

ANCIENT POETRY, MODERN MUSIC, AND THE *WECHSELGESANG DER MIRJAM UND DEBORA*: THE MEANINGS OF SONG IN THE ITZIG CIRCLE

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It is well known that Sara Levy, *née* Itzig (1761–1854), a Jewish keyboardist, patroness, collector, and concert hostess, played a key role in the preservation of music by Johann Sebastian Bach, his sons, and the wider German compositional school of the eighteenth century—especially works by composers based in her home city of Berlin.¹ Her role in commissioning works by her teacher, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, and by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, attest to a desire to synthesize older styles and fuse them with new sensibilities. This has become even more apparent since the rediscovery and repatriation of the collection of the *Sing-Akademie*, a collection to which Levy donated an enormous quantity of musical scores during her lifetime. These donations and their reception have secured her place in the history of music composed by the Bach family.²

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¹See Peter Wollny, “Ein förmlicher Sebastian und Philipp Emanuel Bach-Kultus”: Sara Levy und ihr musikalisches Wirken, mit einer Dokumentensammlung zur musikalischen Familiengeschichte der Vorfahren von Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2010); Wollny, “Sara Levy and the Making of Musical Taste in Berlin,” *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (winter, 1993): 651–88; Wollny, “Ein förmlicher Sebastian und Philipp Emanuel Bach-Kultus”: Sara Levy, geb. Itzig, und ihr musikalischer Salon,” in *Musik und Ästhetik im Berlin Moses Mendelssohns*, ed. Anselm Gerhard (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1999), 217–55; Christoph Wolff, “A Bach Cult in Late-Eighteenth-Century Berlin: Sara Levy’s Musical Salon,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 58, no. 3 (spring, 2005): 26–31. Extensive biographical information on the Itzig family appears in Thekla Keuck, *Hofjuden und Kulturbürger: Die Geschichte der Familie Itzig in Berlin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

²Christoph Wolff, “Recovered in Kiev: Bach et al. A Preliminary Report on the Music Collection of the Berlin Sing-Akademie,” *Notes*, 2nd series, 58, no. 2 (Dec., 2001): 259–71; see also *The Archive of the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin: Catalogue. Das Archiv*

Less well understood, however, is the role that music played in *her* life and in the lives of other women in her family and social circle. To say that Sara and her sisters were “salon” hostesses, or that they played in “house concerts,” addresses just one aspect of this broader issue. The question of what music meant to them—how it figured into their personal lives and their social and religious identities—remains elusive. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that very few of their letters or other verbal texts in their own voices have survived.³ While some Jewish women in Berlin around the turn of the nineteenth century wrote at length about their reactions to music and the other arts, the surviving documentation from the pen of Sara and her sisters, including Fanny von Arnstein and Zippora Wulff (later Cäcilie von Eskeles), reveals little about the way they used or thought of the music they collected.⁴ In the absence of clear verbal documentation, the music itself—both as material object and as sounding art—may constitute the best vehicle for understanding the role of music in the lives of the Itzig sisters.

The relatively small number of vocal works in Levy’s collection, in contrast to the hundreds of scores of instrumental music that bear her *ex libris*, has led some to question the extent to which Sara and her family members sang. However, she did collect scores of some vocal works, even if they are far fewer in number than the

der Sing-Akademie zu Berlin. Katalog (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2010), 41–42 and *passim*.

³Some letters to Sara Levy, including those from Johann Adam Hiller and Johanna Maria Bach (widow of C. P. E. Bach) are reproduced in Wollny, *“Ein förmlicher Sebastian und Philipp Emanuel Bach-Kultus”* (2010). Three letters from Sara Levy herself to the Swedish diplomat Karl Gustav von Brinckmann will appear in Barbara Hahn, “The *Salonnière* and the Diplomat: Sara Levy and Karl Gustav von Brinckmann,” in “Sara Levy’s World: Music, Gender, and Judaism in Enlightenment Berlin,” eds. Rebecca Cypess and Nancy Sinkoff (forthcoming).

⁴For example, Rahel Varnhagen’s reactions to the 1829 performance of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* are discussed in Yael Sela Teichler’s “Longing for the Sublime: Music and Jewish Self-Consciousness at Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* in Biedermeier Berlin,” forthcoming in “Sara Levy’s World.” On Fanny von Arnstein see Hilde Spiel, *Fanny von Arnstein: Daughter of the Enlightenment*, trans. Christine Shuttleworth with intro. by Michael Z. Wise (New York: New Vessel Press, 2013). The cultural attitudes of Jewish women in Berlin are discussed in Emily Bilski and Emily Braun, *Jewish Women and Their Salons: The Power of Conversation* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2005) and in Natalie Naimark-Goldberg, *Jewish Women in Enlightenment Berlin* (Portland, Oregon: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013). Further on the “salons” of Jewish women during this period, see note 56 below.

instrumental works. Zippora also owned vocal scores, and a set of strophic songs dedicated to Fanny suggests that singing formed part of her musical practice as well. However, since so few vocal works bear the names of the Itzig sisters, it is difficult to assess their significance, meanings, and usages.

My purpose in this essay is to consider one work with the *ex libris* of Zippora Wulff which survives in the collection of the *Sing-Akademie*: the *Wechselgesang der Mirjam und Debora* by Justin Heinrich Knecht (published ca. 1781), a cantata set to poetry drawn from Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's epic *Der Messias*.⁵ In light of the fact that this excerpt from Klopstock's *Messias* had already been held up by both Jewish and non-Jewish critics for its encapsulation of the spirit of the poetry of the Hebrew Bible, I argue that its appearance in the collection of a woman of the Jewish Enlightenment (Heb., *Haskalah*) is no mere coincidence.⁶ Klopstock's dialogue between Miriam and Deborah had been set previously by Georg Philipp Telemann and, although Telemann's setting remained unpublished, it was well known in Berlin. However, Telemann either neglected or overrode many of the features of Klopstock's poetry that critics associated with the spirit of ancient Hebrew songs. Knecht, by contrast, embraced these poetic constructions—an approach that was celebrated in reviews of the work. For women of the Jewish Enlightenment, Knecht's *Wechselgesang* served as an aesthetic bridge between past and present, between Jewish history and the theology of their Christian neighbors. This aesthetic connection, in turn, had practical ramifications, as calls for the emancipation of Jews in Prussia increased among both Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers.⁷

⁵Justin Heinrich Knecht, *Wechselgesang der Mirjam und Debora aus dem zehnten Gesange der Klopstockischen Messiade, in Musik gesetzt und Herrn Hofrath Wieland zugeeignet* (Leipzig: im Schwickertschen Verlage). Citations of the tenth *canto* of Klopstock's poem refer to Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, *Der Messias, zweyter Band* (Halle: Carl Hermann Hemmerde, 1756).

