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**Haim Guri and Rabbi David Buzaglo: A Theo-Political Meeting
Place of Zionist Sabra Poetry and Jewish Liturgy***

INTRODUCTION

In the days preceding Israeli's national Memorial Day in 2005, Israeli Broadcasting Authority aired the *piyyut*¹ *Binu Hamordim* ("Wise Up, O Rebels") written by Rabbi David Buzaglo (1903–1975). A few weeks later an audio recording of this *piyyut* was posted to a website dedicated to the development of an online archive of

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¹ A *piyyut* is a poetic text, often composed and performed in Hebrew that expresses religious concepts that are closely tied to the Jewish literary canon. Traditionally *piyyutim* are sung as part of the synagogue liturgy, in homes for festival celebrations, and in conjunction with lifecycle events. Moroccan and Syrian communities have developed a tradition of singing *piyyutim* called *Shirat Bakashot* (supplications) when people gather for singing before commencing their morning prayers. See Mark Kligman, "Diversity and Uniqueness: An Introduction to Sephardic Liturgical Music" in *Sephardic & Mizrahi Jewry*, ed. Zion Zohar (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 264—273.

piyyutim.² What appears at first sight to be a traditional *piyyut* actually breaks away from the customary form³ by borrowing its melody from *Bab el Wad*, one of the most distinctive Israeli-Zionist songs, composed by the poet Haim Guri (Tel-Aviv, b. 1923).⁴ Frequently sung at national memorial ceremonies, *Bab el Wad* has been part of the canon of Israeli civic religion since the first years of the State.⁵ *Binu Hamordim* is thus a unique religious hymn that replaces the lyrics to a canonical Zionist-Sabra song, resulting in a significant textual event with theological and political overtones. It compels the audience to read the *piyyut* as a response, a rejection, or perhaps a call for dialogue with Guri's poem and *Bab el Wad*'s distinctive place within the Israeli national narrative.⁶ With regard to this *piyyut*, Meir Buzaglo, the *payytan*'s son and professor of philosophy, suggests that, "... [R. David Buzaglo] felt that he must present a Jewish alternative to *Bab el Wad*."⁷ With this in mind, Buzaglo's *piyyut* can be seen as a meeting place (and to some extent a battleground) between traditional Mizrahi (Moroccan) Jewish liturgy and

² The establishment of the website *Piyyut* (www.piyyut.org.il/english) was a joint initiative of the Avi Chai Foundation and קהילות שרות (Singing Communities), an organization also supported by the Avi Chai Foundation. Since its creation several years ago, the Singing Communities project has recorded hundreds of Jewish religious hymns.

³ A *maqam* (pl. *maqamat*) is a musical scale used in traditional Arabic music that defines its habitual phrases, important notes, melodic development, and modulation.

⁴ Amnon Shiloah reminds us that cantors and *payytanim* (liturgical poet-musicians) "have done more than anyone else to introduce alien tunes into music used in the synagogue – and outside of it as well." Amnon Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Tradition* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 67. As was noted by Joseph Chetrit, Rabbi David Buzaglo was known for composing many *piyyutim* to the melodies of contemporary Arab folk music. This fact testifies to his openness to new and contemporary music, and therefore his readiness to learn new tunes. In the case of *Binu Hamordim*, he chose to use a Hebrew song popular in Jerusalem and not an Arabic one popular in Casablanca. See Joseph Chetrit, *Piyyut and Poetry in Moroccan Jewry: Papers on Poems and Poets* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1999), 322.

⁵ See Eliezer Don-Yehiya and Charles S. Liebman, "The Symbol System of Zionist-Socialism: An Aspect of Israeli Civil Religion," *Modern Judaism* (1981): 121–148.

⁶ Since both Guri's poem and Rabbi Buzaglo's *piyyut* are texts that are sung, the terms "readers" and "audience" are used interchangeably.

⁷ Meir Buzaglo, "Salim, Haim, and David: Variations of Forgetfulness," (Hebrew) *Teoria U'Bikoret* 22 (2003): 175.

Zionist Israeli Sabra poetry. The focus of this paper is the reconstruction of the textual event in which Guri and Buzaglo meet and its resulting theo-political aspects. In many respects Buzaglo's *piyyut* (written before 1965 while he still resided in Morocco) marks a religious Mizrahi alternative to the secular Sabra narrative and has inspired contemporary dialogue between the various factions that make up Israeli society. In recent years two interpretations to the *piyyut* have been offered: that of Prof. Meir Buzaglo, son of the *payytan*, and another by Rabbi Shimon Biton.⁸ This paper offers an alternative interpretation to both. While there has been disagreement about the correct interpretation of the *piyyut*, the different readings demonstrate how dialogue between representatives of various traditions can enrich Israeli theo-political discourse.

During the first decades of the Israeli State, the idea of the “melting pot” shaped Zionist national identity. As such, Israeli leaders had decided to integrate Mizrahi Jews into a hegemonic Sabra culture which was simultaneously Israeli and European-Jewish⁹ and in which the Sabra served as an archetypal character.¹⁰ In light of this historical

⁸ Ibid., 171—184. Shimon Biton, “Wise up: Between Haim Guri and Rabbi David Buzaglo” (Hebrew) published on the *Piyyut* website: <http://www.piyyut.org.il/articles/282.html>. Accessed 18 February 2008.

⁹ As Zion Zohar shows, the Zionist (Ashkenazi) leadership (like Ben Gurion and Ben Zvi) moved from an affinity to “Orientalism” to an anti-Orientalist sentiment. At first, many Zionists, including the political leadership, identified the “Arab” as an authentic model to be appreciated and imitated in order to rid the Jew of the remnants of exilic characteristics. A change in attitude is evident after the 1929 Hebron riots in which Arab mobs massacred their Jewish neighbors-- men and women, children and the elderly-- who had lived in Hebron for generations. Gradually, the enthusiasm for the “Oriental” Arab was replaced with contempt. The “Oriental” was associated with backwardness and by association the “Oriental” Jew came to be identified with Arabs and their “slave mentality.” See Zion Zohar, “Sephardim and Oriental Jews in Israel” in Idem., ed., *Sephardic & Mizrahi Jewry: From the Golden Age of Spain to Modern Times* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 303—305.

