The Motif of the Nevel (Harp/Lyre) in the Poetry of the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah) Period

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This article delineates the central place of the Hebrew musical instrument, the *nevel* (translated alternatively as harp/lyre), within the framework of the literary culture of the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment; 18th-19th centuries). Adapting the "double impact" model of Hebrew Haskalah poetry, we examine the motif of the musical instrument in three channels: the instrument as it appears as a vignette or graphic attribute on the title pages of books; the inclusion of the word *nevel* in book titles; and the *nevel* as a literary figure in Hebrew maskilic poetry. This article points to the various textual aspects of the motif as depicted by the Haskalah poets, who betray both their obvious debt to the biblical tradition as well as the clear influence of the classic lyric tradition that was cultivated in contemporary European literature.

Introduction: The Ancient Hebrew Nevel

Among the musical instruments mentioned in biblical poetry, the *nevel* (alongside another instrument, the *kinnor*) is most prominent, and was known to have a ritualistic role, particularly in the Psalms that describe the singing of the Levites in the Jerusalem Temple. The *nevel*, typically translated in English as "harp" or "lyre," is mentioned in these psalms as one of the instruments that accompanied liturgical chanting. The psalmist calls out to the Levites to create a pleasurable atmosphere in the Temple by singing and playing their instruments: "Praise Him with harp and lyre" (*Psalms* 150:3), or: "Take up the song, sound the timbrel, the melodious lyre and harp" (*Psalms* 81:3).[1] In addition to its liturgical use, the *nevel* also serves as an instrument for personal religious expressions by the psalmist, such as: "Then, I will acclaim You to the music of the harp for Your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing a hymn to You with a lyre, O Holy One of Israel" (*Psalms* 71:22). Moreover, in the Hebrew Bible, this instrument helps to manifest the prophetic spirit. Thus, for example, Samuel said to Saul: "You will encounter a band of prophets coming down from the shrine, preceded by lyres, timbrels, flutes, and harps, and they will be prophesying" (I *Samuel* 10:5). Following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, the Levites' playing ceased. The Rabbinical Sages issued a decree that musical instruments should not be played at all, thus limiting the music in the synagogues to *a capella* singing.

Throughout the ages, biblical scholars have made extensive attempts to identify the various musical instruments mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. Contemporary scholarship on the matter also considers recent textual findings from the ancient cultures of the Near East. For example, the earliest string instruments are mentioned in poetic texts from the 3rd millennium BCE. At that time, the *balag*, translated as "lyre," was known for its important religious-ritual role, as the instrument that accompanied the elegies on the destroyed cities and their temples. We

learn about the significance of the musical instruments from the names of various types of ancient Mesopotamian elegies: *balag* and *er-sem-ma* elegies, respectively the "lyre elegy" and the "drum elegy," named for the instruments played by the lamenting priests as they sang.[2]

Traditional Jewish scholarship assigned different names and types of instruments to the biblical *nevel*. We may give two notable examples that show the clear influence of the surrounding environments of their authors. First, in Marwān Ibn Janāḥ's Hebrew dictionary *Kitāb al-Uṣul* (*Book of Roots*), written in Muslim Spain in the 11th century, the terms *nevel* and *kinnor* were both considered synonyms for the most prominent instrument in the Orient – the oud (Ibn Janāḥ 1896:225; 281). During Ibn Janāḥ's days, the Golden Age of the Jews in Muslim Spain, the term *nevel* reappears in Hebrew poetry. The Hebrew poets of the time, who were greatly influenced by the musical culture of the Abbasid Caliphs, used the term to describe the musical accompaniment of singing in courtly banquets.[3] A stable figure at the banquet was also the *qiyān* – the professional singer appointed by the elite rulers to sing (Tobi 2010). Thus, for example, the earliest known Hebrew wine poem, written by Dunash ben Labrat, describes a choir singing and playing instruments at a banquet. Peter Cole, who has translated the poem into English, opted to interpret the *nevel* as it was understood by Ibn Janāḥ: "[T]he sound of coursing water, / the thrumming of the zither / accompanies the singers / with reed-pipes and an oud [*be-minnim u-nevalim*]." (Schirmann 1954: 34; Cole 2007: 25).[4] The same word is repeated in a strophic poem by Abraham ibn Ezra, which Samuel M. Stern translated as the harp: "Let us praise him with harps [*nevel*] / and sound of the trumpets" (Ibn Ezra 1886: 88; Stern 1959: 379). Conversely, some 500 years later, in 17th-century Mantua, in the treatise *Shiltey ha-Giborim* ('Shields of the Mighty') that dealt in-depth with the various instruments played in the Jerusalem Temple, Abraham Portaleone identified the biblical *nevel* with the "instrument called in Italian *lauto* [lute]" (Portaleone 1612: 7b).

Due to the profusion of hypotheses and the differences of opinion on this matter, and in the absence of any concrete archaeological findings, we cannot be certain of the precise identity of the biblical *nevel*. Indeed, as the Galician scholar Salomon Rubin concluded over a century ago: "The differences of opinion and assumptions among the linguists and researchers of ancient times in regard to the forms of these musical instruments and their uses in the Hebrew Bible, prove that it is impossible for us to attain clarity and certainty" (1908: 15). In the following discussion, I therefore treat the *nevel* as a polysemous signifier. The term has been kept in the transliterated form, or translated as "lyre" or "harp," according to the context in which it was employed.