⁶The history and significance of the *Haskalah* movement are discussed in Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, trans. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

⁷The literature on the movement for emancipation is extensive. Among the most important works is Jakob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993). See also, for example, Jonathan M. Hess, *Germans, Jews, and the Claims of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2002); and Paul Lawrence Rose, *German Question/Jewish Question: Revolutionary Antisemitism in Germany from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990), 70–90 and *passim*.

The aesthetic and cultural issues raised by the presence of the *Wechselgesang* in Zippora Wulff's collection point to further questions about the meanings, usages, collecting habits, and performance practices of the Itzig sisters. At the end of this essay I identify a series of such questions in the hope that they will spark further discussion within the field.

Ancient Hebrew Poetry in the German Enlightenment

Zippora Wulff's copy of Justin Heinrich Knecht's *Wechselgesang der Mirjam und Debora* is preserved in the collection of the *Sing-Akademie* in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin as SA 1487. The work is an extended cantata set to an excerpt from Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's retelling of the Passion story—his epic poem *Der Messias*. This excerpt is a dialogue written in the voice of two women from the Hebrew Bible, Miriam and Deborah, who witness and reflect upon the crucifixion of Jesus, responding to it with a musical lament. The printed score does not designate specific instruments and is laid out in such a way that it could be realized either by a solo keyboard player, with the right hand playing the obbligato lines, or transferred to partbooks for realization by a small ensemble (Figure 1). (There are no figures for *basso continuo*, but the keyboardist would likely have been able to realize the harmonies by reading the lines for the treble instruments.) In this respect the score was flexible, offering opportunities for performance that could accommodate a variety of instrumental combinations, ensembles of varying sizes, and different settings.

Klopstock's *Messias* had sparked extensive debate and commentary since its first sections were published in 1748. Inspired by Johann Jakob Bodmer's German translation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the *Messias* was viewed by some critics as problematic because of its abandonment of Alexandrine verse and its unconventional use of poetic symbolism.⁸ Others regarded the representations of the characters in the story as unbelievable, and felt

⁸On Klopstock's notions of representation in poetry, see Kerstin Behnke, "Toward an Understanding of Romantic *Darstellung*: Klopstock's Representation of Life," in *The Spirit of Poesy: Essays on Jewish and German Literature and Thought in Honor of Géza von Molnár* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2000), 60–73.

that the whole project was marred by a lack of coherent style; if so, this was likely caused in part by Klopstock's work on the project over the course of several decades.⁹

Apart from the reception of the *Messias* as a whole, the song of Miriam and Deborah had its own interpretive history related to discussions of ancient Hebrew poetry as well as to its study and imitation by eighteenth-century writers. However, Klopstock's poetry for Miriam and Deborah is by no means a simple imitation of ancient Psalms. In its thematic content, this passage emphasizes the close relationship between Judaism and Christianity, implicitly suggesting that the two religions are bound together, and that the arts of poetry and music serve as intermediary. Klopstock's Miriam and Deborah view the crucifixion of Jesus as a tragedy for all of humankind—one that is to be lamented by people of all faiths. While Jesus is suffering and dying on the cross, Miriam and Deborah describe him as "Schönster unter den Menschen," the loveliest of all men. They weep, cry out to nature for help, and address themselves and each other with tears. Perhaps most significantly, they regard Mary—another woman—with sympathy and ask Jesus to comfort her. Finally they burst into a celebratory "Alleluia," prompted by the salvation brought about by the crucifixion. In its deep expression and its quick shifts in mood and character, their language adopts the principles of the *empfindsamer Stil*. Overall, the passage imagines these women reaching across religious boundaries to sympathize with and comfort one another.

The musicality of the Biblical text—the intrinsic properties that connected it with music and that led naturally to its musical recitation—was central to the discussions of the aesthetics of ancient Hebrew poetry in the mid-eighteenth century. It is clear that Klopstock's poetry for Miriam and Deborah was meant to invoke a

⁹Responses to *Der Messias* by Klopstock's contemporaries and by later writers are in "Klopstock's *Messiah*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* 11 (1986): 217–42. The controversy over the aesthetics of *Der Messias* is summarized in Frederick Henry Adler, "Herder and Klopstock" (PhD diss., Univ. of Illinois, 1913), 18–37; Jason Benjamin Grant, "The Rise of Lyricism and the Decline of Biblical Narration in the Late Liturgical Passions of Georg Philipp Telemann" (PhD diss., Univ. of Pittsburgh, 2005), 60–64; see also Mary Sue Morrow, *German Music Criticism in the Late Eighteenth Century: Aesthetic Issues in Instrumental Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 90.

musical reading, and it invites musical treatment. The lines that precede the dialogue and those that follow it explicitly describe the excerpt as a song:

Mirjams, und deine Wehmut, Debora, wurden nach langem, Traurenden Schweigen, zum sanften, zum weinenden Liede voll Klage. Denn der Unsterblichen Stimme zerfließt von sich selbst in Gesänge, Wenn sie Empfindungen sagt, wie Debora und Mirjam sie fühlten. Die auf Ephraims Berge nach ihrem Namen den Palmbaum Nannt', und Amrams Tochter, so sangen sie gegen einander:¹⁰

[Miriam's pain and yours, Deborah, after a long mournful silence, changed into a soft, into a weeping song, full of lament. For the voice of the immortals pours out into song, when it utters emotions like those which Deborah and Miriam felt. So she who on Ephraim's mountain gave her name to the palm tree and Amram's daughter sang, alternating with one another:]¹¹

In all likelihood, Klopstock's portrayal of Miriam and Deborah as singers originated from their characterization in the Hebrew Bible as musicians. Indeed, the musicality evoked by this introduction to Miriam and Deborah's song in the *Messias* echoes the lines that introduce the songs of the biblical Miriam (Exodus 15:20–21) and Deborah (Judges 5:1–31). Numerous Christian writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries remarked on the significance of Miriam and Deborah not only as important characters and prophetesses, but also as singers. As one Christian theologian wrote in 1800, "up to this time period in the biblical books, we find three hymns by women—those of Miriam, Deborah, and Hannah—versus [just] one song by a man—the song of Moses [at the Red Sea]."¹²

¹⁰Klopstock, *Der Messias*, 141.

