A Symbol and Tool of Hybridity: The Organ and its Role in Reform Judaism

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A Symbol and Tool of Hybridity: 
The Organ and its Role in Reform Judaism

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The granite promontory in the deep may stand firm and unchanged amidst the waves and storms that beat upon it, but human institutions cannot withstand the agitations of free, active and progressive opinion. Whilst laws are stationary, things are progressive. Any system of laws that should be made without the principle of expansibility, that would, in some measure accommodate them to the progression of events, would have within it the seeds of mischief and violence.

--Judge A. P. Butler, Charleston, SC, 1846.
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INTRODUCTION

The Enlightenment marked a large shift in thought and action in the western world over the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Joseph II, the ruler of the Habsburg Empire who placed enlightenment principles at the heart of his philosophy on governance, understood "from his reading of Voltaire and Montesquieu...the relationship between economic growth and social and religious freedoms."¹ In 1789, he accordingly passed a series of Toleration Acts integrating Jews into the general population; that same year, the French revolution gave Jews full citizenship in France "and in other regions conquered by the revolutionary forces and ideology.... Once begun, the political emancipation of the Jews continued unabated for several decades throughout Western and Central Europe."² Previously excluded from most forms of mainstream life, European Jews now had to find a place in a new world marked by increased tolerance and the wealth of new opportunities it afforded them.

Maskilim (sing. maskil), a term derived from the Hebrew word for the Enlightenment (haskalah), referred to those Jews who took advantage of their change in status and embraced the opportunity to pursue a rigorous secular education, to hold previously-forbidden occupations, and to move into the urban centers of culture.³ Moses Mendelssohn, an Enlightenment philosopher, attempted to aid Jews in integrating the haskalah intellectually, but without compromising ages of tradition and history.⁴ He was not a reformation per se, but did advocate that Jews should receive a modern education that would expose them to a broader scope of ideas, which would prepare them to engage their new surroundings.⁵ To that end, Mendelssohn translated the Torah into German in much the same way that Luther had encouraged vernacular translations of Scripture for personal study. His edition – and those that followed from other maskilim – differed from
Protestant translations in that he wanted “to leave behind a Bible translation that relied on traditional Jewish interpretations rather than on Protestant scholarship.” Unwilling to compromise any of his religious practices, Mendelssohn’s translation represents his effort to provide maskilim with a modernized connection to Judaism as they entered non-Jewish centers of urban opportunity.

Post-Napoleonic Europe ultimately afforded the Jews increased freedom to participate in the urban business world. Although they excelled, their religious identity and practices became a hindrance to participating in the larger national, Protestant context. Dietary laws became impractical for negotiating social circles. Standing out by wearing skullcaps, different clothing, and a long beard was detrimental to business opportunities. Going to pray three times a day and following the halakha (Jewish law) of daily life was simply unfeasible for sustaining a business, causing one maskil to conclude, “one should be ‘a person outside of the home and a Jew in one’s home.’”

In the burgeoning spirit of nationalism, the state began to take more direct control over the population and abolished traditional sources of authority thereby fracturing the previously insular Jewish community. “The ghetto was formally abolished. Communities lost their limited autonomy and their jurisdiction over all but strictly ritual matters; the rabbi ceased to be a judge and became both preacher and teacher.” One 1792 Prussian edict gave authority on religious matters to the heads of every household; thus without the rabbis’ centralized communal authority over religious life, “religious harmony among some city Jews” devolved into familial divisions over “degrees of observance without apparent rhyme or reason.”
As Jews became accustomed to living in high culture, they began to compare their forms of religious practice to the order and decorum of their neighbors’ Christian services. As reformer rabbi and scholar Ismar Elbogen explains, “The splendor of the outside world attracted them; the Synagogue appeared to them dark and gloomy.”

The traditional Jewish service, especially on Shabbat, was increasingly viewed as a long and disorderly affair performed in Hebrew, a language many assimilated Jews could not sufficiently understand. Jews could come and go as they pleased, talking to friends during the service. When they did participate, the mumbled and cacophonous responses to the hazzan (prayer leader) often interrupted his excessively florid chanting, which seemed more an individual performance than an act of prayer. Conversely, beautiful urban churches provided their parishioners with the appealing music of an organ, which led a congregation in hymns by maintaining tempo, melody, and harmony. Reverends preached to their congregation in the vernacular and provided edification through the art of sermon.

Faced with this comparison, urbanized Jews seeking to maintain a meaningful Jewish identity thought it prudent to institute changes to the service in order to make Jewish ritual more attractive to themselves and to those fully-assimilated Jews who no longer participated in Jewish communal life. Liturgical changes, which included reducing the service length or translating sections into the vernacular for ease of comprehension, differed between synagogues, and even traditionalist congregations made changes to their services by adding a vernacular sermon. Given the range of changes being made, it was difficult to identify a leading “reform” congregation, but the noticeable installation and
use of an organ in a synagogue, made it a predominant symbol of these new attitudes toward worship in Jewish services.

Music had always been a modernizing force in Judaism; Musicologist and rabbi Geoffery Goldberg stresses that the music of the synagogue has always been “inseparable from the Jewish community’s struggle for emancipation.”

One precursor to the introduction of the organ stems from as early as the seventeenth century, when Italian Jews of the early Baroque period adopted polyphonic singing for worship. The Jewish composer Salomone Rossi set worship texts in this style, stirring up controversy and eventually winning rabbinic approval.

Although polyphonic choral singing is not directly related to the organ, the example supports Goldberg’s claim that polyphonic singing was a musical innovation that modernized worship, much as the organ would two centuries later. Of the possible reforms to the nineteenth-century service, the organ in particular brought order and decorum – a mantra for later reformers – to the worship, and was a foil to the excesses of the hazzan.

Essential to the later organ debate is the Prague organ in the Altneushule (Old-New Synagogue), for which no historical record of any problems concerning halakha exists. The community purchased an organ for worship as early as 1594 and Prague’s synagogue developed a tradition of instrumental music until 1745 when Empress Maria Theresa expelled Jews from the region. Because the community did not feel that playing the organ raised legal issues in halakha, nineteenth-century reformers invoked the precedent as a powerful argument in the debates over their introduction of the organ. Conversely, traditionalists disputed the precedent in these debates as part of their effort to stem the tide of reform.
The thesis explores this long-standing debate about the organ’s propriety, which began as a result of a Hamburg synagogue’s organ installation and provided no clear winner. After conceding the inevitability of a formal split with traditionalists, reformer rabbis met in Frankfurt and determined an explicitly reform defense of the organ which, in its language and underlying philosophy, acknowledges a new reform in Judaism. The debates raised legal questions surrounding the organ’s propriety in Jewish worship—given its assumed identity as a Christian instrument—which pointed towards larger issues regarding reformers’ assimilatory identity. The resulting tension and impasse were only fully resolved in the transference of the debate to the United States.

Whereas the best-documented organ debates occurred in Germany, in America, the organ appears to have become popular with hardly a mention. Informed by a national brand of Enlightenment thought, Jewish reformers turned dissatisfaction with service models into a shift toward reform. Charleston, South Carolina was home to the first reform congregation and epitomizes perhaps a solitary example of reform congregations arguing over the organ. In section II, I examine the lengthy organ debate in Charleston as a way to ascertain the diversity of American opinions on the organ, to explore the ways the organ was used in worship, and to contextualize the greater musical opportunities they created.

Finally, this thesis investigates the positionality of reformers within their respective contexts in order to understand the roots of intra-Jewish conflict and the desire to acquire the organ. It will conclude with an evaluation of the organ as a tool and symbol of theological, cultural, and modernist as linked to religious emancipation, and expressions of meaningful Jewish identity.
SECTION I: Establishing the Organ Precedent: The German Cases

Positionality and Power among Maskilim: A Historical Context for the Organ Debate

Israel Jacobson, a wealthy German maskil, became concerned with the religious schism between the indifference of the cultured Jews and the rest who “[observed] traditional forms which however religiously significant they may once have been, had lost much of their former power to impress.” With wealth came political prestige, and King Jerome, Napoleon’s brother who “wanted easy and efficient centralized control over a maximally integrated Jewish population,” made Jacobson head of a Jewish Consistory in the Kingdom of Westphalia in 1808. In his position as head of the Westphalian Jews, Jacobson followed Mendelssohn’s emphasis on a well-rounded secular education and opened a school for Jewish children in the capital city of Cassel, combining secular knowledge with the moral and ritual underpinnings of Judaism. The services held in the school’s chapel, which “met with such favor,” included vernacular readings of the prayers and scripture and congregational hymn singing.

Jacobson also built a synagogue in Cassel in 1810 that included an organ and exemplified those reforms he deemed necessary to aestheticize worship throughout Westphalia. As Goldberg explains, “Protestantism provided the aesthetic norms[,] German prayers, an organ, and hymns,” which replaced the standards of worship found wanting “against the modern standards of the non-Jewish world.” Through these reforms, Jacobson attempted to strike a balance between tradition and modernization, and while he had the inclination, intelligence, and means to work for religious progress, he lacked the overarching scholarly and philosophical background to accomplish his goal.
Although Jacobson thought these reforms were the key to revitalizing the service, he did not realize that there was a larger philosophical issue among maskilim involving a souring attitude toward the rabbinic claim to their legislative mandate.  

The Kingdom of Westphalia and the Jewish Consistory fell with Napoleon’s defeat and the Treaty of Paris, and Jacobson subsequently relocated to Berlin. Upon his move to the Prussian capital, Jacobson initiated similar reforms to those made in Cassel. Because he did not have a system of synagogues under his control, he gathered a group of like-minded Jews and opened his home to them for services. When the liturgically-reformed services, which included organ accompaniment, grew to include roughly four hundred people on some Shabbats, the reformers chose to move their services to the larger home of Jacob Herz Beer. These private services continued, with some gaps, until 1823 when the Prussian king Frederick William III finally succeeded in closing the Beer synagogue. He feared that a new, reformed Jewish sect might attract Christians or reduce the number of fully acculturated Jews, who were generally targets for conversion by Christian missionaries. Through this action, the king sought to drive reformers back to the traditionalist services they no longer enjoyed, imploring “that the divine services of the Jews must be conducted in accordance with the traditional ritual and without the slightest innovation in language, ceremonies, prayers, or songs.” Although reform in Berlin appeared to be a failure, maskilim throughout Europe took notice of the success and popularity of the private, reformed services.

Edward Kley, previously a preacher in Beer’s synagogue, moved to Hamburg in 1817 and in organizing the community’s maskilim, transformed the debates between reformers and traditionalists from private grumblings into public vitriol. In December of
that year, Kley and the young Hamburg maskilim founded a congregation that sought to “restore dignity and meaning to Jewish worship … by the recitation of some prayers in the vernacular, by a German sermon, and by choral song with organ accompaniment.”