The Ancient Greek Lyre

Greek mythological tales are rife with mentions of musical instruments, among which the lyre takes a prominent place. The Greek gods are described as being the most ancient musicians:

Athena invented the flute, Pan constructed the first flute of reeds (Panpipes, the archetype of the modern harmonica), and the Muses used their pleasing voices as sophisticated instruments. However, it seems that the first and foremost Greek instrument was Hermes's lyre, the *chelys*. Hermes's *chelys* was made on the day of his birth from the shell of a tortoise, with seven strings that produced heavenly melodies. Using its power, Hermes captivated Apollo's heart, who promised that if Hermes would teach him how to play it, he would make Hermes immortal. This instrument is described in the Homeric "Hymn to Hermes" (Evelyn-White 1914: 367):

> He cut stalks of reed to measure and fixed them, fastening their ends across the back and through the shell of the tortoise, and then stretched ox hide all over it by his skill. Also, he put in the horns and fitted a cross-piece upon the two of them and stretched seven strings of sheep-gut. But when he had made it, he proved each string in turn with the key, as he held the lovely thing. At the touch of his hand, it sounded marvelously; and, as he tried it, the god sang sweet random snatches, even as youths bandy taunts at festivals.

Several men are also described in Greek myths as excellent musicians, and their talent bestowed on them a touch of immortality, to the point where they were almost like their gods. The most prominent among these legendary musicians was the Thracian Orpheus who played the lyre. Orpheus's lyre produced such wonderful sounds that no power could withstand its melody: The music of its strings could uproot mountains, smash boulders, and alter the course of rivers.

The lyres of Hermes and Orpheus, and the overpowering effects of their music, were transformed within Greek and Roman poetry into an image of the poet himself, as well as of the power of poetry. The lyre served to illustrate the poet's state of mind. It was not by chance that "lyrical poetry" was named after the lyre – the ancient instrument that most reflected the poetic mood: Whenever a poet was overcome by melancholy, the lyre produced sad melodies; when the poet was full of religious fervor, the lyre produced songs of prayer; and when the poet was in love,– the lyre would only play love songs, as is the case of a famous poem in the *Anacreontea* (Campbell 1988: 193):

> I wish to tell of the sons of Atreus, I wish to sing of Cadmus; but my lyre-strings sing only of Love. The other day I changed the strings, indeed the whole lyre, and began singing of the labours of Heracles: but in answer the lyre sang of the Loves.

The Nevel in Jewish Enlightenment Poetry: A "Double Impact Model"

Beginning with the first Hebrew periodicals published in the 18th century, and later in the Jewish Enlightenment in Eastern Europe in the late 19th century, the biblical *nevel* became a widespread motif, both literary and visual, in modern Hebrew poetry. Tracing the occurrences of the *nevel* motif, with all its diverse functions, reveals the fascinating nature of the poetry

of the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*; 18th -19th centuries). It may, in fact, serve as a case-study for the "double impact model" formulated by literary historian Uzi Shavit in discussing the sources of influence on modern Hebrew literary culture (1996: 37-75). Shavit describes how, lacking a living tradition of Hebrew poetry, the *maskilim* (the *Haskalah*'s intellectuals) simultaneously turned to seek inspiration in two distinct directions: inwards – to the ancient Jewish canon, focusing exclusively on the Hebrew Bible, and outwards – to contemporary European literature.

The central place of the *nevel* within the framework of Hebrew literary culture of the *Haskalah* is expressed via three channels: a) a musical instrument appearing as vignettes or graphic attributes on the title pages of books; b) the inclusion of the word *nevel* in book titles; and c) the *nevel*, a musical instrument, as a literary figure in modern Hebrew poetry. A study of the *nevel* motif, as it appears in all these three channels, indeed illustrates the "double impact" on Hebrew *Haskalah* poetry. On the one hand, the various textual aspects of the motif and its literary references, as depicted by the *Haskalah* poets, betray their obvious debt to the biblical tradition; on the other hand, the motif is clearly influenced both by the classical tradition and by contemporary European literature.

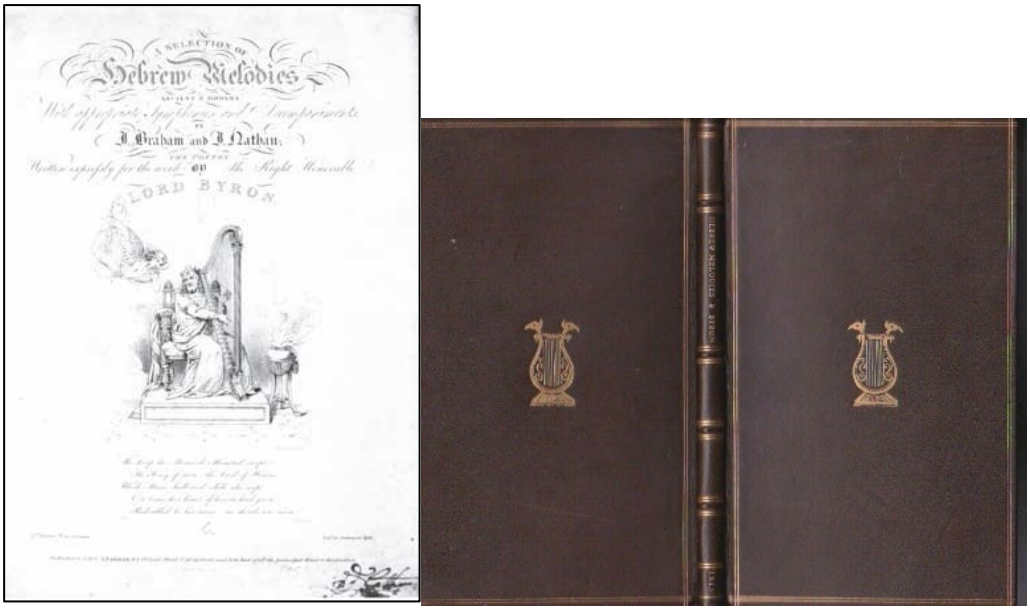
The Vignette of the Nevel in Hebrew Book Art