¹⁰ See ch. 2 of Oz Almog's, *The Sabra—A Profile* (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), and especially the treatment of the Ashkenazi character of the Sabra, on 153—174. In his work, Yehuda Shenhav traces a pattern of suppression and effacement of the Arab-Jewish identity of immigrants to Israel from Arab countries. The Zionist enterprise required that the population conform to an identity “package” that included nationality, religion and ethnicity. Accordingly, the Mizrahi had to outwardly become a religious-nationalist in the Ashkenazi mold in order to rid himself of being identified with the Arabs. This

situation, an analysis of this textual event extends beyond the realm of poetry. By replacing the lyrics of a prayer-like poem from Israeli civil religion, Buzaglo challenged the predominant secular Zionist narrative and Israel's collective national memory. At the same time, Buzaglo's *piyyut*-- in fact, his entire literary oeuvre-- offered a theological perspective on the Jewish-Israeli situation that differed significantly from right-wing, messianic religious Zionism.

Before moving on to the analysis of the poems, it is necessary to define the term "political theology" as it is used here. By political theology I mean the use of theological models in the political context for the purpose of reinforcing the legitimacy of the polity. Political theology is a system of reasoning and discourse that uses religious concepts in order to understand, evaluate, and shape a course of action in the political arena. Political theology thus provides the meta-narrative for the political entity-- its past, present, and future-- and serves as the theological matrix in which the political reality is given meaning. In turn, it influences (and in extreme cases, determines) the political decision-making processes, functions as an interpretive system for the political reality, and competes with other meta-narratives in determining the polity's identity as it sets its political agenda.¹¹ With this in mind, it is now possible to interpret the meeting ground between Haim Guri's *Bab el Wad* and Rabbi David Buzaglo's *Binu Hamordim*.

"Zionization" process resulted in the suppression of core elements of the identity and culture of the Arab-Jew. See Yehuda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity* (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2003), 16, 75.

¹¹ For further reading, see Menachem Lorberbaum, "Making Space for Leviathan: on Hobbes' Political Theory," *Hebraic Political Studies* 2 (2007): 78—100, and especially his closing remarks in subsection 4, "Political Theology and the Modern State," 99—100.

HAIM GURI'S *BAB EL WAD*

Haim Guri, a renowned Israeli poet, joined the *Palmach* and fought in Israel's War of Independence (1948). His poetry addresses topics that range from his most private and personal reflections to his experiences during World War II and the War of Independence. Guri wrote the poem/song *Bab el Wad* during the latter, commemorating the members of the *Haganah* and the *Palmach* who died in the numerous attempts to open and secure the main road connecting the Jewish part of Jerusalem to the rest of the Jewish *Yishuv* (Jewish community).¹² After Shmuel Pershko composed its accompanying music, *Bab el Wad* soon transcended the particular context for which it was written and performed (i.e., for *Palmach* veterans) and became a part of secular Israeli civic religion.

It is important to note that *Bab el Wad* is free of any reference to Jewish religious sources and customs of remembrance. The protagonist is clearly a veteran soldier who has survived a harsh battle. When the soldier returns to the field where the battle was fought, he “walk[s], passing here without a sound... remember[s] [the dead soldiers], one by one; here [they] fought together on cliffs and boulders; here [they] were one family.”¹³

As the poem's protagonist walks attentively through the terrain, he evokes the memory of each of his fallen friends who were like his own brothers. The poem

¹² The *Haganah* (Hebrew for “defense”) was a paramilitary organization that became the core of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) following the establishment of the State of Israel. The *Palmach*, a Hebrew acronym for *Plugot Mahatz* (Strike Companies), was the elite brigade of the *Haganah*. In the last operation to secure the road to Jerusalem known as Operation *Nachshon*, (April 3-15, 1948), half of the 1500 soldiers were from the *Palmach*.

¹³ Fourth stanza. See appendix. The poem/song *Bab el Wad* is printed in numerous collections of Israeli songs. Guri never published the song in his poetry books, but it is included in *The Palmach Book II*, (Hebrew) ed. Gilad Zerubavel and Matti Megged, (Tel- Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1953), 172-173; and in the collection of *Palmach-Songs* he edited with the composer Haim Hefer in the book *The Palmach Family – Collection of stories and songs* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: The Organization of the Palmach Members, 1977), 215.

illustrates how the battlefield and its bloody context have made the dead and the living a family. The veteran recalls the details of the natural scenery, the events of the battle, and each and every one of the soldiers. Following this process of remembering, he commands future Israeli generations to remember forever the names of the soldiers killed in the wars. It seems that the protagonist's right to command the act of remembering the dead "brothers" derives from the perceived sacred and secular covenants existing between those who have died and those who continue living.

Israelis killed in battle sacrificed their lives in order to open the road to Jerusalem, to secure the daily lives of its population, and to ensure transportation of commodities and travelers into the city. Thus, the road to Jerusalem not only normalized life, but has become a memorial shrine of burnt military vehicles scattered along the winding path to this very day. During the period around Israel's Memorial and Independence Day, wreaths are laid and Israeli flags are attached to these vehicles. Therefore, as the poem suggests, when "a spring day will come, the cyclamens will bloom... The one who will walk on the road we traveled; Must not forget us, Bab-el-wad." The memory of the dead soldiers, their heroism and sacrifice, should not go unnoticed by those who continue on.