Following Christian models, they erected a balcony in the rear of the sanctuary with space for both an organ and choir, whereas the private synagogues kept their organs on the ground floor. The congregation attracted “Jews who had not visited a synagogue for fifteen years,” demonstrating the success of this new model for sustaining a Jewish identity for maskilim. Perhaps aware that Shabbat organ use came close to violating Jewish law, Jacob Herz Beer commissioned Eliezer Lieberman to collect t’shuvot (rabbinic opinions) from European rabbis confirming the legality of the organ use and other practices of reform. Lieberman, an Austrian legal scholar with reform sympathies, compiled the t’shuvot into a book he titled Nogah haTzedek (The Radience of Righteousness) and published his own defense of reform entitled Or Nogah (Radient Light). Traditionalists responded vehemently to both works in a compilation of twenty-two t’shuvot entitled Eleh Divrei haBrit (These Are The Words of the Covenant).

Before examining the t’shuvot further, it would help to further contextualize the maskilim and their difficult negotiation of the Protestant-dominated world they wished to enter and the traditional patterns of Jewish life they had to leave behind. Jews seeking to retain their Jewish identity while existing in an urban environment faced the challenge of proving to themselves that sustained connection to Judaism was still relevant in a world of business opportunities, scientific inquiry, and bourgeois sensibility. Urban Jews’ declining ability to pray and read scripture in Hebrew was one reason for Mendelssohn and others to write a Torah commentary in a vernacular German, yet written in Hebrew
characters. Mendelssohn also "hoped that his translation would enable German Jews 'to understand sayings of wisdom [and they] may go and seek the word of the Lord without [relying on] the translations of Christian scholars.'"\textsuperscript{30} By weaving famous Jewish commentaries into the text, Mendelssohn was able to produce a new, elegant "vernacular translation that would preserve in some form a Jewish outlook on the text, repossessing it for Jews and reclaiming it for Judaism."\textsuperscript{31} When \textit{maskilim} uneducated in the intricacies of the Hebrew language wanted to learn scripture, they did not need to look toward a Protestant translation containing a theologically Christian bias; they could learn from a translation written expressly for a Jewish sensibility.

The Jewish difficulty in carving out a niche in the \textit{haskalah} stemmed from difficult issues of positionality, including assimilation into the urban, national setting, maintenance of their sense of belonging, and the feeling of being increasingly disconnected from traditionalism or orthodoxy. Although Nicholas Till argues that the public domain of the new nationalism was, in theory, "free of the partisanship of politics, religion or class," the reality suggests that this neutral public sphere still contained religious symbolism of the dominant Protestant culture.\textsuperscript{32} Affected by the latent religious symbolism, reforming Jews began to emulate the architectural model of churches as a means of promoting their own status and integrating into the public sphere.\textsuperscript{33}

Toleration initiated by Joseph II and Napoleonic civics did lead to more Jewish freedom, but with the fall of Napoleon, European powers lapsed into old patterns of behavior toward the Jews as informed by centuries of perceiving the Jew as "Other." For over a millennium, Catholic and then Protestant theology presented the Jew as this Other—a perpetual example of what happens to those who do not accept Jesus. This theology
vilified the Jews on the corporate level even as churchgoers might patronize, or have a meaningful relationship with, individual Jews in their communities.\textsuperscript{34} Political law, tended to follow in the spirit of the ecclesiastical teachings against Jews. As Jeremy Cohen notes, “Christians saw a definite need and place for the Jews” in that they acted as living witnesses to the “historical basis for christological prophecy” and to the “deplorable wretchedness of their error” such that they will ultimately accept Christianity before the end of days.\textsuperscript{35} Jews were not to be exterminated like the practitioners of the indigenous European religions; they were to be protected and kept in a lower social standing—tolerated yet subjected to humiliation and conversion attempts with the expectation that the eventual conversion of the Jews would lead to the Second Coming.

For a Jew to convert, however, he had to disavow all ties with his community of birth. Reformers avoided such a drastic step by finding a middle ground that would preserve Jewish forays into the public—and predominantly Christian—spheres of business and commerce. By altering some Jewish practices—instituting order and decorum, edifying vernacular sermons, shorter services—reformers could buttress themselves against total assimilation by maintaining important Jewish cultural connections. Moreover, emulating Protestant models naturally alleviated fear of an Other, leading to increased Jewish acceptance in the Protestant context. Synagogues began to take on the imposing characteristics of some churches. Jews commissioned organs to bring sonority to services and curtail the vanity of a hazzan. Hybridizing worship by attempting to provide an experience closer to that of the Christian served two purposes. First, updating Jewish practice ameliorated the disaffection of some Jews to their faith, causing potential converts to rethink a total withdrawal from their communities and thus
preserve a larger Jewish communal identity. Second, from a non-Jewish perspective, Jews began to look less like an Other and more like any other Protestant sect. By lessening their negative theological perception, Jews attempted to make inroads into centers of power and culture by differentiating their public and private roles so as to ease individual relationships with Christian neighbors and businessmen. Due to these acts, *maskilim* cultivated a tense relationship with traditionalists even as they prayed in unified communities. The two parties’ ideologies were shifting apart, but before the desire to employ an organ in worship catalyzed a debate, the two sides lacked enough of an ideological disjunction to warrant a break. *Maskilim* had no desire to continue the old modes of worship and practice in which they saw cacophony and atrophy.

At the same time, the vehemence of the traditionalists’ response in *Eleh Divrei haBrit*, the collected *t’shuvot* against the changes made in the Hamburg Temple, betrays a deeper history of social, political, and religious factors than one might expect from a simple legal disagreement. The tradition of rabbinic study and law making that had dominated Ashkenazic communities had generated an insurmountable mass of law, opinion, and debate that was impossible to master. In the socio-political hierarchies of the Jewish community, the learned rabbi and his students constituted the upper classes; study was the spiritual means to reach God. Everyone in the community was expected to study, but only those with the means to devote a lifetime to studying the texts and grasping sections of law led the community. This spurred an increasing distance between rabbis who legislated and everyday Jews who had to focus on making a living; as a result many Eastern European Jews were drawn to the Hasidic movement, which taught that a connection to God came from personal, ecstatic devotion over a life dedicated to study.
City *maskilim*, on the other hand, tended to leave the study and practice of Judaism for the new opportunities afforded them through integration into urban life.

The objections from the traditionalist rabbis in *Eleh Divrei haBrit* stem from the legal mindset of these rabbis, who were distant from the rest of their communities and attempting to preserve the traditions of Judaism amidst Enlightenment realities. The only formal means they had to accomplish this preservation was through legal arguments founded in centuries of text, commentaries, and precedent. The rabbis considered the study of religious law to be the highest form of divine service. Rabbinic tradition also asserted their legislative authority by claiming an unbroken chain of their teachers back to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Given that rabbinic law and tradition is imbued with divine, Mosaic authority, violating these laws almost equates to breaking a commandment found in the Torah. Therefore, mustering legal arguments for or against reform contains overtones of God’s approval or disapproval. *Maskilim* bristled at the rabbinic practice of asserting divine authority through religio-legal arguments and defining an objective moral and spiritual superiority. When Jacob Herz Beer asked for *t’shuvot* justifying the organ, he requested the same types of religio-legal arguments, not to assert a divine authority but to argue for reform in a language with which traditionalists could identify.

And yet, the vigorous character of the traditionalists’ legal responses projects something more than a warning against transgression. Before the Enlightenment, the rabbi was the leader of his community in the eyes of both Jews and outside leaders and as such, was responsible for collecting the annual religion tax assessed the community by the landholder. The rabbi was the centerpiece for communal sanctity and solidarity. When Enlightenment rulers demolished the ghettos and allowed integration, they became
wary of allowing the rabbis too much non-governmental authority over a subset of the populace. They removed the rabbinic authority to excommunicate and, as stated previously, some states removed rabbinic control over practice entirely, granting it to the head of every household. In short, rabbis were losing control over their communities.

When presented with legal defenses of the organ and other reforms found in Nogah haTzedek and Or Nogah, the traditionalists had specific legal arguments to refute. Through their preferred form of discourse, they channel their frustrations over relaxed practice and/or loss of identity, their own loss of communal control, and the growing influence of ‘secular’ nationalism.

This historical and cultural background provides the subtext and intentionality behind the subsequent “organ conflict” in Germany. Maskilim had created a hybrid identity, derived from Protestant secularism and their own Judaism, to seek entry into a society that still viewed them as an Other. Given that traditionalists invested rabbinic thought with the weight of spiritual, moral, and communal authority, an inevitable conflict arose between the two centers of power: one sacred and the other secularizing. However, maskilim did not necessarily seek a complete break with tradition, and took halting steps to reconnect reformed practices—altered purely for a modern aesthetic—with religious validation. Ironically, they justified these steps using the traditionalists’ language and respect for precedent in law with which they disagreed.
Early German T'shuvot: Hamburg

In Nogah haTzedeck, Or Nogah, reformers argued that it was acceptable for a gentile to play the organ for Shabbat and weddings. In Eleh Divrei haBrit, traditionalists disagreed using strong polemics so as not to yield to the reformers’ corrupting ideas and practices. The competing sets of t’shuvot drew from several types of sources to justify their arguments. Carrying the most weight in argumentation are the verses found in the Written Torah (Five Books of Moses) and to a lesser degree the books of Prophets and Writings. The next authoritative source is the Talmud, which contains the Oral Torah and several layers of discussion and law following it. Following these classical sources are legal compendia such as Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah and Josef Caro’s Shulchan Arukh with a gloss by Moses Isserles.

Between the three compilations there are several core issues that structure the basic shape of the debate. The first dealt with whether the organ could be considered a “Christian instrument,” given its widespread use within European churches. If the organ were considered Christian, the reformers would have to negotiate a major legal injunction against imitating the worship of the pagans’ strange gods (Avodah Zarah). However, evidence in the Talmud suggesting a proto-organ used in the ancient Temple overrides the identification of the organ as solely a “Christian” instrument. Another debated principle involved a ban on instrumental music out of mourning for the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. As mentioned previously, both reformers and traditionalists used the Prague organ as precedent to support their side. The Prague community used an organ prior to the liturgical beginning of Shabbat and, as the practice was fully accepted at the time, traditionalists were hard-pressed to refute the precedent. Finally, the
arguments dealt with the definition of Shabbat as a day of rest and whether the playing of an instrument fell under the legal definition of work forbidden on the holy day.