A *vignette* is a graphic symbol or a small illustration that usually appears on the cover or on the inner title pages of a book. The use of illustrations of harps, lyres, *kathri*, and various other musical instruments was already quite common in the 17th century. This trend reached its peak during the Romantic period, especially in England and Germany, but also in Italy, France, and other countries in western European. Harp/lyre vignettes were typical and widespread in editions of classical poetry, as well as in editions of more contemporary poets.

The publishers of these books chose to decorate their title pages with illustrations of harps/lyres, inspired by their function as literary motifs popular among poets. In Romantic poetry, the harp served as the expression of the spirit of the poet, associated with the divine power of poetry manifested in Nature. Take, for example, the well-known poem, written by Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ode to the West Wind" (1820: 192):

> […] Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
> What if my leaves are falling like its own?
> The tumult of thy mighty harmonies […]

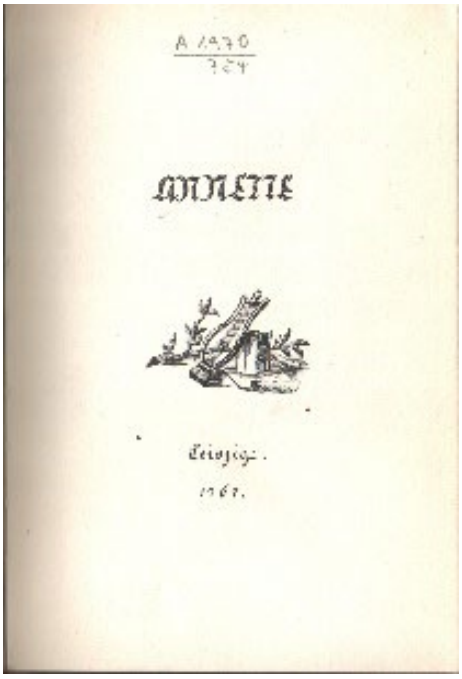
The following are some visual examples of the use of a harp/lyre vignette in poetry books by several prominent poets of the age.



Lord Byron's *Hebrew Melodies* 1815

The harp vignette, which appears on both outside covers and the inner title page of this edition, presents an illustration for one of the melodies in the book, entitled: "The Harp of the Monarch Minstrel Swept," that describes biblical King David's harp, symbolizing a celestial melody: "That felt not – fired not to the Tone / Till David's Lyre grew mightier than his Throne" (Byron 1815: lines 9-10).

The inner title page of Heinrich Heine's first book of poems, *Buch der Lieder* 1827



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Annette* 1767

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the use of the harp/lyre vignette in poetry books also spread to eastern Europe, becoming the almost mandatory symbol of the genre. In his poem "A XIX. század költői" ("The Poets of the Nineteenth Century"), the Hungarian poet Sándor Petőfi meditated on the character of the poetry written by his European contemporaries, arguing that dramatic changes ought to be made in the wake of the budding national movements. In this poem, Petőfi attested to the well-known archetypical character of the lyre. He turns to his fellow poets, and asks that they replace the playing of the lyre – that is, the expressions of personal mood, lyrical, romantic – with playing that expresses collective, nationalist emotion (1847: lines 1-8):

> Let no one with a languid finger
> dare to sweep the strings today!
> The lyre that's lifted up is ready
> to get a great work under way.
> If you can sing of nothing better
> than your own joy or broken heart,
> the world can do without your singing:
> keep out, where you can have no part!

With typical tardiness, non-Jewish literary culture also influenced the Hebrew printers, who warmly adopted the vignette of the harp/lyre to represent the Hebrew *nevel*. Sometimes these Hebrew printers would copy vignettes from non-Jewish typographers, or they would create original typographies, or make adaptations to suit the vignettes to subject-matter of

the Hebrew or Jewish work. Harp/lyre typographies were most prevalent in publications of poetry books; sacred works, however, with an affinity to the genre of poetry (e.g., prayer-books, hymnals, psalters and laments), were also often privileged with an illustration of a harp or a lyre. Here are some such examples:

Seder Kinot le-Tish'ah be-Av (The Order of the Laments for the Ninth of Av) 1866

Here the *nevel* resembles the Greek lyre, and is hanging from a weeping willow tree, illustrating the verse from *Psalms* (137:1-2): "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept, as we thought of Zion. There on the willows, we hung our lyres."