¹¹English translations from *Der Messias* are mine, but I have consulted the very liberal translation in *The Messias: From the German of Klopstock. The First Sixteen Books by Mrs. Collyer and the Three Last by Mrs. Meeke* (London: F. C. and J. Rivington et al., 1821), 246.

¹²"finden wir bis auf diesen Zeitpunkt in den biblischen Büchern drey Hymnen von Weibern, von Mirjam, Debora und Hanna gegen ein Lied eines Mannes, das Lied Mosi." Immanuel Berger, *Praktische Einleitung ins Alte Testament...Zweyter Theil: Die historischen Bücher* (Leipzig: Siegfried Lebrecht Crusius, 1800), 1:183.

The connection between the musicality of Miriam's and Deborah's songs in the Hebrew Bible and the inherent musicality of the dialogue that Klopstock wrote for them was noted by critics soon after this section of the *Messias* was published in 1756. The first volume of the *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste*, edited by Friedrich Nicolai, Moses Mendelssohn, and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, contained Nicolai's extensive review of the second part of the epic. Nicolai expresses some reservations about its poetic construction and style.¹³ However, he singles out for positive treatment the dialogue of Miriam and Deborah. He summarizes Klopstock's scene depicting Jesus's death as one in which "many noble souls and witnesses" (viel edle Seelen und Zeugen) assembled around him. "The poet," Nicolai writes, "describes for us the character of these souls rather extensively, and with very appealing qualities."¹⁴ Of the song of the two prophetesses, in particular, he remarks, "This song which they sing to each other is of outstanding beauty, and if Klopstock had written nothing apart from this, he could still be called a great poet. **It is in the true taste of the old Hebrew poetry**, a masterpiece of simplicity and loftiness."¹⁵

What might Nicolai have meant when he referred to "the true taste of the old Hebrew poetry"? The answer to this question lies, I propose, in another essay printed in the same volume of the *Bibliothek*: a review by Moses Mendelssohn of Robert Lowth's *Praelectiones academicae de sacra poesi Hebraeorum* (1753), later translated as the *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (1787).¹⁶ Mendelssohn's review—long enough to be spread over two issues of the *Bibliothek*, such that it leads directly into Nicolai's review of the *Messias*—summarizes Lowth's treatise section by section. It is well

¹³Friedrich Nicolai, review of *Der Messias*, vol. 2, in *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste* 1, no. 2 (1757): 297–331.

¹⁴"Der Dichter beschreibt uns die Charakter dieser Seelen ziemlich weitläufig und mit sehr liebenswürdigen Zügen." Nicolai, review of *Der Messias*, 321.

¹⁵"Dieses Lied, welches sie gegen einander singen, ist von ausnehmender Schönheit, und wenn Klopstock auch nichts, als dasselbe gemacht hätte, so würde er dennoch ein großer Dichter genennet werden können. Es ist in dem ächten Geschmack der alten hebräischen Poesie, ein Meisterstück der Einfalt und Hoheit." Nicolai, review of *Der Messias*, 322. Emphasis added.

¹⁶Robert Lowth, *De sacra poesi hebraeorum praelectiones academicae* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1753). I refer to the English edition, Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. G. Gregory (Boston: Joseph T. Buckingham, 1815).

known that Lowth's *Lectures* strongly influenced Mendelssohn's thinking about biblical poetics, although Mendelssohn also knew Lowth's Hebrew sources well and departed from Lowth on numerous key points.¹⁷ Overall, Mendelssohn viewed Lowth's project as a worthy one, one that was filled with insights that could help to demonstrate the beauty and power of the biblical text. He wrote:

One reads Homer, Virgil, and the other writings of the ancients; one analyzes all the beauties that are contained in them with the utmost care, and devotes all one's efforts to form our taste in accordance with their example. But seldom does one concern oneself with the rules of art by which those godlike poets among the ancient Hebrews stir up the most sublime emotions in us....One has long wished to have the rules of beauty of the ancient Hebrew poets clarified, and the genius of its poetic art and its unique characteristics identified.¹⁸

Mendelssohn praised Lowth for his ability "to hold up the genius of different peoples against one another, and to know how to differentiate between them,"¹⁹ and he emphasized the need to view biblical poetry on its own terms. In an age when most theologians viewed the Hebrew Bible as outdated and its adherents as backwards-looking and unredeemable, Mendelssohn viewed Lowth's text, and the aesthetic justification of the Hebrew Bible in general, as

¹⁷For instance, Mendelssohn maintained that the Jewish system of musical cantillation of the Bible dated to the same period as the biblical text, while Lowth dismissed them as "fictions" (Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry*, 319). On Mendelssohn's view of Jewish cantillation practices and their ethical force in the recitation of the Hebrew Bible, see Elias Sacks, "Poetry, Music, and the Limits of Harmony: Mendelssohn's Aesthetic Critique of Christianity," forthcoming in "Sara Levy's World."

¹⁸"Man lieset den Homer, Virgil und die übrigen Schriften der Alten; man zergliedert alle Schönheiten, die darinn enthalten sind, mit der größten Sorgfalt, und giebt sich alle Mühe unsern Geschmack nach ihrem Muster zu bilden: aber selten bekümmert man sich um die Regeln der Kunst, nach welchen jene göttliche Dichter, unter den alten Hebräern, die erhabensten Empfindungen in uns rege machen....Man hat daher schon längstens gewünscht, die Regeln der Schönheit in den alten hebräischen Dichtern erklärt, und das Genie ihrer Dichtkunst mit seinen besondern Charakteren bezeichnet zu sehen." Moses Mendelssohn, review of *Robert Lowth's akademische Vorlesungen von der heiligen Dichtkunst der Hebräer; nebst einer kurtzen Widerlegung des barianischen Systems von der Prosodie der Hebräer*, in *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste* 1, no. 1 (1757): 122–23.

¹⁹"das Genie verschiedener Völker gegen einander zu halten, und zu unterscheiden wissen." Mendelssohn, review of *Robert Lowth's akademische Vorlesungen*, 123.

an important component in the argument for the continued validity of Judaism alongside Christianity within modern Europe.