The reformers first attempted to claim that the Temple used an early form of the organ, which would serve as a very strong precedent supporting its use in synagogues.\(^3\) It argued further that the organ was not “explicitly” a Christian instrument because not all churches used them. If it were explicitly a Christian instrument, it would be banned according to the biblical verse, “You shall not walk in their ways.”\(^4\) This verse in Torah serves as a legal basis for non-assimilation and differentiation from non-Jews in the vicinity. The reformer Aaron Chorin argued that this injunction only applied contextually to those practices that were intrinsically idolatrous or which facilitated and contributed to idolatry. Following a pagan practice that enhanced the glory of God was not prohibited and, therefore, employing the organ was permitted. Chorin reasoned further that the “Christian” organ was not a forbidden instrument of pagan idolatry because post-Talmudic commentators considered Christians to be “less pagan” due to monotheistic similarities. Therefore, the organ was permissible.\(^5\) Most traditionalists disagreed with Chorin about the Temple’s proto-organ, disregarded his logic regarding pagan worship, and reiterated the extent to which the organ was associated with Christian worship at the time. One traditionalist made the unverifiable claim that proto-organs were placed in pagan temples for the express purpose of worship, thereby placing its appropriation in direct violation of “you shall not walk in their ways.”

Chorin acknowledged that music was banned out of mourning for the destruction of the Second Temple, but cited an important commentator who reasoned that “musical accompaniment was permitted for the sake of observing a commandment” like public
prayer. One traditionalist rabbi "conceded the point that there was some traditional legal justification for permitting the organ to be employed in a synagogue service." However, he continued that the exception to the ban should not be extended beyond vocal music given that "in our generation...where the lawless among our people have publicly increased...and where many publicly profane the Sabbath, we have no right at all to permit such a thing." This line of reasoning represents the traditionalists attempt to define a boundary that would separate them unequivocally from the reformers.

Finally, Chorin addressed the fact that there were communities (referring to Prague) that had used an organ during Friday evening worship. Reformers considered this precedent, uncontested in its time, to give considerable weight to their arguments given the legal saying, "the custom of the people Israel is Torah [law]." The Prague community was not a reform-minded congregation and their acceptance of the practice created a powerful precedent for reformers that the traditionalist rabbis could not ignore. One traditionalist attempted to limit the scope of the precedent by stressing that the practice happened in only one synagogue and should not apply to all of European Jewry. Another claimed that the Prague community had acted in error, due to their false understanding that the organ was used in the Temple, and called their use of the organ "an erroneous custom." Traditionalist rabbis also raised a further, important, Talmudic point of logic explaining that the organ's use violated the Shabbat ban on work. The Talmud argued that if an instrument broke while in use on Shabbat, one would be tempted to fix it immediately. Because acts of repair are forbidden as work on Shabbat, any instrument was categorically banned from Shabbat worship.
As the traditionalists countered the reformers’ arguments, they employed polemic and acerbic language in their *t’shuvot*. One rabbi explained that the authors of *Nogah ha’Tzedek* were the “wicked of the earth,” and the book itself was an “evil darkness” spouting “devilish lies.” Multiple rabbis dismissed Aaron Chorin in particular for mediocre scholarship and attacked his character as a way of delegitimizing his arguments. One rabbi even declared the entire Hamburg congregation to be neither Christians nor Jews. In the face of what they considered rampant transgression of the law, the rabbis exclaimed that Jews were categorically forbidden to change liturgy, prayer language, or to add instrumental music in any way. In some measure, the traditionalists’ harsh language served to accomplish their goal; musicologist Tina Frühauf argues that the tone of the traditionalist response was enough to prevent “other Jewish congregations in the subsequent three decades [from following] the Hamburg model.” Although other congregations chose not to adopt the organ in the period between the ‘Hamburg debate’ and the Frankfurt decision, the former inspired some Jewish lay leadership to embrace radical positions that threatened even the more reform-minded rabbis. Going so far as to propose moving Shabbat to Sunday, these lay leaders only had assimilation in mind and little regard for Jewish tradition. Rabbis who had advocated for reform were now in the position of trying to slow the rush of progress.

*The Frankfurt Organ T’shuvah*

Beginning in 1844, Reform-minded leaders met in a series of three conferences to discuss a system of principles and to provide a Jewish, legal justification for reformed practices. In 1845, during the second conference in Frankfurt, these rabbis took up the
issue of music in the synagogue. They endorsed Leopold Stein’s *t’shuvah* wherein he argued for the organ’s use in worship by methodically refuting the main points of legal disagreement expressed in *Eleh Divrei haBrit*. Moreover, Stein suggested that employing a Jew to play the organ was preferable to a Gentile, a point that went beyond the opinion of *Or Nogah* and *Nogah haTzedek*.

In his *t’shuvah* Stein began by determining whether instrumental worship was admissible in a worship context. He established that instrumental music was prescribed for the sacrifices in the Temple as described in the *Tanakh* and elaborated on in the *Talmud*. At the same time, Stein acknowledged the prohibition on music due to mourning for the Temple. He resolved this problem by reiterating Aaron Chorin’s argument that music was allowed for fulfilling a commandment like that of public prayer. Citing the incorporation of the organ in Prague and elsewhere, the *t’shuvah* continued, “music has entered the dwellings of even the most pious Israelite so generally, that to doubt the music is admissible in the synagogue would be to put [music] into the crassest contradiction with all else.”

The next item addressed was whether the organ was admissible in synagogue given its widespread use in church. Stein again followed Chorin, arguing that an object of the pagans, if not used in close connection with “foreign worship,” can be appropriated for Jewish use. Additionally, because Christians are not pagans, more leniencies could be applied regarding appropriation of their customs. In terms of admissibility into the synagogue the *t’shuvah* concluded that, “there seems no reason that we could not imitate so beautiful a custom as the elevation of the worship service through instrumental music.”

Stein next tackled the issue of the organ’s connection to work on Shabbat. Traditionalists cited the aforementioned Talmudic argument that playing instruments on Shabbat is prohibited on the grounds that if one breaks an instrument, he would have the impulse to illegally fix it on Shabbat. Stein argued more pragmatically that the organ player most likely did not have the skills to fix an organ immediately, given the complexity of the instrument. Any repairs would therefore have to occur after Shabbat. Moreover he added that due to the very setting of the worship service, if the organist were to attempt to fix the organ in purposeful or inadvertent violation of the law, then the congregation could warn the organist to stop. For Stein, these arguments were sufficient to mitigate the rabbinic risk assessment for repairing an instrument on Shabbat and to allow its use for worship.

Stein went one step further than the allowances in *Nogah haTzedek* and *Or Nogah*, which indicated that gentiles be the one to play the organ for services. He claimed alternatively, “it is a duty to arrange the beautification of the worship service through a coreligionist.” Rabbis writing *t’shuvot* for *Eleh Divrei haBrit* seemed to agree with Stein: if playing the organ were permissible, then the organist should be Jewish. As Stein indicated, “The right kind of organist must be thoroughly suffused by the spirit of worship which he attempts to elevate.” Stein concludes that by adding an organ, “the observance of the Sabbath...can only gain through the added beautification of the worship service, and especially so in rural communities which are unable to maintain a choir. There the organ will render manifold services as a means of elevating the worship service and exalting the soul on festive days.”
Stein's position formed the essential core of reformist attitudes toward the organ use. This and the other reform positions taken by rabbis at these conferences of rabbis began to define a movement ideologically and the figures involved with the conferences became the movement's leaders. The conferences defined the nascent ideas of reform and brought the movement from its impasse with traditionalists to the point of denominational schism. At this point, many religious leaders, who were either immersed in reform ideology or the ideologues themselves, began to migrate to the United States and took full advantage of the religious freedoms in their new country.
Why Charleston? The Roots of Reform in America

Upon his American arrival in the 1840s, close to two hundred years after the first Jewish community establishments, Isaac Mayer Wise explained his perspective on the role the parnass (Jewish community lay leader) played in early American communities.

At that time the parnass was an autocrat in the congregation. He was president, shamash, chazan, rabbi. He ruled the quick and the dead. He was the law and the revelation, the lord and the glory, the majesty and the spiritual guardian of the congregation. He suffered no rival; all were subject to him. This was an inheritance from olden times, brought to these shores from the small European congregations.⁶⁵

Wise, educated in the latest German trends of reform, arrived in America as one of the first rabbis and saw the status of reform in America as a work in progress compared to what he had left in Germany. And yet, America had a freedom and openness that pre-dated and rivaled that of any European power. While reform had not yet flourished as in the temples of the German maskilim, the seeds had been sown a few decades prior in the Jewish community of Charleston, SC. Charleston specifically bears consideration as its debates over reform policies and organ use preceded the Frankfurt organ i’shuvah and the mass immigration of German reformers who set American Reform Judaism in motion.

While European countries continued to segregate Jews and limit their social and economic opportunities, Jews in the colonies enjoyed greater freedoms. As a people constituting less than 0.1% of the colonial population, “Jews [were] never openly denied the right to strike roots” in America.⁶⁶ While only 250 Jews lived in the colonies in 1700, they had already won the rights of residency, trade, land ownership, and religious freedom that still eluded European Jews. By 1740, England’s imperial naturalization law had granted Jews almost unlimited economic opportunity and full civil equality.
throughout the British Empire. As a result, Jews had the same legal rights as anyone to make a living, and many Jews used this opportunity to enter the economic world of mercantilism.

As members of a broadly defined middle-class, many Jews opened shops and, if successful, expanded to become merchants, a position by which they achieved a modicum of societal power and influence inherent to business connections. Although corporate anti-Judaism was certainly a reality, The rabbi-historian Jacob Marcus argues that it did not necessarily extend to the individual context, given that Jews enjoyed business success in great disproportion to their place in the population. He notes that Jews did not achieve these gains by owning a business that served an insular community; rather, “the Jewish businessman prospered...because the Gentiles patronized him.” In fact, German Jews had experienced the same phenomenon; Jacob Herz Beer could not have built his lucrative sugar refinery business had non-Jewish clientele not patronized him. Marcus also points out that the “Christian drama of salvation – a drama in which the Jew played the villain – was not dominant in moulding [sic] public opinion in the colonies” by virtue of the tolerance brought by religious, ethnic, and national diversity. Consequently “the Jew did not stand out too conspicuously.”

The Jews that arrived from “small towns of pre-industrial Europe...[made] no sharp distinction between the religious and the secular” in fashioning a life in the New World. Most immigrants were inclined toward observance and upon obtaining a minyan (prayer quorum) they would buy a burial plot and make arrangements for a center of worship. Mandatory membership in a community headed by Wise’s parnass was prohibited by American civil law but made compulsory by social pressure. Religious
leadership in the forms of rabbi or hazzan was less important to communities with members educated enough to lead community worship, given that men looking for mercantile success had less need for a locus of rabbinic scholarship and authority.