Sefer Tehillim (*Psalter*) 1841

In this book, the *nevel* is illustrated as a classic harp, played by King David. Note the similarity of this illustration to the vignette accompanying Lord Byron's *Hebrew Melodies* [Illustration 1]. Yet, while in Bryon's book King David is seated on his elegant, decorated throne, here he is portrayed as sitting beside the stump of a chopped tree on barren ground – as an expression of the fact that the Jewish People are reciting these Psalms in exile, in the Diaspora.

The common European typography of the lyre, decorated with laurel leaves on both sides (compare Heine's book [Illustration 2]), was adopted by many printers for books of Hebrew poetry. Several typical examples follow:

Michah Joseph Lebenson. *The Destruction of Troy* 1949

Moshe Danzig [Moshe Leib ben Ya'akov Chashkes]. *Harp and Lyre* 1871

Abraham Goldfaden. *Buds and Flowers* 1897

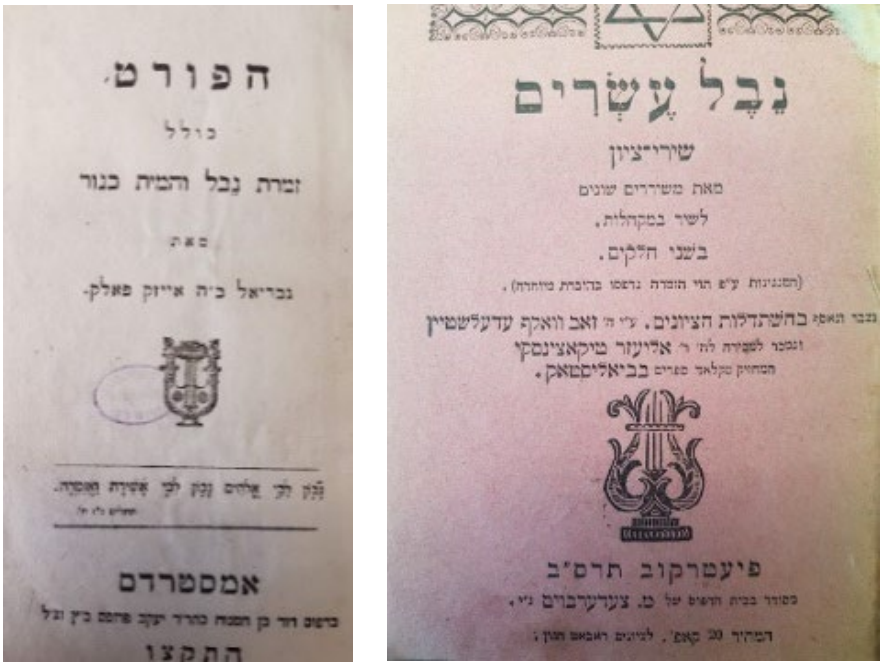
What is more, the collected works of Hebrew poets, published by the Press of the Widow and the Brothers Romm at the end of the 19th century, were characterized by the typography of a lyre flanked by arcs of laurel leaves etched into the cover and filled with gold paint.

On the Right: Abraham Dov-Ber Lebensohn. *All the Poems* 1895
On the Left: *Judah Leib Gordon. All the Poems* 1898

In the wake of the Romm editions, other Hebrew publications retained the lyre vignette on the cover. For instance:

On the Right: *Abraham Dov-Ber Lebensohn*. *All the Poems* 1905
On the Left: *Judah Leib Gordon*. *All the Poems* 1905

In addition to laurel leaves or tree branches flanking the lyre from both sides, one can also see many illustrations ornately decorated or in a neo-classical style that recalls the columns of Greek temples. Some such examples follow:



On the Right: Gabriel Isaac Polak. *Strumming the Strains* 1836
On the Left: Ze'ev Wolf Edelshtein. *Twenty-Stringed Harp* 1902

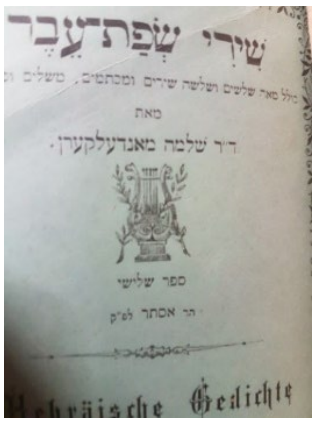
Certain Jewish printers were influenced by European prints and adopted the form of a lyre with two raised arms shaped like snakes, tigers, or other animals:

From Right to Left:
Music of Ben Yehudah 1907
Judah Leib Levin. *Daniel in the Lions' Den* 1899
Joseph Gibianski. *The Book of Melody of the Harp* 1905
All the Poems of Judah Leib Gordon 1884

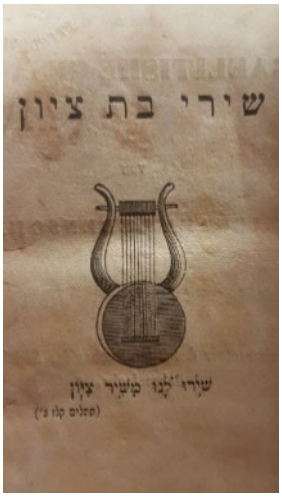
Many times, the lyre vignette (especially lyres ornately decorated with flower engravings) was used for "patriotic" poems lauding the local gentile sovereign:

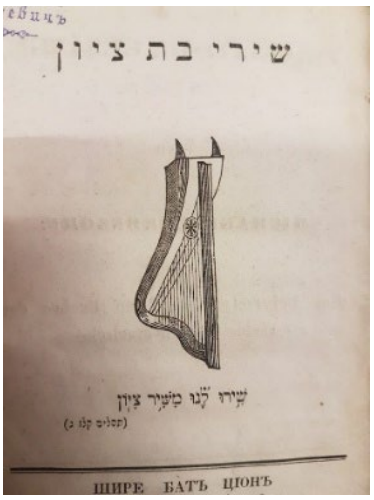
On the Right: J.H. Kohn. *A Hymn Sung 1841*
On the Left: David Abraham Lissaur*. Offering of Thanks*

As seen thus far, the majority of Hebrew printers used the typography of the classic Greek lyre. Several chose, however, to illustrate poetry books with the harp, as it was known in modern Europe. Thus, for example, there is the poetry of Salomon Mandelkern, printed in three volumes over a period of almost two decades. Looking at the illustration below, we see, in the first volume (1882) on the right, the inner title is illustrated with a modern European harp. The final volume (1901), on the left, is graced with the ancient Greek lyre.



An interesting case are those Hebrew books that had been reprinted several times, where each imprint had a different musical instrument on the inner title pages. Michah Joseph Lebensohn's *Poems of the Daughter of Zion* was illustrated both with the archaic lyre and with the modern harp; however, underneath each instrument, the poet's motto remained the same: "Sing us a song from Zion" (*Psalms* 137: 2).





On the right: Michah Joseph Lebensohn. *Poems of the Daughter of Zion* 1869
On the left: Michah Joseph Lebenson. *Poems of the Daughter of Zion* 1895

Therefore, it seems clear that the graphic use of vignettes in Hebrew printing was influenced by musical motifs in European literature, and that the instrument illustrated on the title pages of Hebrew poetry books originated both from the ancient Greek lyre and from its later reincarnation as a modern European harp.

The Nevel in Hebrew Book Titles

The titles of Hebrew poetry books printed throughout the *Haskalah* period frequently incorporated the names of various musical instruments. Hebrew poets employed this convention to distinguish their books from books on other subjects, such as philosophy, prose, or books of *hiddushim* (rabbinic innovations in religious law). Among the instruments mentioned in the titles, three appear regularly: *kinnor*, *'ugav* and *nevel*. These names, we

should note, do not refer to the modern identifications of the instruments. Rather, the names functioned as symbols of the quintessential, ancient Hebrew song. By adopting them for the titles of their poetry books, the *Haskalah* poets created a neo-classical trend, consciously returning to the Hebrew language in its most ancient source, the Bible.

To give an idea of the extent of this literary phenomenon, we can mention a number of the most well-known Hebrew poetry books of the 18th and 19th centuries: *Kinnor Na'im* (*Pleasant Lyre*) by Samuel David Luzzatto (1825); *Ha-Poret Hemyat Nevel ve-Zimrat Kinnor* (*Strumming the Strains of the Harp and the Song of the Lyre*) by Gabriel Isaac Polak (1836); *Higayon be-Khinnor* (*Voice with a Lyre*) by Giuseppe Almanzi (1839); *Kol 'Ugav* (*Sound of an Organ* by Abraham Baruch Piperno (1846); *Tofes Kinnor ve-'Ugav* (*Holding a Harp and an Organ*) by Max Letteris (1860); *Nevel ve-Khinnor* (*Harp and Lyre*) by Aron Dornzweig (1873); *Yelid Kinnor* (*Born of the Lyre*) by Samuele Vita Zelman (1886); *'Ugav Rachel* (*Rachels' Organ*) by Rachel Morpurgo (1890); *Ha-'Uggav: Shirey Ahavah* (*The Organ: Love Poems*) by I. L. Peretz (1894); *Kinnor Bat 'Ami* (*Lyre of My Nation's Daughter*) by Zvi Allatin (Nizhyn, 1895); *Nevel 'Esrim* (*Twenty-Stringed Harp*) by Ze'ev Wolf Edelshtein (Piotrków, 1902); *Kinnor Yeshurun* (*Lyre of the People of Israel*), 3 volumes by Judah Leib Gordon (Warsaw, 1891-1893).

As is immediately apparent, many of these book titles are taken from biblical verses, or variations of the original source. For instance, *Melodious Lyre* by Luzzatto comes from *Psalms* (81:3), cited above; Letteris' *Holding a Harp and an Organ* was taken from the depiction of Jubal in *Genesis* (4:21): "he was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the pipe"; and Almanzi's *Higayon be-Khinnor* follows *Psalms* (92:4). It is, therefore, clear that in the Hebrew typography found in books by the *maskilim*, the source of the harp vignette is entirely European, while the titles of the books are inspired by the Hebrew Bible. Let us now turn to the use of the *nevel* within the context of the poems themselves.

The Nevel as a Literary Figure

The *nevel* received a place of honor not only on book covers and title pages. Even in *Haskalah* poetic texts, the *nevel* was notably present and served as a poetic motif, with its many appearances confirming its centrality in contemporary Hebrew poetry. Unlike the role of the *nevel* in ancient Hebrew poetry, in the actual Temple rituals (Hebrew Bible), and in social folkways (during the Middle Ages) – as part of the *Haskalah*'s "linguistic revitalization," the *nevel* took on an archetypical role in Hebrew poetry, once again proving the existence of the double impact of two distinct sources.