The words of the poem/song have religious power because they create the spiritual matrix by which the spirit of each individual integrates into the national memory. It is a religious poem without references to God, to past tradition, or to classical Jewish texts. The natural scene and the protagonist's commanding language both evoke spiritual engagement with the memory of the dead soldiers. As if pointing a finger, the first and the third stanzas direct us to look at various objects in the natural scene: "Here, I

pass, standing by the stone. Black asphalt road, rocks and ridges... Here, tar and lead fumed under the sun, Here, nights passed under fire and knives. Here, sorrow and glory dwell together, A burnt armored car and the name of an unknown.” The imperative to “remember” is located between the two stanzas in “Bab-el-wad, Forever remember our names”

Every sentence of the poem starts with the word “Here” – steering and directing the reader’s imagination towards a geographical place. This technique transports the audience back to the battlefield through the eyes of the protagonist. It transcends time and evokes their sympathetic-imagination; their sorrow, empathy, and pride. The natural geography is transformed in the reader’s mind into a mental geography that can be carried with them every time he or she “remembers.” At every memorial ceremony, the iconographic battle is present and has become part of the nation’s epic story.¹⁴

Above all, the poem has created a shared memory that is relived time after time. Through Guri’s words, contemporary reality is transformed into a present and future commemoration: “Here tar and lead fumed under the sun; Here nights passed under fire and knives; Here, sorrow and glory dwell together, A burnt armored car and the name of an unknown (*almonim*).” However, it seems that the names of the slain soldiers are known to the protagonist for he says, “And I walk, passing here without a sound, and I remember them, one by one.”¹⁵ Furthermore, he commands that the names of those killed in battle be remembered for eternity (*lanetzach*). Why then does the poet use the word

¹⁴ For a discussion of Guri’s epic poetry as found in his *Perchei Esh* (Flowers of Flame) (Tel-Aviv: Poalim, 1949) and *Shirei Chotam* (Songs of the Seal) (Tel-Aviv: Kibbutz Hameuchad, 1954), see Reuven Shoham, *Haim Guri: Poetic, Thematic, and Rhetoric Research in His Poetry* (Hebrew) (Be’er Sheva: Ben-Gurion University, 2006), chapter 3.

“unknowns”? Do they, or do they not have names? The Hebrew word “*almoni*” functions similarly to the English use of “one” pointing to a general third person who can be assigned any “real” name by the readers. Therefore the use of “*almoni*” allows the readers to fill in the names of the soldiers they have personally known to have died in the wars, creating a personalized memory while retaining a shared experience.

RABBI DAVID BUZAGLO’S *BINU HAMORDIM*¹⁶

Rabbi David Buzaglo is considered a leading *payytan* (poet, composer, performer of *piyyut*) and an authoritative teacher in the Moroccan tradition of religious hymns (*Shirei Yedidut*).¹⁷ His unique voice, musical talent, performance of religious hymns and prayers during the Jewish holidays, and his usage of Andalusian music have made him famous and adored amongst Jews and Arabs alike. He was born in 1903 in Zawia, a small town near Marrakech, and received a traditional Jewish education which included Talmud and *halakhah* (Jewish religious law). At the age of sixteen, he moved with his family to Casablanca where his traditional studies expanded to include poetry, liturgy, and Arab Andalusian music. Rabbi Buzaglo was soon considered a prodigy and was blessed with a phenomenal memory. Due to health problems and the loss of his eyesight in 1949, he did not accept a formal position as a rabbi and instead dedicated his life to

¹⁵ The lines are taken from the third and fourth stanzas.

¹⁶ See appendix for the text and translation.

¹⁷ Testifying to his expertise as a transmitter of *Shirei Yedidut* and the importance of his original compositions are the *haskamot* (approbations) by prominent rabbis including Chief Rabbi of Rishon LeZion Mordechai Eliahu, Chief Rabbi and head of religious court of Jerusalem Rabbi Shalom Messes, and the Chief Rabbi and head of the religious court of Petakh Tikvah, Rabbi Moshe Malkah. For additional discussion and biographical information, see the introduction to the collection of Rabbi Buzaglo’s

teaching Hebrew, cantorial music, and religious poetry. While in Casablanca, Buzaglo organized congregational youth choirs and taught them the tradition of *piyyut*. Many of his students became important *payytanim* affiliated with Moroccan congregations in Israel.¹⁸

After his immigration to Israel in 1965, Buzaglo took on a central role in the cultural reconstruction of the Jewish-Moroccan immigrant communities in Israel. His influence transcended the synagogue and his legacy inspired the subsequent generation of Mizrahi Israeli poets. The contemporary Israeli poet, Erez Biton, testifies that Buzaglo was a medium of deep atavism that inspired Biton's own catharsis and was instrumental in the rediscovery of Biton's inner self and identity.¹⁹

Buzaglo composed hundreds of *piyyutim* in Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic. Only on rare occasions did he compose a *piyyut* recognizing a contemporary event. In addition to the *piyyut* under discussion here, Buzaglo also composed a lamentation over the earthquake in Agadir (1960), and poems celebrating Israel's victory in the Six-Day War. Rabbi Buzaglo never put his *piyyutim* in writing nor did he ever agree to record his singing of them. His disciples learned the *piyyutim* by heart and later transcribed them. Therefore, determining the exact date of each and every composition is quite difficult. It is certain that *Binu Hamordim* was written in Casablanca sometime between 1952 and Buzaglo's departure for Israel in 1965. In 1952, the *payytan* Rabbi Zvi Torgeman returned to Morocco from Israel to teach the Hebrew language and to study with

compositions by Rabbi Amram Deri, *Mizmor LeDavid* (Hebrew) ((*Psalm to David*), (Jerusalem: Or Institute, 1991), 3—27.

¹⁸ See Chetrit, *Piyyut and Poetry*, chapter 8, especially 318—327.

¹⁹ Erez Biton, "Words about Rabbi David Buzaglo" (Hebrew) *HaKivon Mizrah* 12 (2006): 34.