For Lowth and for Mendelssohn, the musicality of ancient Hebrew poetry was connected to the various types of parallel constructions it employed. Poetic lines divided into equal parts would have been sung alternately or responsively, and it was the predilection of the ancient Hebrew writers for these types of singing that led to the construction of the Biblical texts—whether prophetic, lyrical, or didactic—in this particular manner. In general, Lowth explained, “Hebrew poetry consists chiefly in a certain equality, resemblance, or parallelism between the members of each period; so that in two lines...things for the most part shall answer to things, and words to words, as if fitted to each other by a kind of rule or measure. This parallelism has much variety and many gradations.”²⁰ Mendelssohn argued, that while these parallel constructions might seem terse and repetitive on paper because they combine short fragments with seemingly redundant meanings, they were necessitated by the oral, *musical* transmission of biblical poetry. The poet sought to imprint the meanings of the text on listeners, so repetition in poetic constructions formed the key to full assimilation of the message of the text.²¹

It is significant that the first example of parallel constructions in poetic song that Lowth presents is the biblical account of Miriam’s song at the Red Sea. In his interpretation, “she and the women sang the response to the chorus of the men.”²² In addition, he singles out as one of the pinnacles of Hebrew poetry the biblical song of Deborah after her defeat of the Canaanite general Sisera, noting in particular the “uncommon neatness in the versification, great force, accuracy, and perspicuity in the diction, the utmost elegance in the repetitions, which, notwithstanding their apparent redundancy, are

²⁰Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry*, 259.

²¹Michah Gottlieb, “Aesthetics and the Infinite: Moses Mendelssohn on the Poetics of Biblical Prophecy,” in *New Directions in Jewish Philosophy*, eds. Aaron W. Hughes and Elliot R. Wolfson (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2001), 334–40; and Sacks, “Poetry, Music, and the Limits of Harmony, p. 34.” See also Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1973), 409–12 and passim.

²²Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry*, 254.

conducted with the most perfect brevity.”²³ Deborah’s art, in Lowth’s view, lay in the affective power of her musical–poetic constructions: simple yet accurate, effective in repeating the message, yet elegant and efficient. Elsewhere Lowth makes special mention of “the prophetesses, Miriam the sister of Aaron, and Deborah, who were distinguished by that title, not only because they pronounced the oracles of Jehovah, but also on account of their excellence in music and poetry; for these sister arts were united by the Hebrews, as well as by all other nations, during the first stages of society.”²⁴

An example from the song of Deborah will demonstrate one type of parallel construction cited by Lowth and Mendelssohn as an example of biblical poetic art:

5:12. Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake, utter a song; Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam.²⁵

Here Deborah addresses herself and her general, Barak, apparently quoting the songs that the Israelite people are already singing in celebration of their victory. The fragmentation of the text and the repetition of words arise naturally out of the parallel constructions in the text. The word “awake” (Heb. *ʾum*), is repeated four times in the first half of the verse, creating the aural impression of a siren, or battle call. The parallel word in the second half of the verse, “arise” (Heb., *kum*), is stated only once, but its parallel position to the call of “awake” in the first half helps reinforce its meaning. The alliteration in the phrase “thy captivity captive” (Heb., *shevei shevyekha*) creates further repetition and poetic interest, again impressing the meaning of the verse on the listener.

The first edition of Klopstock’s dialogue for Miriam and Deborah did not assign specific lines to the two characters, but the poet made clear that they were meant to alternate lines by means of the layout on the page: each time a line is indented, the speaker switches. Through this convention of printing, Klopstock indicated

²³Lowth, 181.

²⁴Lowth, 246.

²⁵For the translation of this passage I follow the New International Version, available on-line with the Hebrew text at <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0705.htm> (accessed April 6, 2016).

to the reader that he was adopting responsive parallel constructions as found in biblical poetry. One example will suffice here, but other passages will be discussed below. Just as Deborah, in Judges 5:12, uses apostrophe to address herself and Barak, in Klopstock's poem, the characters of Miriam and Deborah address nature, imploring it to join in their lament. The layout of the first edition is replicated below:

Trauert, Cedern! Auf Libanon stand sie, ein Schatten des Müden,
Aber sie ist zum Kreuze gehaun, die seufzende Ceder!
Trauert, Blumen im Thal! Er stand am silbernen Bache;
Aber er ist, um des Göttlichen Haupt, zur Krone gewunden!

[Mourn, cedars! Upon [the hills of] Lebanon the cedar stood,
a shade for the weary,
But it is cut down for the cross, the sighing cedar!
Mourn, flowers in the valley! It stood by the silvery river;
But it is wound into a crown for the Godly head!]

Klopstock employed multiple forms of parallelism in this text, including repetition of words and constructions ("Trauert, Cedern" and "Trauert, Blumen") as well as parallel ideas: the elements of nature that should join in the mourning have already been used for the evil of the crucifixion.

A primary difference between these two passages, however, lies in their character: unlike the biblical songs of Miriam and Deborah which Lowth categorizes as celebratory odes, the dialogue they are assigned in Klopstock's *Messias* is a lament—an elegy for the dying Jesus—which only breaks into a celebratory "Halleluja" at the very end. In this regard, Mendelssohn paved the way for Nicolai's admiration of the song of Miriam and Deborah in the *Messias*, since Mendelssohn associated the elegy with the "feminine" (*weibliche*) spirit among the ancient Hebrews, writing,

It was also common among the Hebrews for certain people to walk behind corpses to sing a lament. **This was mostly left to the women, since the female gender, on account of its softness, appears more disposed to lamenting.** The songs which they sang on such occasions were accompanied by flutes. They were carefully arranged, but in such a way as not to deviate entirely from

nature. The utterances were short, lamenting, pathos-filled, but not overly decorated.²⁶

Lowth describes the ancient Hebrew elegies in similar terms, noting in particular the fragmentary nature of the text:²⁷

The funeral dirges were therefore composed in general upon the model of those complaints which flow naturally and spontaneously from the afflicted heart: the sentences were abrupt, mournful, pathetic, simple, and unembellished; on one account, indeed, more elaborate and artificial, because they consisted of verse, and were chanted to music.