On the one hand, the *Haskalah* poets strove to create a Jewish renaissance; by returning to the Hebrew language and by their devotion to biblical language in particular, as these *maskilim* sought to restore the "golden age" of a Jewish Nation. They drew inspiration from the Hebrew Bible for their creations: Biblical stories became key topics, biblical figures

became poetic heroes in their poems and epics, biblical Hebrew served as the most conspicuous linguistic foundation, and the biblical-historical context provided backdrops for their work. On the other hand, the *Haskalah* poets were exposed to many new ideas from the age of European Enlightenment, and they were also familiar with, and influenced by, the vernacular literatures that surrounded them. The *maskilim* often adopted such non-Jewish ideas, altering them to suit the Hebrew language and Jewish culture, and embedded them into their own works.

The Nevel as an Attribute of Neo-Classical Biblical Poetry

The use of the *nevel* symbol as one of the signs of pseudo-biblical poetry was very widespread. For example, the *nevel* is found in the works of Naphtali Hirz Weisel (or Wessely), one of the earliest figures of Hebrew *Haskalah*, especially in his 5-volume magnum opus, a biblical epic, *Shirey Tif'eret* (*Poems of Glory*). Here, Weisel characterized Moses, the hero at the center of this massive work, as a leader whose leadership skills incorporated many contradictions: the pen and the sword, bravery, and creativity. When Moses' speech is presented in the opening poem of this epic, Weisel describes his words by means of the *nevel* image (1789: 14):

> כִּי הִגִּיד לוֹ תַּעֲלוּמוֹת חָכְמָה, אִמְרֵי יֹשֶׁר / וּכְפוֹרֵט עַל נֵבֶל, פָּרַט מֹשֶׁה מַעֲנֵהוּ / כִּי סִפֵּר לוֹ אֶת כָּל מַעֲשֵׂה אֵל עוֹשֶׂה פֶלֶא
>
> For He told him the mysteries of wisdom, words of truth / And as one strumming a harp [*nevel*], Moses plucked forth his answer / and he recounted all the deeds of God, performer of miracles.

In Michah Joseph Lebensohn's long poem "King Solomon," published in his *Poems of the Daughter of Zion*, the *nevel* is employed to place the poetic hero within a biblical context. Here, the sound of the *nevel* represents the voice of the *Shulamite*, the voice of romantic hope that beats in King Solomon's heart: "And like a shadow on his right, hope was standing, / to her words he would listen as to the pleasing sound of the harp [*nevel*]" (1887: 16).

In Salomon Mandelkern's poem on Bathsheba, the poet sketched the development of the relationship between King David and Bathsheba, placing courting words in the mouth of the King. David, who was known for his musical talent, prefers Bathsheba's voice to the sound of his favorite instrument: "Even the sound from your lips is more pleasing to me than that of the lyre [*nevel*]" (1896: 8). What is more, in the monumental poem by Avrom Ber Gottlober, "The Chronicles of the Poem and Magniloquence from the Day the Lord God Created Mankind on Earth and until This Day," the poet described Hebrew poetry from its inception up to his lifetime. Gottlober based his description of the Hebrew exiles in Babylonia and the cessation of their poetry on the abovementioned biblical verses from *Psalms* (137:1-2), and so he wrote accordingly (1890: 18): "Lament and mourning are heard, the lyre [*kinnor*] and even the harp [*nevel*] have been hung."

The addition of the *nevel* to the biblical *kinnor* (lyre) is perhaps due to the tendency of *maskilim* to make the well-worn Hebrew rhyme – *evel*/*nevel* (rhyming "mourning" with "harp"). It is possible, however, that the poet automatically associates these two musical instruments with each another since they frequently appear together in biblical verses. Nonetheless, it is equally possible that Gottlober added the harp [*nevel*] adjacent to the lyre, as it appears in several verses in *Psalms*, in line with the Western tradition that recognizes the harp as the symbol of lyrical poetry. Gottlober's poetic involvement with the origin and history of Hebrew poetry dealt with the clarification of the nature of the Hebrew poem, its sources, and its cultivation. It is within this context that the *nevel* plays a significant part, as a universal, cultural archetype.

The Nevel as an Attribute of European Poetry

The use of the *nevel* figure to reconstruct a biblical context, or as part of a description of the biblical reality with which the *maskilim* wished to suffuse their literature, points to the *internal-Jewish pole* of the hybrid identity of the Hebrew *Haskalah* poets. The use of the *nevel* figure among these poets, however, was also accomplished under the obvious influence of the European attribute of the harp/lyre, that served the Romantic poets as a symbol of lyric poetry – and moreover, of the poet *per se*. Various examples, brought below, present the *nevel* as a harp/lyre, thereby demonstrating the modern use of the term.

In Abraham Dov-Ber ha-Kohen Lebensohn's poem "The Spring," written in the style of Romantic German spring poems, the harp/lyre serves a traditional function familiar from the European Romantic tradition, as an illustration of the awakening of Nature and the blossoming of flowers, while accompanying the poet, who views the beauty of the world renewing itself 1(895: 23):

פֹּה זַמְּרוּ שִׁיר עַל נָבֶל / מַה תֶּחֱזוּ עִיר סֹעֶרֶת? / שָׁם פֹּעַל אָדָם הָבֶל, / פֹּה הַדְרַת אֵל שֹׁרֶרֶת

Sing here a song with a harp [*nevel*] / Why do you look upon a bustling city? /
There, a man's actions are futile, / Here, the majesty of God prevails!