Given the openness of American society to Jews and the lack of rabbinic figures reminding the community of tradition, the question remains as to why Jews did not assimilate more fully. Certainly, one factor was America's birth under the philosophical banner of the Enlightenment — “equality and justice for all.” In a country where each individual reserves the right to make their own living, where individual liberties matter, leaders realized that a society based on freedom of speech, religion, and assembly provided a basis from which to grow. Marcus explains, “the typical colonial Jew was true to his heritage was because he was not pressed to be untrue to it. There was no overwhelming, monochromatic culture here to force itself upon him. There was no national ethos to exact conformity of him.”

Regarding the European context, this statement can be interpreted in two ways: that the European traditionalists tried to force conformity on a cultural-religious level and that European nationalism forced either Jewish insularity or total acculturation. Conversely, America did not force openness, and therefore American Jews could acculturate at a natural rate — “almost unwittingly and without hesitation” — while maintaining their communal religious ties easily through their connection with a congregation.

Charleston, South Carolina and the Beginnings of Reform

James Hagy has asked why Jewish reforms began in Charleston and not another city in America, a question to which there is no simple answer. Certainly, the ideals of
America’s founding affected all of the country, and news from Europe about reforms in Judaism may have sparked interest. Most likely, the largest contributing factor was the equity Jews had with the rest of Charleston’s population. Jews, as members of the middle- and upper-class, owned businesses, plantations, and held public office. Hagy postulates, “Perhaps the best example of Jewish participation in life in Charleston is provided by the Masons.”

In 1783, Isaac DaCosta was the first known Jewish member of a Charleston Masonic lodge. In 1801, “four of the nine founding members of the Supreme Council of Scottish Rite Masonry were Jewish.” Despite the fact that the Masons only religious requirement was possession of monotheistic belief, that so many Jews were involved spoke to their status in the community. Finally, reform required a sizable population to generate a critical mass that would support different communal ideologies. Prior to the influx of German immigrants in the 1840s, Charleston had the largest, most cultured, and wealthiest Jewish community in the United States.

The Anglican context of Charleston also parallels the Jewish community as both communities looked toward England for guidance. The Anglican Church considered colonial churches to be mission churches and nominally organized them under the Bishop of London who had responsibility over his own local parishes. The disinterest of the busy London-based bishop led the unsupervised colonial Anglicans to adapt traditions in the Church of England to colonial realities. Upon severing ties with the Anglican Church after the Revolution, the new American Episcopalians found they could “alter the old traditions to better suit American ideals and practices.” Charleston’s Kaali Kadosh Beth Elohim (KKBE) sought help from the London community of Bevis Marks whenever
the congregation needed a specialized rabbinic opinion or a qualified prayer leader. The colonial Anglican phenomenon was similar to some reforms of American Jews; when separated from a structure of religious authority, they adapted without scandal and created worship reforms that would have been considered controversial in Germany.

As a minority in the overwhelming Charleston societal culture of trade, slavery, and Anglicanism, one problem for Jews was preserving and perpetuating the traditional forms of Jewish ritual and the concept of communal sanctity. "They remained committed unquestioningly to the institutional structures brought over from the Old World, however their members may have privately varied from them." In 1749, Charleston Jews created KKBE as a religious society and set up a rigid structure of rules within their constitution to mandate order within the community. The community's parnass tended to enforce community rule through fear of a complex system of fines, which may have been what Isaac Mayer Wise meant when referring to him as an autocrat in keeping with Old World structures. Another problem arising from the perpetuation of Old World structures was the mode of service worship, which led to early struggles in KKBE over liturgical models between the Sephardim and the newly arriving Ashkenazim. Similar to Germany, Jewish worship models seemed out of keeping with the well-choreographed and decorous proceedings of the Anglican setting as Samuel Gilman, a Charleston minister, observed when he wrote a description of a synagogue scholars believe was KKBE. He specifically critiqued widespread disorganization and indecorous nature of the worship in comparison to the Christian worship to which he was accustomed.

The congregation's adherence to traditional forms constituted an attempt to maintain the internal structure of the community. Individuals, however, were susceptible
to changing attitudes derived from the “the ideas of Locke, the Enlightenment, the...Constitution, ...Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, ...Romanticism,” and Protestantism. This American Zeitgeist, imbuing individuals within the community with the spirit of change, meant that the community could not sustain the same separation that the German traditionalists enjoyed between urban and religious. As a result, the contrast in practice between KKBE and Charleston’s Anglican context softened. Their synagogue, built in 1794 in the Georgian style resembled a church, and the clergy took on the title Reverend underscoring their increased similarity to Protestant pastoral roles. The worship service had already been translated into English for a Charleston-wide orphanage dedication, the congregation adopted communal singing, and the service included an edifying English speech. Lastly, the hazzan of the congregation introduced a choir and was suspended from his job when he tried to discontinue the practice; clearly the congregation had no problem with non-traditional and/or appropriated elements in their services. Although Charleston’s Jews made these minor changes in response to the Anglican context, they followed larger patterns of ritual adherence even as they lacked the grounding in traditional law provided by a rabbi.

The Reformed Society of Israelites

Like the German maskilim, some members of KKBE were concerned with the number of Jews in Charleston who did not belong to the congregation because they felt no connection to the services of the kind described by Samuel Gilman. Feeling this lack of connection, some members of KKBE and even some non-members signed onto a petition that they sent to the parnass of KKBE for review.
The petitioners wanted important portions of the prayer repeated in English for the edifying benefit of those who did not understand the Hebrew. They believed that if congregants understood what they prayed, comprehension would cause the laxities in decorum to decrease. They also thought that adding an English sermon “for the purpose of disseminating the peculiar tenets of their faith among the poor and uniformed” would lead to the “improved habits and attention of the younger branches of the congregation.”

The petition next spoke to the “absolute necessity of abridging the service generally” and reiterated that those portions which would be retained should be repeated in English translation. Another grievance the petitioners had was non-liturgical; they asked for an end to soliciting donations for synagogue honors. The petition explained “a number of Israelites... are now wandering gradually from the true God,” and recommended that reforming the “present form of worship to suit their comprehensions” would bring them back to the congregation.

After citing examples of worship reforms in Germany, the petition concluded,

> Let us then hasten to the task with harmony and good fellowship. We wish not to overthrow, but to rebuild; we wish not to destroy, but to reform and revise the evils complained of; we wish not to abandon the institutions of Moses, but to understand and observe them; in fine, we wish to worship God, not as slaves of bigotry and priestcraft, but as the enlightened descendants of that chosen race.

Such suggestions fell on deaf ears, however, and the board dismissed the petition out of hand.

The board dedicated itself to maintaining traditional forms of worship and would not have been sympathetic to the adoption of any reform. The petition itself asked for an extensive amount of reform especially in the request to shorten the service. The conclusion of the petition, while seemingly conciliatory to the wishes of the board, was
an affront to the traditionalist elements in KKBE given its inflammatory character, and betrayed the reformers sensibilities. The phrase “slaves of bigotry and priestcraft” is in direct reference to the reformers’ aversion to the system of law set down by the rabbis of the Talmud and later commentators, which they saw as a bigoted system with attitudes held over from the corruption of the Temple’s priestly caste. Shortening the service, which removes those liturgical additions by the medieval rabbis, combined with the offensive phrases constituted a strong polemic against halakha and rabbinic traditions. Because there were so few voting members supporting the petition, the traditionalist board dismissed it via a constitutional technicality that required a petition of two-thirds of the members to call a meeting about constitutional review.

Having received news of the rejected petition, the concerned members created the Reformed Society of Israelites (RSI) on 16 January 1825. Isaac Harby, a prominent American journalist served as an intellectual force behind the RSI. From the outset, they did not intend to be in direct competition with KKBE or create any denominational schism; rather they hoped to effect change in KKBE from the outside by acting as a separate entity to further their goal. The RSI initially followed a similar model to a German reform society (Kultusverein) before its members chose to create a congregation. The society posed ideas in ways analogous to the modern think-tank by sharing ideas via correspondence committee and looking for supporters of their revolutionary ideas. Thus the society wedded German models of reform with American institutions of change; the correspondence committee “was modeled after the Committees on Correspondence of the 1770’s [sic], which had striven to advance the cause of the American Revolution.”
After KKBE made no sign of altering their practice according the wishes of the reformers, the leadership of RSI gave into its more radical members’ demands for a separate reform community. Separation from the KKBE community went against the stated purpose of the RSI as stated in its first anniversary addresses, in which Harby explained, “the society did not seek to create a new sect, but to improve Judaism by throwing ‘away Rabbinical interpolations.’”

In the fall of 1826, a year and a half after the inception of the Society, the leaders decided to take out an advertisement in the newspaper soliciting funds for a new temple. The attempt to build a new synagogue marked a significant step away from KKBE especially as it denoted a loss of burial rights in KKBE’s cemetery for those members of RSI. The reformers also designed a new liturgy in English to fulfill their desire for a shorter, intelligible worship service that incorporated specific places to insert a sung hymn in English.

At some point, RSI’s activities peaked and then lost its momentum. Due to an economic downturn in the late 1820s, Harby and other knowledgeable, dynamic members left Charleston for opportunities in the North and the society struggled to attract new members from KKBE. Whether because of “increasing rifts between families because of religious differences, …the desire for a permanent house of worship, [or]…burial privileges,” the members of RSI began to return to KKBE. Eventually, in 1833, the society disbanded and donations for the new synagogue were returned with interest. The reforming urge did not end with the society, however, and the subsequent revision of the KKBE constitution called for the hazzan to be fluent enough in English to offer a sermon and prayer to God in the vernacular, as well as an end to the questionable practice of soliciting donations during the service.
Organ Controversy and Lawsuit

After recovering from the financial troubles sustained by the attrition of members to RSI, KKBE looked to engage the services of a hazzan that was professionally trained to lead services. Even though the traditionalists in KKBE made compromises for reformers in the congregation, they were wary of further reform and sought a hazzan who would reinvigorate the services to the highest standard of traditionalist practice. The traditionalist Isaac Leeser, the Philadelphia-based hazzan who Isaac Mayer Wise referred to as the “lumen mundi” of his time, recommended Gustavus Poznanski to serve in what was, at the time, the plum position for clergy. Poznanski was born in Poland and had spent time in Hamburg before immigrating to America, where he served as ritual slaughterer and assistant hazzan to a New York congregation. Upon his arrival to KKBE for his two-year probationary contract, his service leadership improved attendance, interest in learning Hebrew, and individual levels of ritual observances such that “the congregation elected him [hazzan] for life in May 1838—before his two-year probation period expired.” In April of the same year however, Charleston suffered a large fire that devastated many businesses and homes, with the synagogue completely destroyed. KKBE built a new sanctuary building using money from donations and insurance collections and dedicated it on 19 March 1841. The synagogue was laid out in the traditional Sephardic style, but the organ installed in the rear of the sanctuary “catapulted the congregation into a virulent struggle.”