Buzaglo. Among the three (then contemporary) Israeli songs that Torgeman taught Buzaglo was *Bab el Wad*.²⁰

CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS OF *BINU HAMORDIM*:

PROFESSOR MEIR BUZAGLO AND RABBI SHIMON BITON

Professor Meir Buzaglo and Rabbi Shimon Biton both agree that *Binu Hamordim* was written as a direct response to Guri's *Bab el Wad*. Both see R. Buzaglo's response as an expression of fundamental disagreement with how Guri commemorated the dead in *Bab el Wad*; "Do remember our names forever." In his "Salim, Haim, and David," Prof. Buzaglo states that Guri's imperative to remember the names of the dead soldiers enters an already "occupied" Jewish religious realm, and is therefore in direct (perhaps intentional) competition with it; "The Jewish people live on in commemoration; commemoration of the destruction of the Temple, of *Amalek*, of the Shabbat, and of the Exodus. . . .no new memory can claim ownership over the territory of commemoration."²¹ Prof. Buzaglo perceives Guri's *Bab el Wad* as an attempt to supersede the traditional religious memories with new secular Zionist ones. Furthermore, he notes that in *Bab el Wad*, Guri demands that the audience remember the names of "our" soldiers and in contrast to the detailed recollection of the Jewish soldiers on the battlefield, he leaves the enemy nameless and faceless: "The nonappearance or disappearance of the Arabs from

²⁰ This testimony was given by Rabbi Zvi Torgeman to Yossi Ben Shabbat, who is currently completing his Ph.D. dissertation on Rabbi Buzaglo. I thank Mr. Ben Shabbat for sharing this and other relevant information about the subject. The other two songs are the *Palmach* hymn *Misaviv Yehom Hasa'ar*, and *Nivneh Artzenu*. All three songs were quite popular and remain central to the Zionist ethos and culture. See also Chetrit, *Piyyut and Poetry*, 322 n. 22.

Guri's poem erases any guilt and carries within it dehumanization of the Arab."²² Accordingly, this apparent strategy of creating national memory may lead to feelings of isolation and entrenchment in an "inherent state of agony" that blocks the way for change and dialogue.²³

In contrast to Guri's concept of memorialization, Prof. Buzaglo claims that *Binu Hamordim* incorporates the newly formed traumatic memory of the 1948 battlefields into the traditional Jewish realm of remembrance. One of the many examples of this in the *piyyut* is provided in the phrase: "We were pursued strangled in days of hatred and fury," taken from the Book of Lamentations where it alludes to the destruction of the first Temple in Jerusalem.²⁴ Lamentations, it should be noted, is traditionally chanted on Tisha B'Av, a date on which Jews are called upon to remember major communal catastrophes. Both his return to traditional Jewish commemoration and his references and citations of religious texts diffuse the particular memory of each and every dead soldier of the present into the wider traditional religious memory of the communal past. This, in turn, prevents the memory of the recent wars from blocking the way to reconciliation with the enemy (i.e. the Arabs) and allows a level of healing from the more present trauma.

At the same time, in order to therapeutically transform the present traumatic memory one must first recognize the enemy as an enemy. And thus, Rabbi Buzaglo does not shy away from harsh condemnation of the enemy: "O battle eager murderous rebels." Yet, here again he moves the concrete enemy into the theological realm; by attacking,

²¹ Meir Buzaglo, "Salim, Haim, and David," 181 (all English translations of Meir Buzaglo's article are mine).

²² Ibid., 182.

²³ Ibid., 182.

they rebel against God's plan in history. This enables their destructive presence to be processed by traditional religious methods. The outcome is a call to leave the personal and process it within the religious framework. The enemy's aggression is perceived not only as personal and particular, but also as contextualized and mediated by traditional religious sources. History guided by the Divine leaves place for *teshuvah* (repentance) and therefore can be amended. In this way a door has opened to deal with the enemy on the one hand, and to heal on the other.

SHIMON BITON

Shimon Biton elaborates on Rabbi Buzaglo's references to tradition and explains that in contrast to Guri's imperative to remember the name of each and every dead soldier, Rabbi Buzaglo refers to the "passing day," the day when God created man.²⁵ Man is not eternal; his days on earth are numbered. According to Biton, Buzaglo refers to Ps. 144: 3-4: in "Lord, what is man, that you should take knowledge of him, or the son of man, that you should make account of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow." Man is a fragile creature. Man's frail disposition is not just a source of weakness, but at times his weakness is manifested in his propensity to quarrel and fight. That is the source of the angelic objection to the creation of man: "The angelic advocates of peace have cried loudly to God" and warned God "But man is quick to fight."²⁶ The

²⁴ Shimon Biton lists all the references to biblical, talmudic, midrashic, and kabbalistic literature.

²⁵ See Biton's commentary, "Wise up: Between Haim Guri and Rabbi David Buzaglo," <http://www.piyyut.org.il/articles/282.html>. Accessed 18 February 2008.

²⁶ *Binu Hamordim*, second stanza. See *Genesis Rabbah* 8: "R. Simon said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create Adam, the ministering angels formed themselves into groups and parties, some of them saying, 'Let him be created,' whilst others urged, 'let him not be created.' Thus it is written, Love and

piyyut reminds the audience that all humans suffer from inherent weaknesses. Once people acknowledge their frail and temporary nature, they may begin to realize their dependency on God. According to the midrash referred to by Rabbi Buzaglo in the *piyyut*, God created man despite the angelic objections. Buzaglo suggests that God commanded man to prove the angels wrong by installing man to be "...the crown of creation [man] has been created like a king,²⁷ so as to build the deserts, to plant the desolated places."²⁸ Humankind's failure to stand up to this task and its inclination to wage wars and bring destruction is an abhorrent act of rebellion against God and His hopes for his people. Biton emphasizes the universal and humanistic aspects of the third stanza. Instead of Guri's particular memory of the fallen soldiers, Buzaglo offers a universal reminder for man's obligation to "...call for peace, [to become] the crown of creation... to build the desert, to plant the desolated places..." This "call" challenges both nations, Jewish and Arab alike.