Further examination of Klopstock's dialogue for Miriam and Deborah suggests that he had these same features in mind when he wrote the text of the poem. As I shall show in the pages that follow, fragmentation, repetition, emotionally charged vocabulary, and parallel constructions are among the features critics remarked upon when describing Klopstock's dialogue. Moreover, as Carl Friedrich Cramer remarked, it was precisely these features that lent the dialogue to musical treatment. By applying these characteristic markers of ancient Hebrew poetry, and by employing Miriam and Deborah as vehicles of lament, Klopstock consciously imitated the art of ancient Hebrew poetry. It is no wonder that, in his treatise on *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry* (1782–83), Johann Gottfried Herder wrote that there was one poet "who first brought us Germans closer to the genuine tone of the Hebrew Psalms, namely Klopstock. His simplest odes . . . are tones from the harp of David."²⁸

²⁶"Es war auch bey den Hebräern gebräuchlich, daß sie gewisse Leute dazu bestellten, hinter den Leichen her zu klagen. Man ließ dieses meistens von Weibern verrichten, weil das weibliche Geschlecht seiner natürlichen Weichlichkeit halber, zum kläglichen mehr aufgelegt zu seyn scheint. Die Lieder, die sie bey solcher Gelegenheit absangen, wurden von Flöten begleitet. Sie waren mit einigem Fleiße ausgearbeitet, aber doch so, daß sie von der Natur nicht allzuweit abwichen. Die Sprüche waren kurz, kläglich, pathetisch, aber nicht allzu geschmückt." Mendelssohn, review of *Robert Lowth's akademische Vorlesungen*, 272. Emphasis added.

²⁷Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry*, 311.

²⁸Johann Gottfried Herder, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, trans. J. Marsh (Burlington: Edward Smith, 1833), 246. "der uns Deutsche zuerst dem wahren Tone des ebräischen Psalms näher gebracht hat: Klopstock. Die simpelsten seiner Oden...sind Töne aus Davids Harfe." Herder, *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie: Eine Anleitung für Liebhaber derselben und der ältesten Geschichte des menschlichen Geistes*, ed.

*Klopstock, Telemann, and Knecht:
The Aesthetics of Ancient Poetry and Modern Music*

The musicality of Klopstock's song for Miriam and Deborah was still a subject of discussion in 1792, when Klopstock's student Carl Friedrich Cramer remarked upon this passage in his commentary on the *Messias*: "This dialogic elegy, this mourning idyll . . . [is] recognized as one of the most striking passages, one of the most beautiful, moving scenes of the poem."²⁹ Echoing Mendelssohn's assessment of biblical elegies, Cramer writes that one of the factors that made Klopstock's dialogue so effective is its "tender femininity" (*zarte Weiblichkeit*). In addition, following Nicolai, he remarks on Klopstock's use of parallel construction: "in the dialogue, one person always takes up the tone given by the other, and builds upon, amplifies, and beautifies what she has sung."³⁰ In keeping with the views of Nicolai, Mendelssohn, Lowth, and Herder, Cramer explains, "One might say that, to a certain extent, this duet-like style is a general characteristic of the whole of Hebrew poetry."³¹ He goes on to enumerate the different types of parallelism outlined by Lowth and Mendelssohn, among others.

Cramer further suggests that Klopstock's use of parallel constructions gives this poem its expressive force, and that this use of parallelism is inherently connected to the nature of this passage as a dialogue—a form that fostered bipartite constructions. The musical implications of such parallelism—its applicability for contemporary composition—seem clear: "The essential character of a duet is that the second voice does not merely take turns playing the [same] melody as the first, but that it presents and develops a melody that is

Johann Georg Müller (Tübingen: In der J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1805), 321.

²⁹"Diese dialogisirte Elegie; dieses Traueridyll . . . [ist] für eine der hervorstechendsten Parthien, der schönsten, rührendsten Scenen des Gedichtes, anerkannt." Cramer, *Klopstock: Er, und über ihn* (Leipzig and Altona: in der Ravenschen Buchhandlung, 1792), 5:191–92.

³⁰"Eine dialogisirende Person immer den angegebenen Ton der andern wieder auffaßt, ihr Gesungenes ausbildet, vermehrt, verschönert." Cramer, *Klopstock: Er, und über ihn*, 5:192.

³¹"Man kann gewissermaßen sagen, daß dieß Duettmäßige überhaupt Eigenthum der ganzen hebräischen Poesie ist." Cramer, *Klopstock: Er, und über ihn*, 5:194.

similar to, but different from the first, which at last is united with the first in a complete, proper, entirely connected harmony."³²

Cramer's description of the "essential character of a duet" sheds new light on the significance of Knecht's *Wechselgesang der Mirjam und Debora*, and this significance becomes even stronger when Knecht's setting is compared with the setting of the same dialogue by Georg Philipp Telemann, composed (though not printed) in 1759. It is noteworthy that Knecht sought to preserve the dialogic construction of Klopstock's poem—something that Telemann had not done.³³ Cramer indicates that he possessed copies of the settings by both Telemann and Knecht. While he does not undertake a comparison of their merits in his commentary on the *Messias*, his *Magazin der Musik* (1783) includes a review of Knecht's setting which praised the composer's responses to Klopstock's poetic cues.

The libretto printed in conjunction with the Hamburg performances of Telemann's settings of excerpts from *Der Messias* provides a telling clue about the composer's approach to the dialogue of Miriam and Deborah.³⁴ As noted earlier, the first edition of Klopstock's poem indented the first line of each passage to indicate alternation of the character. Telemann's libretto omitted this convention of formatting entirely, printing the start of each line flush left and using a "hanging" indentation only to indicate the continuation of each line (Figure 2). In this way, Telemann liberated himself from strict adherence to the dialogic nature of the poem. Instead, he did not hesitate to have the two singers repeat each other's text, or to have them sing the same words in homophony or

³²"Der wesentliche Character eines Duetts ist, daß die zweyete Stimme nicht blos abwechsele in Melodie mit der ersten, sondern daß sie eine ähnliche Melodie, nur verschieden von der ersten, angebe und fortführe, die sich zuletzt mit der Ersten in einem allgemeinen, durch richtige Harmonien verbundenen Ganzen, vereinige." Cramer, *Klopstock: Er, und über ihn* 5:193.