Similar to Germany, buying an organ signified the extent to which reform had progressed in the congregation. Traditionalists fought against the organ as a violation of the ritual practice they sought to preserve. Poznanski, though he had spent time in
Hamburg with its clear history of reform in Jewish practice, was unsuspected as being a reformer; he had received a recommendation from his former congregation, Isaac Leeser, the traditionalist *parnass* of KKBE, and the congregation's investigative agents who had all attested to his traditionalism; the investigative agents found him to be a "rigid Rabbinist." The man who so pleased the traditionalists with his invigorating leadership surprised them by changing his mind during the synagogue construction.

As old members of RSI began to return to their former congregation, "rumors began to spread that [Poznanski] was in favor of instrumental music in the new synagogue." He had already instituted the unobjectionable reforms stressing greater order and decorum in services, but in 1839, he met with the traditionalist president to suggest the installation and use of an organ in the new synagogue. Apparently, Poznanski had a particular talent for music and became vested in improving its quality in services. Based on his experiences in Hamburg, he had to have realized the uproar an organ might cause in the community. One wonders whether he had a change of heart or whether he was secretly a reformer, biding his time in order to initiate those reforms he felt necessary.

Regardless of Poznanski's motives, thirty-eight voting members of KKBE sent the following favorable petition to the board: "[We] respectfully petition Your body, to call a General meeting of the congregation at the earliest and most convenient period you may deem proper...to discuss the propriety of erecting an organ in the synagogue to assist the vocal part of the service." The traditionalist president voted that the petition was unconstitutional on the grounds that any change to the manner of the service violated the first article of the constitution, indicating that the congregation would follow *minhag*
Sephardim (Spanish ritual custom), which did not allow the organ. And yet, the board realized that because of the large number of voting members who had signed the petition, the number of former RSI members who had returned to KKBE, and the rumored support of Poznanski, they could not brush it aside without a formal hearing, as they did the petition in 1824. Thus, they decided to call a congregational meeting for 26 July 1840 in an attempt to put the question to rest.

Scholarly review of the minutes of that meeting testifies to the intensity within the congregational factions that day. To begin with, the ninety voting members argued over the propriety of letting Poznanski speak on the organ. To some of the congregants’ surprise, Poznanski arrived to lend his support for the organ’s installation and answer questions before he requested to leave the discussion. Abraham Moise, a former leader of the RSI, put forward a resolution to buy and install an organ “to be purchased by voluntary contributions, and not drawn from congregational funds.” Moise must have understood that it would not be productive to suggest that the divided congregation purchase the object of contention. Despite such efforts, the parnass again ruled the resolution to be unconstitutional as a violation of minhag Sephardim. The reformers appealed the decision and, upon a congregational vote, overruled the president’s ruling forty-seven to forty. They then passed the resolution to procure an organ by a vote of forty-six to forty.

Shortly after the organ vote the traditionalist parnass, who was strongest voice of the opposing faction, died. Upon the election of the reformer Abraham Ottolengui as parnass, a position held for life, the traditionalists had little more recourse than to offer a resolution of protest and begin to pray in separate services. After a year, around the time
of the vote to install the newly purchased organ, the traditionalists left the congregation having rejected the idea of initiating legal proceedings. They named their new congregation Shearith Israel (Remnant of Israel). Charleston’s Jewish community would never be united again.

With the reformers in firm control of KKBE, Poznanski revealed his true colors as a reformer. He began to advocate for more radical reforms, causing a group of moderates to emerge from among the reformers in KKBE. They began to resist further changes in the services. When a position opened on the board, a moderate was narrowly elected giving a four-three advantage to the moderates even though the parnass, Ottolengui, was a reformer. This moderate majority on the board categorically refused any further innovations, even accusing Poznanski of introducing a new melody in the worship service and denying its singing even after a congregational petition to keep it. Tensions continued to build in the polarized community until the most conservative of the moderates asked Poznanski, “Where these changes were to end?” The hazzan replied “that he knew no stopping place to Reform in this enlightened age.” Disturbed by the answer, the moderate introduced a resolution worded to support a return to traditionalism. Although it was narrowly defeated, the moderates realized how close they were to obtaining a majority voice in the congregation.

After a meeting of the moderates, board members strategically decided to reach out to the traditionalists that had left the congregation for Shearith Israel (SI). The SI members agreed to rejoin KKBE in a moderate-traditionalist coalition on the condition that Poznanski be fired, the organ unused, and all reformed liturgy or ritual restored to its traditional form. The moderate board members then asked Ottolengui to convene the
board, which had the power to vote on readmitting the SI members. Suspecting what the moderate board members planned, Ottolengui managed to convene a congregational meeting and pass a resolution directing the *parnass* not to solicit the board until they demonstrated their readiness to conform to the majority opinion of the existing members of KKBE. After the moderates walked out in protest, the congregation passed a constitutional amendment allowing only the existing congregation the right to grant a new member the ability to vote.

Frustrated, the moderates sent Ottolengui a petition calling for a board meeting, which he dismissed. Ignoring the sole power of the *parnass* to call board meetings and the congregational resolution preventing temporarily preventing board meetings, the four-member majority of the board met to confer voting and non-voting status in KKBE upon forty-two men. This conference of voting rights was also in violation of the constitutional amendment approved in the aforementioned congregational meeting. At subsequent meetings, the traditionalist-moderate coalition voted to restore their vision of a traditionalist service without the organ. In protest, Ottolengui changed the locks to the gates and the organist refused to stop playing for Shabbat services, but these were just petty nuisances in comparison to the drawn out legal proceeding that was to follow.

Historian-rabbi Barnett Elzas seems to indicate that each side procured the best legal counsel money could buy to argue the case. In Charleston’s Court of Common Pleas, the traditionalists asserted that the organ and other changes made to ritual and creed were contrary to *minhag Sephardim* and the longstanding faith of Jews. The judge struck this specific piece of testimony “[citing] that it was immaterial before the court and would lead to the unnecessary discussion of religious details.” Traditionalists further
argued that because Ottolengui refused to hold a board meeting, the majority board members could convene their own. In response, the judge cited the KKBE constitution, which, barring illness or absence of the parnass, granted the parnass sole authority to convene the board. Finally, the traditionalists argued that in creating Shearith Israel, they had only temporarily withdrawn from KKBE and should be allowed unfettered readmission. The judge sent the question to a jury, who decided that the withdrawal constituted an official resignation from the congregation. The judge agreed with the ruling and therefore gave possession of KKBE back to the reformers.

The traditionalists appealed the decision to South Carolina’s Court of Appeals. In his opinion expressing the appellate court’s affirmation of the lower court’s ruling, Judge A. P. Butler observed that “a judicial magistrate is not very well qualified to give a definite and enforcible [sic] judgment on questions of theological doctrine, depending on speculative faith, or ecclesiastical rites,” especially when they cannot be agreed on by practitioners. He also indicated his inability to evaluate the traditionalists’ charge of heterodoxy against the reformers, but he did express his sympathies for change and difference in religious practice:

The granite promontory in the deep may stand firm and unchanged amidst the waves and storms that beat upon it, but human institutions cannot withstand the agitations of free, active and progressive opinion. Whilst laws are stationary, things are progressive. Any system of laws that should be made without the principle of expansibility, that would, in some measure accommodate them to the progression of events, would have within it the seeds of mischief and violence.... Minhag Separdm [sic] was a ritual of Spanish origin...If two Jewish congregations, one from Poland and the other from Spain, were to be brought together, whilst professing to be governed by the same rituals, they would probably find themselves unable to understand each other in their observances of them.”
While the first point is highly poetic and the second highly speculative, the argument stands that religious rituals are affected by the sociopolitical context of the worshipers.

As the case demonstrates, courts, especially as they exist in a land granting freedom of religion, could only address contract law as found in the KKBE constitution. Thus, A. P. Butler was not prepared to rule on a standard of religious practice and therefore reaffirmed the freedom for Jews to decide as a community their level of practice, and reaffirmed the individual’s freedom of association and personal belief.

Compared with the German context, the tension in these legal proceedings is analogous to the early t’shuvah debates in Hamburg, where reformers attempted to justify their practices and traditionalists argued that their practices lay outside a ‘unified’ Jewish communal practice. The reform rabbis learned, when they convened their reform-only conferences in the 1840s, that they could only achieve progress by acknowledging the inevitability of a denominational split in the community. The Stein t’shuvah addressed traditionalist concerns but was worded for the benefit of a reform-minded reader. American communities would come to a similar conclusion about the inevitability of a split in practice after it became clear that Charleston’s Jewish community would have to sustain two congregations. Instead of polarizing existing congregations, unified reformers had no difficulty forming “reform societies,” which turned into congregations after achieving the size and wealth required to build synagogues. In the end, the only question surrounding the subsequent installation of an organ concerned money.139
The Subsequent History of Liturgical Music

Charleston’s wealth and predominantly Anglican culture had a bearing on the musical content in Jewish services as well. Anglican parishioners have historically “had high expectations for their musicians, the resources to fund quality programs, and a cultural environment that appreciated and supported these programs.”¹⁴⁰ For various reasons, the Christian singing of hymns was considered “disappointing” without the aid of an “organ to accompany the psalms [which] helped to maintain the tempo and the pitch level, and kept the congregation on the correct tune.”¹⁴¹ Thus early on, Charleston developed a musical taste for their church music, confirming the additional benefit of employing a skilled organist to play a good organ.

American maskilim “steered their individual courses toward the model prescribed by the predominant religion of the American upper class... [and] the yearning to be part of the American religious landscape was particularly evident in the modernization of synagogue music.”¹⁴² KKBE reformers sought the order and decorum found in the services of their Anglican neighbors and, like the reformers in Germany, sought to emulate their musical practices. At the time of the Charleston organ controversy, the Frankfurt Commission decision was still four years away; therefore any justifying precedent from Europe came either from Hamburg dispute or the mere fact that congregations in Europe were using organs in worship.