Both Prof. Buzaglo and Rabbi Biton underscore the last stanza as the climax and the highlight of David Buzaglo's theo-political message.²⁹ Rabbi Buzaglo writes:

Truth fought together, Righteousness and Peace combated each other (Ps. 85: 11): Love said, 'Let him be created, because he will dispense acts of love'; Truth said, 'Let him not be created, because he is compounded of falsehood'; Righteousness said, 'Let him be created, because he will perform righteous deeds'; Peace said, 'Let him not be created, because he is full of strife.' What did the Lord do? He took Truth and cast it to the ground. Said the ministering angels before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Why dost Thou despise Thy seal? Let Truth arise from the earth!' Hence it is written, Let truth spring up from the earth (Ps. 85: 12). All our Rabbis say the following in the name of R. Hanina, while R. Phinehas and R. Hilkiyah say it in the name of R. Simon: Me'od (E.V. 'very') is identical with Adam; as it is written, And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was good-me'od (Gen. 1: 31), i.e. and behold Adam was good. R. Huna the Elder of Sepphoris, said: While the ministering angels were arguing with each other and disputing with each other, the Holy One, blessed be He, created him. Said He to them: What can ye avail? Man has already been made!" H. Freedman, trans., *Midrash Rabba, Genesis, Vol.1*, ed. H. Freeman & M. Simon (Brooklyn: Soncino Press, 1983) 58.

²⁷ See Ps.. 8: 6—7 (Jerusalem: Koren Edition, 1997).

²⁸ *Binu Hamordim*, second stanza.

²⁹ Meir Buzaglo, "Salim, Haim, and David," 182, and, Biton, "Wise Up," commentary on the fourth stanza.

The Tetragrammaton was erased in the Temple's water and given to *Sotah* [woman defiled by jealousy] to drink in order to prove her innocence and bring peace between her and her husband.

This stanza refers to the fifth chapter in the biblical book of Numbers, which discusses a husband who challenges his wife's fidelity, but does not have any evidence for her alleged adultery. The Torah says:

But a fit of jealousy comes over him, and he is wrought up about the wife who has defiled herself; or if a fit of jealousy comes over one and he is wrought up about his wife although she has not defiled herself; the husband shall bring his wife to the priest... The priest shall bring her forward and have her stand before the Eternal... the priest shall bare the wife's head and place upon her hands the meal offering of remembrance, which is a meal offering of jealousy... and the priest shall administer the curse of jealousy... (the water of bitterness that induces the spell)... [and] he shall make the wife drink the water.³⁰

³⁰ Num, 5 18-26 (New York, Gunther Plaut Edition, WAHC Press, 2005)

According to the rabbinic tradition as preserved in the Talmud, the Tetragrammaton is written on parchment and the priest dissolves the Holy Name in water.³¹ The woman then drinks the water and if she has sinned she falls ill and collapses. But, “if the wife has not defiled herself and is pure, she shall be unharmed and able to retain seed.”³²

According to Meir Buzaglo, his father referenced this biblical passage to explain that just as God instructs the priest to erase His Holy Name in order to establish peace between husband and wife, Jews and Arabs must be ready to overcome their own private agony and erase their separate traumatic memories for the sake of peace. This imperative directly challenges Guri’s call to remember each and every name. According to Biton, “name” signifies man’s vain quest for status and honor – qualities which feed violence and hostility. Rabbi Buzaglo calls on Arabs and Jews alike to rise above the cycle of violence and revenge in order to live in peace. Both interpretations demonstrate the theopolitical potential of Buzaglo’s poetry by focusing on his use of religious language and metaphor and its ability to enrich contemporary Israeli political discourse regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. Prof. Buzaglo extends his father’s critique and employs these metaphors to challenge right-wing religious Zionists who invoke avenging the fallen and the sanctity of the land in the name of Jewish tradition. He claims that his father’s theopolitical poetry presents a “sober option for the reconstruction of the Arab-Israeli conflict. While he does not propose surrendering to the Arabs, he does call to strive for true peace and not just for comradeship.”³³

³¹ Y. Talmud, Sotah, chapter 2:4

³² Num. 5: 28.

³³ Meir Buzaglo, “Salim, Haim, and David,” 183—184.

RABBI DAVID BUZAGLO'S CRITIQUE: AN ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION

Both Meir Buzaglo and Simon Biton offer compelling interpretations of *Binu Hamordim* by suggesting that it offers an alternate idea of commemoration. However, while the idea that the *piyyut* contributes to theo-political discussion of the Arab-Israeli conflict is plausible, reading the third stanza from a new perspective yields an interpretation that significantly changes its focus. If indeed the *piyyut* calls for peace between Arabs and Jews and challenges Guri's notion of remembrance, the basis for this call lies elsewhere in the text. Buzaglo's reference to the ceremony of *Sotah* in the context of the Arab-Israeli wars relies on two religious themes: (1) the belief in the unique nature of the relationship between the people of Israel and God as expressed by the drama of exile and redemption, and (2) the peaceful essence of Israel encapsulated in the *piyyut* through the image of the biblical patriarch Jacob as the "simple man, a dweller in tents."³⁴

WAITING FOR THE MESSIAH

The *piyyut*'s last stanza can be read as an expression of messianic expectation for the redemption of Israel (*geulah*) – a central theme in Buzaglo's collected poetry.³⁵ While in Israel, many of his poems were dedicated to praising Israel as the Holy Land and Jerusalem as the holy city. He extolled their beauty, their eternal and contemporary

³⁴ Gen. 25: 27: The Hebrew is: איש תם ישב אהלים. The Hebrew is best rendered into English in the translation of Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004).