³³Overviews of Telemann's settings of two excerpts from the *Messias*, TWV 6:4, are in Ralph-Jürgen Reipsch, critical notes to Georg Philipp Telemann, *Zwei Auszüge aus Klopstocks Messias* (Basel: Bärenreiter, 2009), viii–xxiii; Günther Godehart, "Telemanns 'Messias,'" *Die Musikforschung* 14 (1961): 139–55. On Telemann's relationship to Klopstock see Reipsch, critical notes, ix–x; Godehart, "Telemanns 'Messias,'" 142, and Grant, "The Rise of Lyricism," 65–66.

³⁴*Zween Auszüge aus dem Gedichte: Der Messias. In Musik gebracht von Telemann* (Hamburg: Jeremias Conrad Piscator, [1760?]). Reproduced in Telemann, *Zwei Auszüge aus Klopstocks Messias*, 56–57.

Figures 2a and 2b. Opening of Klopstock's dialogue of Miriam and Deborah in the libretto for Georg Philipp Telemann's cantata *Mirjam, und deine Wehmut*. D-B Mus. Tt 140

Unterdeß nähete sich Jesus dem Vater, der wegen
 des Volkes,
 Zu dem die Stimme geschah, voll Zorn zum Him-
 mel hinauf stieg.
 Vor ihm wolte er noch einmal sein göttliches
 freyes Entschliessen,
 Seine Geliebten, die Menschen, zu heiligen, fener-
 lich kund thun.

Aus dem zehnten Gesange,

von der 272sten Zeile an.

Mirjams, und deine Wehmut, Debora, wurden
 nach langem,
 Traurenden Schweigen, zum sanften, zum wei-
 nenden Liede voll Klage.
 Denn der Unsterblichen Stimme zerfließt von sich
 selbst in Gesänge,
 Wenn sie Empfindungen sagt, wie Debora und
 Mirjam sie fühlten.
 Die auf Ephraims Berge nach ihren Namen den
 Palmbaum
 Nennt, und Amrams Tochter, sangen sie gegen
 einander:
 Schönster, unter den Menschen! Er war der
 Schönste der Menschen;

Figures 2a and 2b. (continued)

Aber entstellt, entstellt hat dich, der blutige
 Tod dich!
 Zwar es weinet mein Herz, und trübes Trau-
 ren umringt mich;
 Aber er ist der Schönste, vor allen Erschaff-
 nen der Schönste!
 Schöner, als alle Söhne des Lichts, wenn sie
 strahlend, vor Andacht,
 Beten zu dem Unendlichen, schöner in seinem
 Blute!
 Trauert, Cedern! Auf Libanon stand sie, ein
 Schatten des Müden;
 Aber sie ist zum Kreuze gehaum, die seufzende
 Ceder!
 Trauert, Blumen im Thal! Er stand am sil-
 bernen Bache;
 Aber er ist, um des Göttlichen Haupt, zur
 Krone gewunden!
 Unermüdet faltet er seine Hände zum Va-
 ter,
 Für die Sünder, zum Heiligen! Unermüdet
 betreten
 Seine Füße der Leidenden Hütte! Nun sind
 sie durchgraben!
 Seine Hand und Füße, mit eisernen Wun-
 den durchgraben!
 Seine göttliche Stirn, die er hier am Berg in den
 Staub hin
 Niederbückte, von der schon Schweiß mit Blute
 gemischt rann!

counterpoint. The opening of Miriam and Deborah's song will serve as an example (the indentations in the text are as shown in Klopstock's first edition):

Schönster unter den Menschen! Er war der schönste der Menschen;
 Aber entstellt, entstellt hat dich, der blutige Tod, dich!
 Zwar es weint mein Herz, und trübes Trauren umringt mich;
 Aber er ist der Schönste, vor allen Erschaffnen der Schönste!
 Schöner, als alle Söhne des Lichts, wenn sie strahlend vor Andacht,
 Beten zu dem Unendlichen, schöner in seinem Blute!

[Loveliest among men! He was the loveliest of men
 But deformed, deformed has bloody death made you!
 Indeed, my heart cries, and mournful clouds surround me;
 But he is the loveliest—of all creation, the loveliest!
 Lovelier than the rays of the sun, when, beaming with devotion,
 They pray to the Eternal, more lovely in his blood!]

In Telemann's setting—a consonant, pastoral aria evoking the "Jesus as shepherd" trope—Miriam begins the song, presenting the first two lines in their entirety, and repeats the final word, "dich," four times (Example 1). Rather than moving on to her own text, Deborah presents the same melody exactly, a fourth lower. At the line "Zwar es weint mein Herz," the two voices begin to sing together, effectively leaving the format of a dialogue behind. This section is noteworthy, too, for Telemann's inclusion of a sequence of melodic figuration—the first of several in this cantata—in the two voices (measure 93). Here, musical considerations, including melodic patterns and harmonic motion, act as the driving force behind the composition. Rather than viewing the two elements of poetry and music as equal partners in the generation of the cantata, at moments like this, it appears that Telemann places the musical art above the poetic.

Knecht's approach is entirely different. First, Knecht does not repeat individual words (such as "dich"), but only complete lines or phrases, thereby maintaining the construction and continuity of the poetry as Klopstock presented it. Second, and more importantly, Knecht meticulously adheres to the alternating format of the dialogue; only on one occasion does he fail to observe the switch of

Example 1. Telemann, *Mirjam, und deine Wehmut*,
 TWV 6:4, measures 67–102

67

Traverso 1
 Traverso 2

Violin 1
 Violin 2
 Viola

Mirjam
 Zwar_ es weint_____ mein Herz_____ und trü - bes

Debora
 Zwar_ es weint_____ mein Herz_____ und Trau -

Grundbaß

73

Trau-ren um - ringt mich, a - ber er ist der Schön -

- ren um - ringt mich, der Schön -

Example 1. (continued)

79

79

I.

st. gel.

gel.

ste, der Schön - ste, von al - len Er - schaff - nen der Schön -

ste, von al - len Er - schaff - nen der Schön -

85

85

tr.

st.

gel.

ste, schö - ner als

ste, schö - ner als

Example 1. (continued)

90

al - le Söh - ne des Lichts, wenn sie strah -

al - le Söh - ne des Lichts, wenn sie strah -

94

lend vor An - dacht

lend vor An - dacht

Example 1. (continued)