Upon the 1840 congregational vote to purchase an organ using privately contributed funds, a few KKBE families joined together to form the Hebrew Harmonic Society, which purchased the organ and lent it to KKBE for installation and use during services.¹⁴³ They chose Henry Erben to build the organ they purchased for $2,500.¹⁴⁴
Erben, a New York-based organ builder in the English style, was known for his quality of manufacture in material choice and workmanship.\textsuperscript{145} Although his shop was in New York, he did a significant amount of business in the South, including Charleston.\textsuperscript{146} Erben had installed a $3000 organ of Charleston’s St. Philip’s around 1833 and by 1844 had installed a total of five organs in the city, including the one for KKBE.\textsuperscript{147} In a possible game of musical, religious, and cultural one-upsmanship, the Hebrew Harmonic Society sought to commission the same organ maker that the other Christian congregations had employed to fashion a large instrument for its time.\textsuperscript{148}

The Hebrew Harmonic Society paid a significant amount of the money for their instrument and received an organ exemplative of “the best of its era.”\textsuperscript{149} As outlined in Appendix A, the organ had three manuals as well as pedal and was capable of solo and accompanying roles.\textsuperscript{150} The ranks of fundamental flue pipes in the Great and Choir provided a strong basis for accompaniment. The Trumpet and Hautboy were reed stops, different in timbre from the flue stops, and could be used to add a brilliant color to an accompaniment.\textsuperscript{151} For solo, the Great contains the Sesquialtra and Cornet mixture stops, the latter of which particularly would be used in combination with the principal flue pipes to create a strong, well-rounded registration for a solo line. For more color, the twin stops Dulciana and Violana create the celeste effect achieved by pitching one rank of pipes slightly higher than its partner. When played in combination, the beats of destructive interference in the sound create a pleasing shimmer to liven the accompaniment.\textsuperscript{152}

The presence of the organ allowed other forms of synagogue music to flourish and augment the quality of the service. Unsurprisingly, Jews looked toward Protestantism for their models. Since before the time of the RSI, there was a history of Protestant-
influenced hymn singing in the congregation, and the 1825 RSI prayer book explicates reserved places for congregational singing. That the KKBE reformers wanted an organ indicates that there may have been places in Poznanski’s services that could have similarly benefitted. Penina Moise, the sister of one of the reformers and the protégé of Isaac Harby, “expressed her faith and values through numerous poems and hymns” she wrote for the congregation’s edification. Though there was no tradition of written hymns for American Jews at the time, she responded to the need for congregational song and reading in a new, reformed service by organizing a book of hymns for KKBE. Moise wrote all but the few hymns she had commissioned herself and the publication marked the first attempt to create an American hymnal for a reforming Judaism. Three subsequent editions were published throughout the nineteenth century and her works circulated throughout the Reform Jewish world for use in worship. KKBE also published an 1866 choir book with hymns written mostly by Penina Moise and set by the congregation’s first two organists. The other hymns were derivatives of those used in Hamburg, pointing to the transcontinental influence on American reform.

As reform in Judaism evolved structurally into a denominational Reform Judaism, leaders sought to create a standardized hymnal in 1897, which contained Moise’s hymns. They apparently were so popular that the 1946 hymnal retained eleven of her hymns for the collection. The 1897 hymnal incorporated these congregational hymn collections with works from secular composers like Mendelssohn, Beethoven, and Haydn, combined with settings by the famous cantor Alois Kaiser. "The musical style is European romantic, borrowed directly from the Protestant chorale traditions. The few Jewish motifs that do exist are successfully hidden harmonizations thoroughly embedded
in nineteenth-century secular music.” The hymnal is a testament to the Reform Jewish tendency to engage with the world around them, choosing a hybrid musical form that, at times, seems to align more with the prevailing Protestant tradition than retain a specific Jewish distinctiveness.

The role of KKBE’s synagogue organist is difficult to ascertain but can be extrapolated given that reformers wanted their musical tradition to be on par with their Christian neighbors. Clearly the organist played for congregational singing and may have also been expected to compose like KKBE’s organists, who wrote musical settings for Penina Moise’s hymns. They may have also been expected to play some sort of voluntary preceding or following the service and possibly during a silent prayer. To what extent Poznanski was accompanied by the organ during the internal prayers, scholars may only speculate.
CONCLUSION

As historian Michael Meyer explains, “in 1860 [Isaac Mayer] Wise could claim only a dozen ‘organ congregations’; eight years later there were more than thirty.” And yet, Meyer provides this statistic without any context for why the organ became such a dramatic symbol of reform. As this thesis demonstrates, structural similarities between the German and American histories of reform can shed light on the unexplained American proliferation of the organ. Thirty years after the vitriolic debates in Hamburg, the reformers who met in Frankfurt to discuss and approve reforms such as Leopold Stein’s t’shuva, tacitly acknowledged that they would neither sway traditionalists nor reconcile their ideals with the traditionalist view. Denominational separation would prove the only viable solution. In much the same way, the conflict in Charleston demonstrated to other American reformers that it was easier to create reform communities as separate from existing congregations. Whereas European Reform congregations continually struggled with Orthodox attacks even after the Stein t’shuva, the American spirit of religious plurality allowed these reform societies to obtain the necessary funding to build a synagogue and turn their fundraising efforts toward procuring an organ in order to properly elevate the mode of worship.

In addition to the thirty organ congregations in 1868, “Temple Emanu-El in New York could now boast an instrument said to be the largest in the country except for Musical Hall in Boston.” Isaac Mayer Wise’s own synagogue in Cincinnati, B’nai Yeshurun, had an instrument designed specifically for its function of accompaniment in the liturgy; its subtle range of colors were perfect for accompanying cantorial chant, congregational singing, and for voluntaries under silent prayer. The proliferation of
synagogue organs only increased as the country rebounded from the Civil War, and in 1875, reform congregations became denominationally incorporated into a Union for American Hebrew Congregations, which supported Reform Jewish congregations as a denomination separate from Orthodox traditionalists. The expansion of synagogal organs thus represents both a reason for, and a symbol of, the development of Reform Judaism from Germany to America.

The organ also became a symbol of status and wealth within the community at large. Charleston's Christian community had a cultured tradition of music in churches. The Hebrew Harmonic Society engaged in a competition to musically surpass the neighboring churches. They commissioned Henry Erben, the same man who had completed a Charleston organ by 1833 and four others by 1844, to design an instrument of high quality, capable of solo and accompaniment. Their choice in organ maker, given his history in the city, is enough to understand the status an organ had as a symbol of a religious community's wealth and station in the large Charleston community.

As this thesis demonstrates, the organ symbolized the hybridity of Jews who encountered and moved through urbanity, the modern public sphere, and the underlying Protestant culture in both the German and American contexts. The German organ debates in particular referred to the organ as a Christian instrument and despite arguments to the contrary, reformers could not effectively disassociate the organ from the church. Meyer agrees, maintaining that, "the organ was the element least susceptible to Judaization." And yet, despite these associations, the organ "became an integral component of liberal Jewish identity"; among all of the experiments of early American reform, the organ was
the common denominator between them and the most easily recognizable sign of reform to the congregation and the outside community.\footnote{167}

In their article “Theorizing the Hybrid,” Deborah Kapchan and Pauline Strong explain that most discussions of hybrid genres draw on Mikhael Bakhtin’s “notion of a genre as an expression of worldview and ideology.”\footnote{168} Scholars utilize his discussion of hybridization as an intentional or unintentional linguistic process, defined as “a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter...between two different linguistic consciousness [emphasis added].”\footnote{169} Kapchan and Strong also understand hybridity as a similar term to syncretism, which explains “why, in conditions of displacement and new contact, certain forms are carried over and others are lost.”\footnote{170} Anthropologist Melville Herskovits originally formulated the term to analyze an African religion melding indigenous and Christian beliefs and practices. He posited “a sort of magnet effect whereby African traditions most resembling those of the New World attract and adhere to each other, and are therefore maintained and elaborated, while those most different fall away.”\footnote{171} Syncretism highlights “adaptation, assimilation, and the reconciliation of cultures, rather than their plural coexistence.”\footnote{172} Used, in concert, syncretism is the process by which groups of people obtain a hybrid identity; Jews’ encounter with alternate cultural systems caused a syncretic fusion of two sets of traditions, into a singular, hybrid expression of religion and culture.

When juxtaposed with the question of the organ as a Christian instrument, the concept of hybridity, especially as informed by a definition of syncretism, does not accurately describe the Jewish organ phenomenon. Hybridity connotes a fusion of those traditional elements that fit best into the milieu and, conversely, elements from the
surrounding milieu that fit best into the existing tradition. American Jews were integrating themselves into a cultural context dominated by Protestantism, and at first glance, the appropriation of the organ would seem to fit a model of a hybrid syncretism with Christianity. However, the organ acts more as a cultural symbol of modernist hybridization than as a theological symbol of religious hybridization.

A model of a hybridized religion incorporates the fusion of both ritual and theological components between two religious systems. In both Christian and Jewish contexts of worship, the organ became a non-theological, ritual component; Jewish traditionalists felt justified in calling it a Christian instrument for the extent of its integration into church ritual, and they subsequently condemned what they perceived as a Jewish heterodox movement toward Christianity. And yet, the Jewish appropriation of the organ was more a matter of aesthetics or status, rather than a signifier of true hybridization with the Christian worship context. When one considers Jewish theological reforms taking shape during the organ debates, the heterodox movement of reform actually appears to distance itself from Christian theology. One divisive theological issue began as the reformers rejected the notion of an imminent redeemer in favor of an imminent redemption. Their altered messianic beliefs reflected a move away from a fundamental Christian principle to one more reflective of a modern sensibility. The assumption that Jewish ritual reforms reflected a desire to be more like Protestants requires reexamination when the accompanying theological reforms did not reflect that shift. When fundamental religious beliefs do not bend to the syncretic, hybridizing pressures of living in a Protestant milieu, it cannot be concluded that Jews were engaged in absolute theological hybridity with Christians.
Consequently, the organ, though it was closely associated with Christianity, did not function as a theologically Christian object of syncretism and hybridity. Instead, KKBE’s pursuit for Charleston’s best organ implies a definition of the organ as a symbol and tool of cultural hybridity more in dialogue with modernity than with Christianity. The Stein t’shuvah, in addressing the question of the organ as a Christian instrument, concludes that when non-Jewish objects do not have a direct function in the pagan sacrificial cult they can be adopted for use. Clothing from the surrounding culture can be appropriated as long as a Jew does not wear an article of clothing used by a priest in the service of his duties. Stein argued that cultural items, like the organ, which can serve to enhance Jewish worship, are eligible for appropriation. The organ does not play a primary liturgical role and can be removed from Christian worship without deleterious, theological effect. An organ only possesses a secondary function in the church service to facilitate order and structure in congregational participation, to offer meditative music, or even, as Bach and others demonstrated, to provide a basis for edifying sacred music. The accessory nature of organ’s liturgical function serves to undermine the possibility of an organ symbolizing religious hybridity.