The use of the harp/lyre as a musical instrument, to express the heartfelt feelings of the lover, as in the Romantic love lyrics, may also be found in the Hebrew poetry of the *maskilim*. Thus, for instance, in the poetry of Zevi Hirsch Jonathanson, in which the lover asks his beloved for permission to serenade her in the accepted Romantic manner (1893: 109):

הַרְשִׁינִי בַּת־חֵמֶד לַחֲזוֹת פָּנַיִךְ, לָשִׁיר גַּם לִפְרוֹט בַּעֲדֵךְ עַל פִּי נֵבֶל.

Allow me, charming girl, to look upon your face, to sing and pluck my lyre for you.

The attribute of the harp, as a symbol of all lyrical poetry, as it was recognized in traditional European poetry, was also found in Hebrew *Haskalah* poetry. Solomon Salkind composed *ars*-poetic poetry, in the center of which stands the image of the poet, whose desire is the song plucked on the harp (1866: 82):

עַל זִמְרָה נִשְׂגֶּבֶת / קוֹל אִישׁ יַשְׁמִיעֶנָּה / אוֹ נֵבֶל יִפְרְטֶנָּה / לֹא אָזְנְךָ עוֹגֶבֶת?

Does not your ear desire sublime melody, made by man's voice or plucked upon the harp?

The Nevel as Symbol in Elegiac Poetry

The harp/lyre, as a sign of personal poetic expression, appears in many elegies written by *Haskalah* poets. Accordingly, these poets often imagined a deceased poet as resembling a harp that had ceased playing or whose strings had been torn. Figurative uses of the harp particularly abounded in the common genre of the poetic epitaph. Thus, for example, in the epitaph for the gravestone of Abraham Dov-Ber ha-Kohen Lebensohn (1895: 20)

בְּמוֹתְךָ הוּעַם אוֹרוֹ נוּפַץ כִּנּוֹרוֹ שָׁבוֹ הִשְׁתַּבֵּחַ /
עִמְּךָ נִשְׁבַּר הַנֵּבֶל וַיְהִי שִׁירוֹ לְאֶבֶל כִּי פַּס הַמְנַצֵּחַ.

With your death its light dulled, his harp use for praise shattered /With you the lyre broke and its song became a lamentation because the poet vanished.

A visual expression for the place of the harp in Hebrew literature as the figure of a literary Muse may be found on postcards printed by the "Lebanon Company" in Warsaw, to serve as bookmarks. In honor of *Haskalah* authors, the portraits of two of the most distinguished Hebrew writers of their time – Peretz Smolenskin (on the right) and Abraham Mapu (on the left) – were printed on postcards.[5] Under each portrait are illustrations of four symbols: an author's inkwell, a classic, broken-stringed harp placed on books (indicating that the writers are deceased), an extinguished candle, and a white dove:

Source: The National Library of Israel

There are, in addition, a few unusual instances in which the harp actually stands in opposition to human mortality. While the corpse of the poet is being brought to its grave, something in the eternal nature of the melody, symbolized by the instrument, still lingers in his wake. Thus, for example, when Jonathanson laments the death of his father and describes "the harp

[*nevel*] of Zion" – his father's Hebrew works – he adds that his father's words will continue to exist even after he has gone (Jonathanson 1893: 109):

> גַּם אַתָּה אָב יָקָר! אָהַבְתָּ תּוּשִׁיָה, עַל נֵבֶל צִיּוֹן זֶמֶר הִשְׁמַעְתָּנוּ, שִׁירֵי קֹדֶשׁ, הֵד הָעִיר הָעֲנִיָה, וּ״כְלֵי שִׁירֶיךָ״ תָּמִיד יִהְיוּ בָּנוּ.
>
> You, dear father! You loved wisdom, on the harp of Zion you played us songs, sacred songs, an echo of a poor city, and the "instruments of your songs" will always reside within us.

The Nevel as Metaphor in the Burgeoning Jewish National Poetry

The figure of the *nevel*, which functioned as a universal metaphor for the spirit of the poem in the life of the poet, takes on a more nationalistic character among the later poets of the *Haskalah*. For instance, Judah Leib Gordon's famous lament on the death of Michah Joseph Lebensohn opens with a description of the *nevel* as a metaphor of the Muse, the inspiration, that ceased. However, in this elegy, Gordon also describes the nationalistic role of the *nevel*, that plays its melody in the service of God, to console "the Daughter of Zion" (1901: 166):

> מִקִּירוֹת לִבְּךָ קוֹל נֵבֶל אֱלוֹהַּ / שָׁמְעָה בַּת-צִיּוֹן וַתִּשְׁכַּח כָּל נֹהַ / עֵת בָּא הָרוּחַ וְיִתָּרָיו רָעָשׁוּ׃ /
> עַתָּה שָׁב אֵבְלָהּ וַיִּגְדַּל עַד מָעְלָה / כִּי בְּצָפְרַת יוֹמְךָ בָּא לְךָ הַלָּיְלָה, / נִשְׁבַּר הַנֵּבֶל וַחֲבָלָיו נִטָּשׁוּ.
>
> From the walls of your heart, the divine harp [*nevel*] sounds / the Daughter of Zion heard, and forgot all other laments / when the wind came and its bow-strings resounded: / now grief returns and grows evermore / because night came upon you on your very morning / the harp [*nevel*] is broken and its strings have been forsaken.