98

be - ten zu dem Un - end - li - chen,
be - ten zu dem Un - end - li - chen,

characters indicated by the formatting of Klopstock's poem.³⁵ Not until the end of the poem does Knecht set the two voices in harmony with one another, a point to which I shall return below. It might seem strange to have two singers involved in an extended cantata like this and *not* to use them together; however, this approach preserves the form of the dialogue, which, according to Nicolai and Cramer, was so essential to the aesthetic force and the meaning of the poetry. This dialogic structure achieves its effectiveness through Klopstock's careful use of repetition; to use Cramer's words, the second character "builds upon, amplifies, and beautifies" what the first has sung. Cramer cites the opening lines of the song, quoted above, as one of the best examples of this kind of beautification, since the two singers employ variants of a single word—schöner, schönste, Schönster—again and again to characterize Jesus. As noted earlier, this same type of repetition, prompted by parallel poetic constructions in alternating voices, represents an essential component of biblical poetry identified by Lowth and Mendelssohn. As they argue, it was the oral nature of biblical recitation—its status as *song*—that fostered, even mandated, this type of repetition. This inherently musical style of poetic writing is a key factor in conveying the meaning of the text and impressing it upon the memory of the listener.³⁶

The third marked difference between Knecht's setting and Telemann's lies in Knecht's avoidance of musically-driven techniques such as sequences and vocal figuration, which Telemann uses liberally (Example 2). This is not to say that Knecht's melodic or harmonic writing is overly simple; indeed, the harmonic language, in particular, is quite chromatic. The vocal lines are filled with "sighing" gestures such as appoggiaturas and large, plaintive leaps that signify the *topos* of lament. Knecht's opening section, shown in Example 3, is strikingly different in character from Telemann's lilting pastoral lullaby. Within the harmonically complex context of Knecht's setting, each syllable takes up only one or two notes. Beyond a desire to convey the text clearly, this manner of text-setting may be an

³⁵Knecht did not switch characters from Miriam to Deborah at the line "Wär ich seine Mutter" (measure 166) as indicated by Klopstock's formatting presumably because, in the following line, the speaker must be Deborah since she addresses Miriam there (measure 213).

³⁶See previous references to Sacks and Gottlieb.

Example 2. Telemann, *Mirjam, und deine Wehmut*, measures 310–317

310

Traverso 1
Traverso 2

Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola

Mirjam
wei - ne Trä - nen der Won -

Debora
wei - ne Trä - nen der Won -

Grundbaß

314

ne,

ne,

Example 3. Knecht, *Wechselgesang der Mirjam
und Debora*, measures 13–28

2 Wechselgesang der Mirjam und Debora

9

S 1

S 2

13 **Mirjam.**

S 1

S 2

Schön - ster un - ter den Mensch-en! Er_ war der Schön - ste der Mensch-en;

p *mf*

17

S 1

S 2

A - ber ent - stellt, _ ent -

p

3

Example 3. (continued)

20

S 1

stellt hat dich, der blu - ti - ge Tod, dich!

S 2

24

S 1

S 2

Debora.

Zwar es weint mein Herz, und

mf *p*

29

S 1

S 2

trüb - es Traur - en um - ringt mich; a - ber er ist der Schön - ste, vor

indicator of his wish to keep the poetry and music on an equal footing, again in recognition of the relationship between the two arts in the biblical poetry that Klopstock was attempting to imitate.

Cramer makes special mention of the conclusion of Klopstock's poem for Miriam and Deborah. He argues that it is precisely because of the dialogic nature of the poem that the unification of the two voices at the end of the excerpt is so powerful. After enumerating a series of passages with bipartite poetic constructions in which each of the two characters responds to and "beautifies" the words of the other, Cramer explains that the two voices come together in an apotheosis: "At the end they unite in verses repeated with earnest dignity: 'This is Jesus Christ, the eternal high priest, to redeem in the Holiest of Holies! Hallelujah!'"³⁷ The full lines are shown below, with formatting preserved from the first edition:

Still in ihrem Laufe sind alle Sterne gestanden!
 Und die Schöpfung umher verstummt dem leidenden Gotte!
 Denn es ist Jesus, es ist der ewige Hohepriester,
 Zu versöhnen, im Allerheiligsten! Halleluja!
 Auch der Erdkreis ist still gestanden! Und die, auf der Erde,
 Staub auf Staube, wohnen, euch ist die Sonne verloschen!
 Denn es ist Jesus Christus, der ewige Hohepriester,
 Zu versöhnen, im Allerheiligsten! Halleluja!³⁸

[Stopped in their tracks are all of the stars!
 And all of creation falls silent at the suffering of its God!
 For it is Jesus, it is the eternal high priest,
 To redeem in the Holiest of Holies! Halleluja!
 The earth also stands still! And to you who dwell on earth,
 dust upon dust, the sun has died out!
 For it is Jesus Christ, it is the eternal high priest,
 To redeem in the Holiest of Holies! Halleluja!]

Here the contrast between Telemann's setting and Knecht's comes into sharpest focus. From these two stanzas Telemann created another structure entirely, distributing the lines between the two women differently and separating their statements by means of a

³⁷"Zuletzt vereinigen sich beyde in den mit ernster Würde wiederholten Versen: Denn es ist Jesus Christus, der ewige Hohepriester, zu versöhnen im Allerheiligsten! Hallelujah!" Cramer, *Klopstock: Er, und über ihn*, 5:193.

³⁸Klopstock, *Der Messias*, 142.

lengthy, celebratory refrain on the word “Halleluja” (an excerpt is shown in Example 4).

Debora: Still in ihrem Laufe sind alle Sterne gestanden,

Mirjam: Und die Schöpfung umher verstummt dem leidenden Gotte!

Debora: Denn es ist Jesus, es ist der ewige Hohepriester, Zu versöhnen, im Allerheiligsten!

Debora and Mirjam: Halleluja!

Mirjam: Auch der Erdkreis ist still gestanden!

Debora: Und die, auf der Erde, Staub auf Staube, wohnen, euch ist die Sonne verloschen!

Mirjam: Denn es ist Jesus Christus, der ewige Hohepriester,

Debora: Zu versöhnen, im Allerheiligsten!

Debora and Mirjam: Halleluja!