The organ is more adept as a symbol of a modernist aesthetic, reflective of cultural hybridity between Christian and Jewish symbols of power and wealth. A shared cultural desire for a modern, heightened worship was musically manifested amidst burgeoning ideas that would spark the Enlightenment. Jewish congregations entering modernity sought to alter their own musical models to appeal to the modern and cultured taste of their congregants. Salomone Rossi mirrored Christian liturgical styles in providing his synagogue with polyphony set in Hebrew. Around the same time, Prague’s
wealthy community chose to use an organ in their services. Therefore, music, and the organ specifically, existed in the public sphere as a tool available for all to derive the same benefits. Although Christianity was often a driving force behind cultural taste, music’s universality must mitigate the perception of a Christian monopoly on the organ. Thus, the organ can be a symbol and tool of hybridity between religion and modernity, a correlation that fits more clearly with the ways that Judaism reformed amidst its Enlightenment encounter with modernism.

The reforms that Judaism did make during its formative years suggest a Jewish hybridity with modernism, a relationship reflected in the organ debates. In general, reforms tended toward establishing a personal understanding with tradition. The translation of the Bible for the Jewish audience, the repetition of the liturgy in the vernacular, and the introduction of an edifying sermon all point to a dialogue between the ideas and practices of Judaism and modern access and fluency. Although the reformers did (and still do) express their t’shuvot in terms of the precedent of prior rabbinic tracts, they perceived the superstition within early writings to be in conflict with Enlightenment rationalism and, as such, dismissed adherents to “Rabbanism” as “slaves of bigotry and priestcraft.” Crucially, Gustavus Poznanski did not couch his reforms in terms of a dialogue with Christianity, but with the Enlightenment, which served as a philosophical guideline by which to modernize an ancient practice.

Ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman describes Jewish modernism as unique from a generic form of modernism that generally leads to a move toward and participation in the universal: “born of emancipation and spurred on by assimilation, Jewish modernism did not seek to free itself from its origins.” In this vein, Jewish worship practices with the
reformers of KKBE looked increasingly like those of their surroundings, but the connection to Jewish tradition proved strong enough to motivate Penina Moise to develop specifically Jewish hymns. This example of musical hybridity, as made possible by the inclusion of an organ, illustrates just the Jewish modernism that Bohlman recognizes; Moise adapted a non-Jewish liturgical form and adapted it to the theological origins of Judaism while KKBE's organists set her texts to original music in order to stop the practice of writing Jewish words to existing Christian hymn tunes. Both examples describe a desire to tie hybrid practices to appropriate places in tradition.

In 1914, KKBE held a special service for the consecration of their third organ. The rabbi gave a sermon, printed in the Courier, reviewing the extensive history of reform in the congregation and underlining the basic legal and historical issues surrounding the organ in synagogue music. The service outline they printed for that Shabbat gives a hint to the developing character of the organ and Reform Judaism in general. This organ was more capable then its predecessors, as evidenced by the Bach Toccata found at the top of the program, which also included Liszt and Mendelssohn. Including the pieces showcased the sounds of the new organ. Religious hybridity might explain this appropriation by describing KKBE's use of a Bach toccata as an appropriation of the music of an avowed Lutheran composer for a Jewish worship setting. Modernist hybridity, however, might counter that the rabbi's decision to include a non-liturgical piece by a staunchly Lutheran composer exemplified the Jewish adoption of only the best musical practices—Protestant, Jewish, or secular—for edification, not assimilation of a religious mindset.
The permeable cultural boundaries of the American “melting pot” left Jews in the position of reconciling their practices with those they saw around them. The musical sophistication of the organ could lend Jewish worship the experience of musical culture felt within churches while the basic liturgical and theological aspects were retained. The American lack of religious oversight from civil and rabbinic authorities allowed for a Jewish freedom from the traditional concepts of community, and the numerous American reform communities that existed by the end of nineteenth century are a testament to a Jewish “determination not to abandon [the] heritage.”\(^{176}\) The organ was the modern tool by which to experiment musically with a religious emancipation so as to create a meaningful Jewish experience within that heritage. It served as a symbol by which to identify reform congregations and continues to spark discussion today over the ways the next generation of Reform Jews will choose to express their hybridity as Jewish Americans or American Jews in the twenty-first century.
APPENDIX A:
Specifications for the KKBE Erben Organ

The list comes from a Charleston newspaper’s description of the organ. Based on the English conventions of the time, the pitch indications are omitted from a description of an organ. The pitch indications provided below to the right of the rank names are extrapolations by the author based his analysis of a number of sources in order to better reconstruct the capabilities of the organ.

CONGREGATION KAHAL KADOSH BETH ELOHIM
90 Hasell Street between Meeting and King Streets
Charleston, South Carolina
Henry Erben, New York City, 1841

Great Organ
Open Diapason 8’
Stop’d Diapason 8’
Principal 4’
Twelfth 2 3/3’
Fifteenth 2’
Sesquialtra II
Cornet III
Trumpet 8’

Choir Organ [That is, Bass]
Stop’d Diapason 8’
Principal 4’

Swell Organ
Stop’d Diapason 8’
Dulciana 8’
Violana 8’
Flute 4’
Hautboy 8’

Pedals
Large Open Diapason 16’

Great to Pedals
Swell and Choir Bass to Pedals

† Glück, 101-102; Austin Niland, Introduction to the Organ (London: Faber and Faber, 1968); John Ogasapian, Henry Erben: Portrait of a Nineteenth-century American Organ Builder (Braintree, MA: Organ Literature Foundation, 1980); Dr. Shirley King, interviewed by author, Carlisle, PA, 19 November 2010.
NOTES


4 Moses Mendelssohn was grandfather to the composer Felix Mendelssohn.


7 Ibid., 736.


13 Tina Frühauf, *The Organ and Its Music in German-Jewish Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38-41. The cantorial star of the mid-nineteenth century, Salomon Sulzer argued for the organ and its role in easing congregational participation. He explained, “Only the organ is in a position to lead, to control, to cover dissonances...The organ allows the hazzan to perform his priestly function independently of his personal artistic ability and at the same time protects him from that self-satisfied pseudo-artistry that often attacks aesthetic beauty, ...protects him from those trivial vocal...
ornamentations misused by provincial cantors a way of trying to appeal to the masses, or that weepy Polish virtuosity that drives the younger generation—most of whom have some musical training—to flee from the house of God” (emphasis added).

A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929), 205. The *hazzan* tradition began as members of the community acted as the communal prayer leader for a given service. The specialized musical modes, melodies, and themes make up the *nusach* for any given worship service. There are many different forms of *nusach*. Some differ between Shabbat and the rest of the week. There is a different *nusach* for the time of day, and a different *nusach* for each holiday. A learned community member might know the *nusach* for many of these different permutations of events, but not for the yearly occasions. An individual tasked with remembering and retransmitting via the oral tradition the many forms of *nusach* with his skilled voice was known as a *hazzan* and was hired by a community to serve not just as a prayer leader, but as a source for Jewish life. As the oral tradition progressed, chants became increasingly embellished sometimes in an attempt to get at the emotion in the text. Increasingly, leading the congregation and conveying emotion on behalf of the community devolved into a performance of long melismatic passages of single syllables interrupted by rapid text declamations leading to the next melismatic syllable. They “devoted themselves more and more to music, and began to consider all other communal functions as burdens.” Reformers did not appreciate the increased lack of clarity in the liturgy due to these excesses and Sulzer felt this could be remedied through the organ.

14 Frühauf, 25.
16 Philipson, 13.
17 Meyer, 32. Jews do not do well historically with centralized control. The Westphalian consistory was marked with passive resistance to Jacobson’s reforms, and after the fall of the Kingdom of Westphalia, the idea of centralization of practice never happened again. In fact, the foundational documents to the Union for American Hebrew Congregations—the American associative body of Reform Jewish synagogues—explicated that the Union would never attempt to force specific practices upon their constituent synagogues.

18 Philipson, 14; Meyer, 38.
19 Philipson, 15.
20 Goldberg, 60, 59.
21 Philipson, 13-14.
22 Ibid., 15. Rabbinic tradition stems from the ability of a rabbi to trace his lineage of teachers back to Moses. Their claim to legislative mandate comes from the idea that Jews received both a Written Torah (The Five Books of Moses) and an Oral Torah that, among
other things, fills in explanatory gaps on the details of ritual not found in the Written Torah. The Rabbis – an extension of the Pharisaic tradition – claimed stewardship of the Oral Torah and amidst Roman persecution, wrote down the Oral Law and associated discussions into the Mishnah. Later rabbis commented on the discussions and compiled the Talmud. Based on these classical rabbinic texts, rabbis – working from the assumption that the previous generation’s decisions were correct because they lived closer to Mosaic revelation – refined and clarified the law. One practice the reformers disliked was the rabbinic tendency to “build a fence around the Torah,” wherein the rabbis were so fearful of transgressing a commandment in the Written Torah, that they enacted layers of legal safeguards around the law so there was no chance of breaking the commandment. One illuminating example is the Orthodox practice of having two dishwashers for separate sets of milk and meat kitchen items – stemming from the Torah commandment “you shall not boil a kid in its mother’s milk” (Deut. 14:21). Many of the laws of kashrut (dietary laws) come from building this fence. Because the previous generation of rabbis was infallible, laws could only be added such that by the time of the Enlightenment, following the practices of traditional Judaism was so difficult to achieve and hard to accept by acculturated Jews. Eventually, maskilim called for a purge of “rabbinism” and a return to the essential spirit of Judaism without the stilted trappings of rabbinic tradition.

23 Meyer, 46-48; Peter Gradenwitz, The Music of Israel: From the Biblical Era to Modern Times, 2nd ed. (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1996), 269-270. Jacob Herz Beer was the wealthiest Jew in Berlin at the time having made his money from sugar refineries. Though his son, composer Giacomo Meyerbeer, had ideological reservations with organ use, according to contemporary descriptions of the Beer synagogue, this did not stop Beer from placing an organ in the synagogue he had created by knocking down three walls in his home.

24 Philipson, 25. Frederick William III shut the Beer synagogue before because it was operating outside the traditionalist community. When the main Jewish synagogue was being rebuilt, however, Beer’s home was designated one of the sanctioned alternatives for the community during the years of construction and reform-style services occurred there until 1823.

25 Meyer, 54.

26 Ibid., 55.

27 Ibid., 55.

28 Frühauf, 30. Throughout the first millennium, Jews migrated and settled further from the traditional centers of religious authority. The educated elite feared loss of centralized control while those communities of immigrating Jews lacked educated authorities to settle disputes and questions of religious import. Out of this vacuum arose a system, she’elot u’t’shuvot (questions and answers), wherein a community would write the regional Jewish scholar of note with a pressing and usually communally existential
question. The scholar would then reply to the community with his t'shuvah (answer) after weighing the varying hierarchies of legal principles and possible t'shuvot that exist as prior precedent. This system was, and remains today, the primary means of religious authorities to offer legal arguments and/or decrees on contemporary issues whether or not anyone asks them a question.