³⁵ Prior to his immigration to Israel he wrote sixty poems (of the 150 known to us) on this theme.

religious virtues, and the importance of protecting the State and its leaders.³⁶ Buzaglo wrote sixteen *piyyutim* during the period surrounding the 1967 War. These particular compositions present the Israeli success in the war not only as a secular triumph delivered by courageous Israeli soldiers, but also as a victory of the “God of Israel” and as a step in the process towards messianic redemption. Equally apparent in these writings is Buzaglo’s anger and harsh condemnation of Arab leaders who instigated war against Israel as a result of their failure to properly understand the new reality (i.e., the return of the Jews to their promised land).³⁷

However, even in these hymns celebrating military victory, Buzaglo does not cease from calling for peace.³⁸ It is important to note that it is precisely because of his religious perspective on the conflict, anticipating messianic redemption, that his theopolitical message is important. His traditional messianic expectations do not overshadow his call for peace. His celebration of the victories of the Israeli army does not change his commitment to the basic personification of State of Israel as “Jacob” – a “simple man, a dweller in tents.”³⁹ This image stands in sharp contrast to his brother and enemy Esau, “a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors.”⁴⁰ This motif appears in *Binu Hamordim*: “Jacob, honest, sought peace softly and gently... with his brothers...” Similarly, when Buzaglo discusses Abraham, the nation’s forefather in the *piyyut* “Star of Justice for Generations

³⁶ See, for example, the *piyyut* "אך בך מולדתי" (“Only in you my homeland”) in Rabbi Meir Atiya, *Shirei Dodim Hashalem* (Jerusalem: self-published, 2000), 230.

³⁷ See, for example, the *piyyut* "שלום לך שלם" (“Peace to You, Jerusalem”), in Atiya, 127 and “צבאות ערב” (The Arab Armies) on p. 338.

³⁸ See the *piyyut* "שלום לך שלם" (Peace to You, Jerusalem) in Atiya, 127. For a survey of these and other aspects of Buzaglo’s poetry see Chetrit, *Piyyut and Poetry*, chapter 8, especially 333-346.

³⁹ See above fn. 35.

⁴⁰ Gen. 25:27.

to Come” (“כוכב צדק לדורות”), he is portrayed as “an old man studying at the *Yeshiva*” and not a General; Abraham “[d]oes not know swords... he gathers congregations and teaches them his wisdom.” Only when under attack did Abraham act “as a lion [charging] from a forest; against four kings he stood up and charged.”⁴¹

Rabbi Buzaglo’s work combines the repetition of prayers for peace and an emphasis on the peaceful nature of the Jewish people together with a sober realization that when Jewish survival is threatened, the use of force, and even war, is both called for and obligatory. In one case he wrote “Happy are you [my] homeland that your king does wear his sword.”⁴² In another *piyyut* composed immediately following the war in 1967 he wrote “not the forces [and] not the minds determined Egypt’s defeat... but the divine concealed hand...”⁴³ In a *piyyut* for Chanukah he wrote “not daggers, not spears... but the creator of all, the omnipotent decried: may it be freedom for generations to come.”⁴⁴ His messianic tone and enthusiasm were amplified following the 1967 War; however, he continued calling for peace with the Arabs, and perpetuated the image of Israel as Jacob, the forefather whose character was far from that of a warrior.

⁴¹ All translations to Buzaglo’s *piyyutim* are mine. Atiya, 278. The Hebrew reads: זקן יושב בישיבה, לא שר צבא; ובסוד שולפי חרבות לא בא; אך להקהיל קהילות נפשו תאבה; להשמיעם את לקחו מדי עברו; // והנה הוא כאריה מתוך יער; ... מול ארבעה מלכים קפץ נסער; ... See also the *piyyut* “אשרינו כי נחלנו” (Happy are we that we inherit). This was written after 1949, following the War of Independence. Atiya, 123-124.

⁴² The Hebrew reads: “אשרך ארץ שמלכך, לא ענד חרבו”, from the *piyyut* “אשרך ארץ”, Atiya, 124.

⁴³ Atiya, 87, the Hebrew reads: “לא הכוחות, לא המוחות; קבעו תבוסת מצרים עד לבכיתה; כי יד רמה נעלמה; הפכה בן רגע על פניה שליתה”

⁴⁴ Atiya, 285. the Hebrew reads: “לא פגיונים לא כידונים; עמדו לחולשים על יוון יום עברות; כי יוצר כל יכול; הוא אמר ויהי לדרור דרור לדורות”

THE INTERPRETATION OF *SOTAH*:

As noted above, *Binu Hamordim*'s last stanza refers to the trial of the *Sotah*:

The Tetragrammaton was erased in the Temple's water and given to *Sotah* [woman defiled by jealousy] to drink in order to prove her innocence and bring peace between her and her husband.

Unlike the interpretations of Simon Biton and Meir Buzaglo, referring to the relationship between Arabs and Jews, the last stanza might better be seen as pointing to a redemptive event: the return of *Knesset Israel* (*Shechinah*, and the people of Israel) to her beloved, the *Kadosh Baruch Hu* (The Holy One, blessed be He). In the rabbinic and mystical traditions, *Knesset Israel* signifies, sometimes interchangeably, the people of Israel and the *Shechinah* - the feminine aspect of the divine Presence. It is beyond the scope of this article to cover all the facets of this subject and a limited description is sufficient for supporting the proposed interpretation.⁴⁵

According to rabbinic literature, the *Shechinah* went into exile with the people of Israel. In Zoharic Kabbalah the *Shechinah* is described as "the mother of the world," as *Knesset Israel*, and also as the "mother of Israel" through which the world receives the divine flux of energy. The emanation of bounty from the *Shechinah* is influenced by the merit of her "sons," the people of Israel. As long as Israel was in its land and the Temple

⁴⁵ For a general exposition of these motifs in rabbinic Judaism see Efraim Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979), chapter 3; in the Zohar see Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), part I, chapter 3.

stood, the union of the divine forces, the masculine and feminine, was intact. After the destruction of the Temple and the exile of Israel from its land, the protective *Shechinah* traveled with them – separating the feminine from the masculine (*Kadosh Baruch Hu*). Not only did the *Shechinah* suffer in exile with her “sons,” according to this tradition she was also held accountable for their corruption. God exiles his *Shechinah* and departs from her. At times the *Shechinah* is viewed as if she were held captive by the forces of evil (the *Sitra Achrah*, literally “the other side”), as if she dwelt in the quarters of another man.

