* is sometimes used to refer to the congregation of ten worshippers (*minyan*).[62] The second line of this stanza, *be-qirbi nitzav*, echoes the word *qarov* 'near', in the third line above. While it has been translated here as 'stands close to me', the word *be-qirbi* could also mean, literally, 'among me, within me'; it can therefore also refer to God's presence within the community, or perhaps even the spirit of divine inspiration within the poet himself. The next line is more specific institutionally. The phrase *miqdash meʿat,* 'smaller sanctuary' comes originally from Ezek. 11.16, but it is sometimes used to refer to the synagogue.[63] It reflects the idea that the synagogue is a miniature or lesser Temple. The stanza therefore represents the paytan as the one who raises his voice[64] in the substitute Temple, facing God who is near when he calls.

In the next stanza, the poet remains in the first person, but that person has shifted subtly:

> Care for me and seek me out,
> I am a lost lamb;
> I was shorn and abandoned
> Without raising a voice.[65]

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62 See b. Ber. 6a.

63 See Swartz, "Rhetorical Indications," 238.

64 The phrase 'open my mouth' is based on Isa. 10.14, where the silence of birds is used as a metaphor for the silence of the nations while Assyria gathers wealth; for a magical use of this verse see *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantation Texts from the Cairo Genizah: Selected Texts from Taylor-Schechter Box K1*, ed. by Michael D. Swartz and Lawrence H. Schiffman, 140.

65 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 110, line 3.

This 'lost lamb' is not just the poet or even the individual penitent, but corporate Israel. The following stanzas follow history as in *Zikhronot*, but instead of lamenting a string of lost opportunities, the poet reminds God of His willingness to save an undeserving nation. In this middle section he draws especially on the Song of Songs and Daniel. For example, he uses Song 1.6 to remind God of how He sent prophets to urge the people to heed Him:

> And my seers and saviours,[66]
> Who are my mother's sons,
> Quarreled with me[67]
> So that I may listen to the voice.[68]

Rehearsing the vision of Dan. 7, the poet signifies God's triumph over Greece and pledges to emulate Daniel's prayer:

> He conquered for me
> The four heads of the leopard[69]
> And I too[70] will give thanks, *selah.*
> I will raise to Him my voice.

Finally, the poem turns to the present occasion, Rosh Hashanah. Here the poet speaks of his own place in the mythic scheme:

> The end is near,[71]
> The time for judgment has come.
> The speaker for innocence (*melitz yosher*) has arisen
> To plead for mercy with his voice.[72]

As Aharon Mirsky points out, the poet is acting here as the defence attorney ('the speaker for innocence'), advocating for Israel's acquittal. The Hebrew phrase *melitz yosher* has

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66 The prophets.

67 See Song 1.6.

68 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 111, line 11.

69 Greece; cf. Dan. 7.6.

70 Like Daniel.

71 That is, the end of the year.

72 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 116, line 43.

connotations both of forensic speech and poetry; thus, the line implies that the poet's vocation is both that of the liturgical *shaliaḥ tzibbur*, the messenger of the ritual community, and as advocate for Israel's innocence in the divine court.

6.0. The Collective 'I'

Yose ben Yose and the paytanim that followed him were not only *shelihe tzibbur*, embodying the Everyman of a nation in exile. They were highly skilled practitioners aware of their charges to arouse the people's consciousness of their own place in the annual cycle of confession and atonement and at the same time to arouse God's compassion towards them. To do this, the poet had to take on a plurality of voices. Unlike the redactors of the rabbinic corpus, who arranged the many voices of individual named Sages, the paytan shifted only between the 'we' and the 'I'. In fact, each of these pronouns was two: the 'we' in the *Teqiʿata* were the ancestors of the past and the congregation of the present; and the 'I' was the repentant nation and the poet himself.

It is not only as an individual, or an embodiment of every individual, that the paytan represents himself. In most of his *ʿAvodah* piyyutim as well, Yose ben Yose uses the first person to signify his place in society. Given the corporate nature of the subject of the *ʿAvodah*—the Yom Kippur sacrifice, which purifies the Temple and procures atonement for Israel as a whole—the appearance of the first-person singular is worthy of note as well. This genre, which follows the high priest step-by-step as he conducts the Yom Kippur sacrifice, seeks to produce empathy between the congregation and the high priest. More than this, the high priest is identified mimetically with the paytan himself, whose mission it is to take the community verbally into the vanished Temple.[73] The early *ʿAvodah* piyyutim sometimes open