29 Ibid., 30.

30 Moses Mendelssohn, Introduction to Netivot Hashalom (Berlin, 1784), as cited in Cohen, Urban Visibility, 766.

31 Cohen, Urban Visibility, 766-767.

32 Till, 91.

33 Cohen, Urban Visibility, 744-748.


37 The author is indebted to Dr. Eliezer Shore, whose seminar on the history of Hasidism in 2009 provided a first forum for these ideas.

38 Attempting to prove one way or another based on discussions in the Talmud the existence of a proto-organ in Classical antiquity is complicated. For more detailed information, see Frühauf, 11-17.

39 Lev. 18:3.


41 Moses Isserles, Orach Chayim, 560:3, as cited in Ellenson, 124.

42 Ellenson, 126.

43 Rabbi Hirtz Scheur, Eleh Divrei ha-Brit, Letter 2, as cited in Ellenson, 126.
In order to comply with halakha prohibiting work on Shabbat, the synagogues in the Prague community with an organ simply stopped playing it prior to the recitation of Psalm 92 – the liturgical point during the Friday night Kabbalat Shabbat (Receiving Shabbat) services that Shabbat officially begins.

At that point in history, organs needed the wind provided by the manual labor of someone pumping the bellows and this would have been considered a class of work. The rabbis did not bring up this issue. Frühauf surmises that this was because “treading the bellows was not considered a devotional part of Jewish worship [that] may have been performed by a non-Jewish person employed” by the synagogue.

Talmud Bavli (Brooklyn, NY: 2003), Beitza 36b.

Although denominational terms do not yet apply, this first debate marked the beginnings of the “Orthodox” position against “Reform” and served as the basis for the later Frankfurt t’shuvah.

Meyer, 132.

Tanakh is the Hebrew acronym for the Hebrew Bible: The Five Books of Moses, the books of the Prophets, and the books of the Writings.


Stein, 168.
(Tosafot) to *Talmud Bavli*, Beitza 30a states “this caution is not necessary for us because we have no skill to make such instruments.” “From this, the commentator Magen Abraham (Orach Chayim 338:8) says that…the playing of musical instruments is permitted on the Sabbath” in the context of dances. This is the source for later reformers to justify the organ.

60 Ibid., 169. This is based on extension of the halakhic allowance for two people to read with a light on Shabbat given the assumption that upon one’s impulse to adjust the light (prohibited) the other would give warning not to adjust.

61 Ibid., 169.


63 Stein, 169.

64 Ibid., 169.


67 Marcus, “The American Colonial Jew,” 77-78.

68 Ibid., 79.

69 Ibid., 82.

70 Ibid., 83.

71 Ibid., 80.

72 Ibid., 80.

73 Ibid., 80.

74 Ibid., 84.

75 Ibid., 84.


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81 Radloff, 10-11.

82 Ibid., 31.


85 Hagy, 59-60; Harris, 28.

86 Kaal Kadosh Beth-Elohim, *Constitution of the Hebrew Congregation of Kaal Kadosh Beth-Elohim or House of God*, (Charleston, SC: 1820; repr., Charleston, SC: Barnett A. Elzas (The Daggett Printing Company), 1904). The Constitution of KKBE, in use directly prior to the formation of the Reformed Society of Israelites, sets out a system of fines to be assessed. Usually, they are expressed as a range within which the board of the congregation can decide an amount given the circumstances of the transgression.

87 Hagy, 60-62; Harris, 29-37.

88 Hagy, 129. Gilman noticed how disorganized the service was with congregants “sitting or standing in an indifferent mood.” While the *hazzan* was leading prayers, a congregational leader crossed the room, ostensibly to discuss “the Hebrew phrasing with another worshipper,” though he quickly changed subjects entirely. “The liturgy was almost entirely in Hebrew, although there were occasional prayers in Spanish, especially to announce the amount of money given to the synagogue by members,” which almost no one could understand. There were enough prayers to last five hours, but they sped through in three as “people came and went and children played.”

89 Ibid., 144.

90 Ibid., 76, 144.

91 Ibid., 144.

92 Ibid., 144.
93 See note 88.


95 Moise, 50.

96 Ibid., 52-53.

97 Ibid., 47-50; Kaal Kadosh Beth Elohim, 12. Rule XIII in the constitution of 1820 explains that upon being called up for synagogue honors, which one could not refuse, one had to donate at least a shilling “for the Parnass Presidenta, and prosperity of the Congregation.” The petitioners felt that the quasi-selling of indulgences had no place in the worship services.

98 Ibid., 52-53.


In this later speech, Abraham Moise explained that Israel had “lost a just conception of the true God, in their blind acquiescence to the erroneous doctrines of the Rabbins.” (pg. 3) He expressed his hope that the American “freedom of conscience” will have “broken the sceptre of rabbinical power.”

100 Hagy, 131-132. Rule 1 of the Constitution indicates that the congregation will proceed according to minhag Sephardim (according to the customs and traditions of Sephardic Jews). The petition asked to change some portions of minhag and thus, the petition became a constitutional question requiring two-thirds approval of voting members to be considered or approved.


103 Gary Zola as cited in Harris, 45-46.

104 Harris, 46.
Isaac Harby, as cited in Hagy, 146-147.

Harris, 46.

Ibid., 48, 48n41; Reformed Society of Israelites, *The Sabbath Service and Miscellaneous Prayers: Adopted by the Reformed Society of Israelites Founded in Charleston, S.C. November 21, 1825* (repr., New York: Barnett A. Elzas (The Bloch Publishing Company), 1916). The extant services are printed entirely in English but it is doubtful they erased all Hebrew from the service. Based on archival evidence of the compiler’s copy of this service containing Hebrew taped from another source, it is more likely that the service was used as a framework for and supplement to the prayers considered most essential by the reformers. The omission was likely due to a typesetter’s inability to print Hebrew characters. Harris, 56-57.

Ibid., 57-58.

Ibid., 58.


Hagy, 237

Harris, 64.

Wise, 51. Wise’s description of Leeser is tongue-in-cheek given the very public discussions of their opposing ideologies but is, in essence, accurate.


Meyer, 235. Leeser was considered the leading Jewish intellectual in America before the 1840s German immigration. Though educated in Germany, “he read widely on his own, proved himself articulate, and within five years was chosen the [hazzan] of the influential Sephardi Mikveh Israel congregation in Philadelphia. He believed in adapting to his surroundings culturally, linguistically and patriotically but he could not justify changes to a religion he considered eternal without a basis for them in Jewish law. He also founded and edited the first important American Jewish periodical, *The Occident* where he editorialized heavily on the organ conflict to come.

Hagy, 238.

Harris, 67. The synagogue “survives today as the oldest synagogue in continuous use in the United States and a National Historic Landmark.”

Ibid., 67.
State v. Ancker, as cited in Hagy, 238.


Meyer, 233.

Ibid.

KKBE Minutes, July 14, 1840, as cited in Harris, 68. The petition continued to acknowledge that the traditional nature of the community eschewed “innovation” to in the service but cited Prague and the 19th century German/French examples as precedent for their proposal.

Harris, 69.

Harris, 69; Hagy, 242.

Harris, 69; Hagy, 242. The minutes only recorded that Poznanski cited authoritative sources and not any specifics about his argument. See Leeser, “Letter to Rev. Poznanski.” A lengthy open letter written by Isaac Leeser in The Occident offers the best guess as to Poznanski’s arguments. Leeser attacked Poznanski for being a member of the “ultra-reformists” and attempted to refute his position on all points of contention. Examining Leeser’s refutations of the arguments he attributes to Poznanski on the organ may indicate the types of arguments he used in the congregational meeting. First, he asserted that the synagogue was the legitimate successor to the Temple in Jerusalem. See Courier, Mar. 20, 1841, as cited in Hagy, 236. He stated upon the new synagogue’s dedication that it was “our temple, this city our Jerusalem, this happy land our Palestine.” From this it follows that the Levitical musical tradition of the Temple was transferable to the synagogue. However, traditionalists yearn for an eventual rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, nullifying Poznanski’s equation. Poznanski argued further that the scriptural descriptions of David praising God on the harp allowed instrumental music in synagogue to which Leeser retorted, “Does this authorize you to play on instruments on the Sabbath?” Leeser also points out that Poznanski does not bring forward any precedents prior to 1810 or outside a reform-tending community to support his argument. If we use Leeser’s refutation as evidence for Poznanski’s arguments, we are led to believe that Poznanski pinned his entire argument on the synagogue being equivalent to the temple in Jerusalem. There, Levites played music in the service of the sacrificial cult even on Shabbat. Creating this equivalency would supersede any arguments about rest on Shabbat, or mourning for the temple. Ultimately, scholars may never know how Poznanski argued for the organ but the Leeser article may provide a clue through a clearly biased source.

Harris, 70 citing KKBE Minutes, July, 26 1840.

Tarshish, 430. Tarshish points out that the named the traditionalists picked for their new congregation was the same as a Sephardic congregation in New York City. This
congregation also happened to be Poznanski’s former place of employment when he was judged to be an ardent traditionalist. It is plausible that the traditionalists were aware of this fact and chose the name as way of voicing their disapproval for Poznanski.

127 Hagy, 246.

128 Hagy, 248; Tarshish, 433; Harris, 79. Two of the moderates voted against the organ but did not leave the congregation and the other two voted for the organ wanted to slow the pace of reform.

129 Hagy, 248.

130 KKB Minutes, as cited in Tarshish, 435.

131 KKB Minutes, as cited in Tarshish, 435-436; Hagy, 250-251.

132 Hagy, 251.

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid., 252.


136 Harris, 91.

137 *State ex relatione*, as cited in Tarshish, 440-441.


140 Radloff, 76.

141 Ibid., 110.

142 Schiller, 189.

143 Harris, 75.


Ogasapian, 7.


Dr. Shirley King, interview by author, Carlisle, PA, November 19, 2010.

Glück, 101.

King, interview

Ibid.

Ibid.

Harris, 135-136. She not only contributed verses to the Charleston *Courier* on issues of the day but also published a book of poetry that became known throughout the Southeast and along the East Coast.

Ibid., 142.

Ibid.

Ibid., 144.

Ibid. The migration of German rabbis probably sparked the appropriation and use of the German hymns.

Ibid., 142.

Ibid., 142

Schiller, 191.

Ibid., 191

Meyer, 251.

Schiller, 189.

Meyer, 251.

Glück, 102-103.


170 Kapchan and Strong, 240.

171 Ibid., 240.

172 Ibid., 240.

173 Moise, 52-53.


175 “Synagogue Here the First in America to Use Organ,” *Charleston News and Courier*, November 8, 1914.

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