As the *Shechinah* struggles against the forces of evil, her victorious moments are manifested in this world as victory over the gentiles. Although at times she is held captive by the masculine evil forces, the *Shechinah* stays “clean” and “pure” and is not defiled by the *Sitra Achrah*. The ritual of testing the *Sotah* symbolizes the maintenance of her purity and her reunion with the *Kadosh Baruch Hu*. This image parallels Israel’s experience in exile amongst other nations. During exile, the reunion of the *Shechinah* and the *Kadosh Baruch Hu* occasionally takes place in synagogues, houses of study (*batei midrash*), and on Shabbat - all a result of Israel’s engagement with religious rituals. This relationship between the feminine Israel and the masculine God is central to Lurianic Kabbalah and finds its way out of the esoteric mystic realm into much larger and more popular circles, eventually to become part of mainstream Jewish folklore. This is evident in the wide acceptance of *Lecha Dodi* (Come my Beloved to Greet the Bride), the mystical *piyyut* by Rabbi Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz of the 16th century, as part of the liturgy of Shabbat evening.

As mentioned previously, the loyalty of the woman (*Shechinah*, *Knesset Israel*, *Am Israel*) is demonstrated in the last stanza of *Binu Hamordim*. The *Shechinah* (i.e., *Knesset Israel*) “drinks” the water of *Sotah* “in order to prove her innocence.” According to the biblical passage as well as preserved in the oral tradition, the woman will conceive, reuniting the husband and wife with a child and securing their future. The divine drama of the *Shechinah*’s return to her “husband” and the return of the divine realm to its equilibrium is influenced by, and manifested through, the historical events in this world. Israel’s return to its land and the *Shechinah*’s return to the Godhead are intertwined and interdependent concepts and messianic events.

Indeed, the establishment of the State of Israel was conceived by Rabbi Buzaglo as the beginning of the processes of redemption.⁴⁶ In *Binu Hamordim*, the metaphor of the woman conceiving can be understood as a symbol of the beginning of redemption, the messianic era, the fruit of the reunion of *Knesset Israel* (*Shechinah*) and *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. For Buzaglo, the war waged against the State of Israel symbolized the rebellion of man (the Arabs) against God as it moved against God’s people and the processes of redemption. Buzaglo opens his *piyyut* with a plea: “Be wise you battle eager murderous rebels. You must not stand against a people who intimately speak to the One who dwells in the heavens, the eternal, and the omnipotent. In His shade they [God’s people] put their trust and safety.” From a theo-political perspective, Buzaglo’s *piyyut* offers a different way to commemorate those who sacrificed their lives for the State of

⁴⁶ See for example the *piyyut* "ירושלים עיר בירה" (Jerusalem the capital) in Atiya, *Shirei Yedidut*, 123. In the *piyyut*, Buzaglo prays for redemption ... “send our messiah, the son of Jesse our king, ...” According to Chetrit it was written before 1967 and the unification of Jerusalem. Chetrit, *Piyyut and Poetry*, 339. See also "ירושלים אשרך" (happy are you Jerusalem) in Atiya, 268—270.

Israel: it explains contemporary events through a traditional religious prism and incorporates it into the divine drama that leads the Jewish people from exile to redemption.

CONCLUSION

The theo-political significance of *Binu Hamordim* is twofold. It establishes the self image of Israel as more similar to the ancient patriarch “Jacob,” a “simple man, a dweller in tents”⁴⁷ in contrast to the predominant modern image of Israel as the new and strong Jew. Furthermore, it provides us with religious language that enriches contemporary Israeli political discourse. In both respects it reconnects contemporary Zionism and Israeli culture to religious metaphors different from those highlighted by both the predominant secular Zionists and the religious Zionists.

In spite of the violent nature of the conflict between Arabs and Jews, Buzaglo depicts Israel as the peaceful character Jacob. In so doing, the *piyyut* stands in contrast both to the Sabra ethos and the relationship of right-wing fundamentalists to the land of Israel. “Jacob” does not support the metaphor of the “new Jew,” the tough man, or the fighter. In fact, in the metaphors introduced by Buzaglo in this *piyyut*, the rough, secular Sabra more closely resemble Esau than Jacob. In his poetry in general, the belief that historical events indicate the beginning of redemption does not change the image of the Jew as Jacob. In addition to challenging the ideal of the secular Sabra, it also critiques the right-wing religious Zionist self-image that infuses the Sabra with religious and

⁴⁷ See fn. 34.

messianic zeal. Buzaglo rejects the image of the religious Sabra who, as a soldier in God's armies, perceives any territorial compromise as a setback for redemption. Instead, he calls for all humans to be "the crown of creation" and demands that man "acknowledge and resume his divine responsibility... only to build the deserts, to plant the desolated places."

It is my hope that this article, joined with the articles written by Prof. Meir Buzaglo and Rabbi Shimon Biton, brings Rabbi David Buzaglo and the religious world he represents closer to the center of the cultural-political discussion in contemporary Israel. As this article seeks to demonstrate, the textual event is a theo-political one, providing both a critique and an alternative to the national mores of remembrance. Buzaglo's poetry contributes an alternative look at issues regarding the religious relationship to the land of Israel, the Arabs, the religious interpretations of historical events, and the self-image and character of the Israeli Jew. His poetry incorporates the Jewish traditions of remembering and messianic expectations together with Zionist enthusiasm and, at the same time, provides an alternative to the messianic narrative of Rabbi Yehudah Kook and his Gush-Emunim followers. For Buzaglo, the messianic awakening triggered by the historic establishment of the State of Israel and the 1967 victory in the Six Day War have not transformed the self-image of Israel from "Jacob a dweller in tents" to the warrior Sabra. In spite of the joy he took in Israel's victories over the Arab armies, Buzaglo has not demonized or dehumanized the Arabs.