The *nevel* served as a Jewish national symbol predominantly during the transition from the *Haskalah* poetry to the pre-Zionist work of the poets known as the "Lovers of Zion" (*Hibbat Tsiyon*). The role of poet, then, was to revive his broken harp to play anew, in other words, to renew the Jewish national spirit. In his poem "Isaac's Prayer," Isaac Kaminer likens the playing of the harp to the weeping of his People and their suffering in the Diaspora (1969: 64):

> תֵּן לִי , אֵלִי, אַךְ קוֹלוֹת זֶה הַנֵּבֶל / הַבּוֹכֶה בְּבְכִי כָל בְּנֵי עֹנִי, נִשְׁאֵי הַסֵּבֶל! / תֵּן לִי, אָבִי, אַךְ אֶת מֵיתְרֵי זֶה הַנֵּבֶל / וַאֲקוֹנֵן עַל צָרוֹת בַּת עַמִּי, אֶקְרָא אֵבֶל
>
> Give me, my God, only the sounds of this harp [*nevel*] / that's crying for all the poor, who suffer! / Give me, my Father, only the strings for this harp [*nevel*] / so I may lament the travails of my People.

Similarly, Abba Constantin Shapiro also associates the playing of the harp with the song of his people in exile. "*Mi-Hezyonot 'Ami*" ("From the Visions of My People") (Kartun-Blum 1969: 85):

> עֵת מַחֲבֵא־רוּחִי פֹּרֵט עַל פִּי נֵבֶל / יְלַהֵט שִׁיר עַמִּי, שִׁיר עֹנִי וָסֵבֶל.
>
> When my hidden spirit is plucking the harp / the song of my People will ignite, a song of poverty and suffering.

Menahem Mandel Dolitzky, in his famous poem "Shulamit" that deals with the restoration of the Jewish Nation after the return to the Promised Land, uses the figure of the harp. Dolitzky loads this figure with echoes of historical laments, beginning with the biblical laments of the prophet Jeremiah in Lamentations, and continuing with the medieval poems of Judah Halevi (Cole 2007: 162-64). Thus, Dolitzky writes (Kartun-Blum 1969: 139):

> הָבִי לִי יָדֵךְ, שׁוּלַמִּית יָפָתִי, / קָדִימָה נֵלֵכה אֶל אֶרֶץ חֶמְדָּתִי / וְשָׁם בֵּין פְּרָחֶיהָ אֶשְׁתֶּלֵךְ! / אָז בְּלִי הַבּׂכֶה כְּתַנִּים / יָשִׁיר עַל פְּרָחִים, שׁוֹשַׁנִּים / וְחָיְתָה בַת שִׁירִי בְגָלָלֵךְ.
>
> Give me your hand, my beautiful *Shulamit*, / forwards we will walk to the land
> I desire / and there, between its flowers, I will plant you! / Then, my weeping harp [*nevel*] / shall sing of flowers and roses / and my Muse shall live again, thanks to you.

Conclusion

The variety of appearances of the *nevel* as a literary figure in Hebrew *Haskalah* poems demonstrates the twofold nature of such poetry. In many instances, the harp/lyre serves as a pseudo-biblical illustration, influenced by the biblical context, with the intent of creating a neo-classical Hebrew that is based on the Hebrew Bible. Nonetheless, in numerous other cases, the figurative harp/lyre motif deals with the essence of Hebrew poetry, the image of the Hebrew poet, literary creativity, and the Muse of the living poet. Hebrew poetry dealing with the deaths of Hebrew poets and/or the cessation of Hebrew poetry was clearly impacted by European poetry, starting from the classical Greek era and through to the contemporary European poetry of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Notes

1 All the English translations of biblical verses are cited from the Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh* (1985). The English translations of the Hebrew poems are by Ethelea Katzenell.

2 Regarding the ritualistic elegies in Sumer, and the manner in which the instruments reflected the theology behind them, see Gabbay 2014. Similarly, from the start of the ancient Babylonian period, five elegies remain on the destruction of cities, resulting from the fall of the Ur Dynasty. In the elegy on the destruction of Ur, the Goddess Ningal ("Great Queen'" and wife of the God, Nanna, is crying for the demolished city; she is described placing Adani, "the harp of tears," amid the ruins of the temple, as a symbol of her mourning for the destruction of Ur: "The woman, her voice *accompanied* by the lyre of mourning with its *algar*, Softly intones a dirge for the silent house, all alone" (Samet 2014: 59).

3 Tobi claims that the use of the term "harp" in medieval Hebrew music does not refer to the ancient biblical harp, nor does it correspond to the modern Hebrew usage of *nevel* (harp), rather it is an oud.

4 Commenting on the identification of the *nevalim*, Schirmann also writes: "We do not know to what instrument the poets were referring by this name, but perhaps they meant the Arab *rebab.*"

[5] Sources:
Abraham Mapu:
https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_ARCHIVE_AL002782073/NLI#$FL12178923
Peretz Smolenskin:
https://www.nli.org.il/he/archives/NNL_ARCHIVE_AL002782756/NLI#$FL12175672

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