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73 For this argument see *Avodah: An Anthology of Ancient Poetry for Yom Kippur*, ed. by Michael D. Swartz and Joseph Yahalom (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), and Michael D. Swartz, 'Liturgy, Poetry, and the Persistence of Sacrifice', in *Was 70 CE a Watershed*

with a first-person declaration, as we have seen in other genres. For example, his *Eten Tehillah* begins:

> Let me give praise
> To God, who is to be praised;
> I shall tell, in awe,
> A few of His works.
> God was from eternity[74]
> Before there was a world,[75]
> Neither before nor after Him
> Was any god created.[76]

This opening form, in which the poet asks permission to recite God's praises, is a precursor to a more formalized genre known as *Reshut* 'permission', which subsequently developed in classical piyyut.[77] This form may reflect a type of scholastic protocol whereby a student or servant must ask permission from his master to speak, to approach him, or to take leave of him.[78] At the same time, in the preamble to its description of the Yom Kippur sacrifice, the *ʿAvodah* traces the rituals of the Temple, and ultimately the synagogue, from creation to a line of patriarchs and priests, culminating in Aaron and his descendants.[79] The genre

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in *Jewish History?*, ed. by Daniel R. Schwartz and Zeev Weiss (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 393–412.

74 Hebrew *me-ʿolam*.

75 Hebrew *ʿad lo ʿolam*.

76 Mirsky, *Yose ben Yose*, 173, lines 1–2.

77 Lenhardt, *Yotser, Piyyut, and Qahal*; Fleischer, 'Studies'.

78 Uri Ehrlich, 'Asking Leave and Granting of Leave: A Chapter in the Laws of Derek Erez', in *Shefa Tal: Studies in Jewish Thought and Culture Presented to Bracha Sack*, ed. by Zeev Gries, Howard T. Kreisel, and Boaz Huss (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press, 2004), 13–26 (Hebrew).

79 See Swartz, 'Chains of Tradition'; cf. Derek Krueger, 'The Liturgical Creation of a Christian Past: Identity and Community in Anaphoral Prayers', in *Unclassical Traditions, Volume 1: Alternatives to the Classical Past in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Christopher Kelly, Richard Flower, and Michael Stuart Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 2010), 58–71.

thus begins with the individual paytan and his role as a skilled messenger; introduces the priestly line as precursors to the poet; and, in his capacity as prayer leader, walks the congregation virtually through the vanished sanctuary.

7.0. From Poetry to Society

How can we proceed to the fragments of texts presented here to the identification of their authors as social beings in the complex network of Palestinian Jewish society of Late Antiquity? We can begin by recognizing the paytan as a representative of a skilled vocation. We have seen the subtlety and artistry by which Yose ben Yose deployed themes, biblical references and allusions, ambiguities, paronomasia, and rhetoric in his compositions. He was not merely a vehicle for the repetition of rabbinic ideology or lore. Nor was he only a preacher, conveying a theological message to an audience. Rather, the paytan engaged in several channels of interactive communication: between himself and God, between himself and the community—and likewise between himself-as-community and God—as well as between his generation and the generations that came before him. The poet was conscious of these roles, as he was of the virtuosity with which he would navigate them.

This virtuosity served as a key component in the poet's conception of his function, as both a ritual actor and a member of his society. From the beginnings of piyyut to its classical era, in the time of Eleazar Qillir and his colleagues, we can detect a pattern of increasing complexity and professionalism in the construction of piyyut. Yannai and his successors created extensive, intricate compositions for the entire liturgical cycle. Whether or not the early paytanim supported themselves as synagogue professionals (e.g., the *ḥazzan*)[80] or perhaps supplemented their earnings as teachers and functionaries with some form of compensation

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80 On the profession of the *ḥazzan*, see Hyman I. Sky, *Redevelopment of the Office of Hazzan through the Talmudic Period* (San Francisco: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).

for their art, they would have accumulated considerable social capital through these functions. The synagogues of this period abounded in the architectural, artistic, and material features that were designed to showcase their donors' commitment to community life and, more important, served as material offerings to Israel's God. The poets likewise adorned the liturgy with their ornate and sophisticated compositions and, at the same time, signaled their role in that ritual function to both their divine and human listeners.

It has been argued here that the creators of early piyyut can be designated as nodes of cultural production in the complex networks that constituted Jewish society in Palestine in Late Antiquity. Whatever their relationship to the body of law and theology represented in the Talmudim and early rabbinic Midrashim, the paytanim were aware of their distinctive role in society and used that distinctiveness in their communications.

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