Rabbi Buzaglo spent most of his adult life in Casablanca, a port city which during the 19th century became the center of Moroccan industry and trade. In Morocco in general

and Casablanca in particular, the Arab-Jewish experience was a positive one. King Mohammad V was known for his sympathy towards the Jews in his realm. In Casablanca, Rabbi Buzaglo trained with the best of the Andalusian musicians and became a popular performer of that music. He was invited to perform at the King's palace and before ministers and the Moroccan elite. As was demonstrated above, in many of his *piyyutim*, and especially in *Binu Hamordim*, his poetry breaks the typical lines between the Israeli political Left and Right. Rabbi Buzaglo aligns Jewish national redemption with a Jewish universal religious and humanistic vision - a vision described in the kind of theo-political language so needed in Israel today.

APPENDIX:

I have translated the poems for the purpose of this article. The translation is not always able to convey the poetic and aesthetic aspects of the originals.

Haim Guri
Music: Shmuel Pershko

מילים: חיים גורי (1949)
לחן: שמואל פרשקו

<p>Here, I pass, standing by the stone. Black asphalt road, rocks and ridges. Evening slowly descends; sea-wind blowing Light of a first star, over Beit Machsir.⁴⁸</p>	<p>פה אני עובר, ניצב ליד האבן. כביש אספלט שחור, סלעים ורכסים. ערב אט יורד, רוח ים נושבת אור כוכב ראשון מעבר בית מחסיר.</p>
<p>Bab-el-wad, Forever remember our names! Convoys broke through, on the way to the City. Our dead laid out on the side of the road. The iron skeleton, silent like my comrade.</p>	<p>באב אל וואד, לנצח זכור נא את שמותינו, שיירות פרצו בדרך אל העיר. בצידי הדרך מוטלים מתינו. שלד הברזל שותק כמו רעי.</p>
<p>Here, tar and lead fumed under the sun, Here, nights passed under fire and knives. Here, sorrow and glory dwell together, A burnt armored car and the name of an unknown.</p>	<p>פה שצפו בשמש זפת ועופרת. פה עברו לילות באש וסכינים. פה שוכנים ביחד עצב ותפארת, משוריין חרוך ושם של אלמוני.</p>
<p>Bab-el-wad...</p>	<p>באב אל וואד...</p>
<p>And I walk, passing here without a sound, And I remember them, one by one. Here, we fought together on cliffs and boulders Here, we were together--one family.</p>	<p>ואני הולך, עובר כאן חרש חרש ואני זוכר אותם אחד אחד. כאן לחמנו יחד על צוקים וטרש כאן היינו יחד משפחה אחת.</p>
<p>Bab-el-wad...</p>	<p>באב אל וואד...</p>
<p>A spring day will come; the cyclamens will bloom; Anemone red on the mountain and on the slope. The one who will walk on the road we traveled, Must not forget us, Bab-el-wad!</p>	<p>יום אביב יבוא ורקפות תפרחנה, אודם כלנית בהר ובמורד. זה אשר ילך בדרך שהלכנו אל ישכח אותנו באב אל-ואד</p>

⁴⁸ An Arab village that overlooks the road to Jerusalem and became a base for the Arab siege of Jerusalem in 1948. It took the *Palmach* more than three waves of attacks to take the village.

<p>R. David Buzaglio (Casablanca, 1952?) Wise Up, O Rebels!</p> <p>Wise up, O battle-eager murderous rebels! You must not stand against a people who intimately Speak to the One who dwells in the heavens, the Omnipotent, the Eternal, in His shade they put their trust and safety.</p> <p>Remember a passing day was made for creation The angelic advocates of peace have cried loudly to God:⁴⁹ “But man is quick to fight!” Therefore you (men) must call for peace, Man, the crown of creation, has been created like a king,⁵⁰ so as to build the deserts, to plant the desolated places, but he has ruined the fields of plenty and turned citadels and palaces to rubble.⁵¹</p> <p>Remember ...</p> <p>Honest Jacob sought peace softly and gently, Both with his brothers⁵² and with his opponents. We were persecuted, strangled in days of hatred and fury,⁵³ but we have always pursued peace, we, his descendents.</p> <p>Remember ...</p> <p>The Tetragrammaton was erased in the Temple’s water and given to <i>Sotah</i> [woman defiled by jealousy] to drink in order to prove her innocence and bring peace between her and her husband.</p> <p>Remember...</p>	<p>ר' דוד בוזגלו בינו המורדים</p> <p>בינו נא מורדים רודפי קרב ורצח לא לתת בקול על עם שופד שיחו מול שוכן שמיו, כל יכול לנצח כי בצל סכו שם שם לו מבטחו</p> <p>זכרו נא יום בן חלוף הוכן ליצירה פת שלום נתנה בקול מר למריו הלא הוא יציר נפשו לריב נמהרה זאת עשו אפוא, קראו לכם שלום נזר היצירה אנוש נוצר כמלה רק לבנות ציה לנטע שימון אך הוא שת בטה שדות יבול רב ערף וימגר לארץ, עפל וארמון</p> <p>זכרו...</p> <p>יעקב, ישר, דרש ברה ונעם את שלום אחיו ואת שלום שונאיו על צנאר נרדפנו יום חרון וזעם ושלומים רדפנו, נחנו צאצאיו</p> <p>זכרו...</p> <p>תוף מי המקדש מחקו שם בן ארבע להשקות סוטה יום אשר קנאו לה למען ברר את צדקה ונקבע להשרות שלום בינה ובין בעלה</p> <p>זכרו...</p>
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⁴⁹ Genesis Rabbah, 8.

⁵⁰ See Ps. 8: 6-7.

⁵¹ See Isa. 5:1-2, 6 and 32:13-17.

⁵² Gen. 37:14.

⁵³ Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeishev, Siman 4.