Here, as he does throughout the cantata, Knecht strictly adheres to the distribution of text implicit in the layout of Klopstock’s poem. Moreover, he puts into practice precisely the manner of biblical recitation that Cramer describes in his commentary on Klopstock’s poem a few years later. In Knecht’s setting, Deborah sings her entire four-line stanza and her own “Halleluja,” in measures 346–371. Miriam answers with her complete stanza in measures 372–396. When the two voices come together, “uniting,” as Cramer puts it, “with earnest dignity,” each character sings *her own text*, overlapping and harmonizing with the other. They sing staggered iterations of the word “Halleluja,” only reaching completely unified homophony in the very last measures (Example 5).

Several other factors distinguish Telemann’s version of Miriam and Deborah’s dialogue from Knecht’s. Telemann retains Klopstock’s poetic framing device, beginning and ending his cantata with a passage sung by a “herald” who announces and concludes the women’s song. Knecht bypasses this dramatic frame entirely, instead inviting the listener directly into the musical–poetic world of the two women. As a result, they appear not as theatrical characters, but as real people engaging in a real dialogue—an effect enhanced by Knecht’s syllabic treatment of the text and his retention of Klopstock’s dialogic apparatus. Furthermore, Telemann’s setting for

Example 4. Telemann, *Mirjam, und deine Wehmut*, measures 397–415

397

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Mirjam
denn es ist Je-sus Chri-stus, der e-wi-ge Ho-he-

Debora
lo-schen!

Alle

Grundbaß

400

Vln 1, Ob. 1
etwas st. / sehr gel.

prie-ster, Hal-le-

zu ver-söh-nen im Al-ler-hei-lig-sten!

Grundbaß

Example 4. (continued)

403

Vln. 2, Ob. 2
etwas st. / sehr gel.

etwas st.

lu - ja, Hal-le-lu - ja, Ha - le - lu - ja,

Hal-le-

406

Hal-le - lu - ja, Hal-le-lu - ja,

lu - ja, Hal-le-lu - ja, Hal - le - lu - ja, Hal-le-lu - ja, Hal-le-

Example 4. (continued)

409

Hal-le-lu - ja, Hal-le - lu - ja, Hal-le-lu - ja, Hal - le - lu -
 lu - ja, Hal - le - lu - ja, Ha - le - lu -

412 Ob. 1, 2

ja,
 ja,

Example 5. Knecht, *Wechselgesang der Mirjam
und Debora*, measures 398–439

S 1
Auch der Erd - kreis ist still ge - stan - den!

S 2
Still im ih - rem Lau - fe sind al - le Ster - ne ge - stan - den!

p *rf*

403

S 1
still ge - stan - den! Und die auf der Er - de, Staub auf Stau - be woh - nen, euch

S 2
still ge - stan - den! Und die Schöp - fung um - her - ver -

p *f* *pp*

408

S 1
ist die Son - ne ver - lo - schen! Denn es ist Je - sus

S 2
stummt dem lei - den - den Got - te! Denn es ist

rf *p*

Example 5. (continued)

413 37

S 1 Chri - stus, der e - wi-ge Ho - he - prie - ster, zu —

S 2 Je - sus, es ist der e - wi-ge Ho - he - prie - ster,

417

S 1 ver - söh-nen, im Al - ler - hei - lig-sten, Hal - le - lu -

S 2 zu ver - söh-nen, im Al - ler hei - lig-sten, Hal - le lu -

422

S 1 ja, Hal - - - - - le -

S 2 ja, Hal - - - - -

mf

Example 5. (continued)

327

S 1 lu - - - ja! Hal - - -

S 2 - - le lu - ja! Hal - - -

p

431

S 1 - le lu - ja, Hal - le - lu - - -

S 2 - le lu - ja, Hal - le - - - lu -

f

435

S 1 ja! Hal-le-lu - ja, Hal-le-lu - ja!

S 2 ja! Hal-le-lu - ja, Hal-le-lu - ja!

p *f*

Il Fine.

large ensemble, with flutes, oboes, bassoons, strings, and continuo, reflects the public nature of his cantata, which received its first performances in large churches in Hamburg and Berlin.³⁹ Knecht's cantata, on the other hand, is *Hausmusik* with flexible instrumentation, suitable either for a small chamber ensemble, or for voices with keyboard accompaniment alone. The intimacy of Knecht's setting provides listeners with immediate access to the emotions expressed by the two characters.

Cramer knew both Telemann's and Knecht's musical settings of Klopstock's dialogue. In his commentary on the *Messias* he did not judge one above the other. However, his *Magazin der Musik* ran a review of Knecht's setting in 1783 that was overwhelmingly positive. "Thanks be said to this wonderful, heretofore largely unknown composer; thanks for his stirring song, full of the purest emotions that penetrate deep into the soul!"⁴⁰ Among the factors the author enumerates as keys to the success of Knecht's work is his attention to the dictates of the poetry. The reviewer parses and celebrates the parallel constructions of Klopstock's poem, but also heaps praise upon the composer for understanding how to respond to these constructions:

One needs only to look at the opening "Schönster unter den Menschen," and then the contrasting sentence: "Aber entstellt," etc. How many compositions could one go through [searching] for such a spot? Who wouldn't respond to the quality of this [passage]? —Once again a mild lament, and then, "Aber er ist der Schönste"—this is indeed to depict light and shadow! To be sure, the poet has laid the groundwork, but good for him [the composer] who has understood him!⁴¹

³⁹On the performance and reception of Telemann's cantata in Berlin, see Reipsch, critical notes, x–xii.

⁴⁰"Dank sey dem edlen noch bisher nicht sehr bekannten Componisten gesagt; Dank für seinen reizenden Gesang, voll von dem reinsten, tief in die Seele dringendem Gefühle!" S.n., Review of *Wechselgesang der Mirjam und Debora, aus dem zehnten Gesange der Klopstockischen Messiad in Musik gesetzt von Justin Heinrich Knecht*, in Carl Friedrich Cramer, ed. *Magazin der Musik* 1 (1783): 59–60.

⁴¹"Man sehe nur den Anfang 'Schönster unter den Menschen' und nun den contrastirenden Satz: Aber entstellt etc. wie manche Compositionen könnte man hingeben für eine solche Stelle! Wer sollte wohl den Werth derselben nicht ganz fühlen! – Nun wieder das sanfte Trauren und dann: 'Aber er ist der Schönste,' das heißt in der That Licht und Schatten auftragen! Freylich hat der Dichter ihm

This reviewer downplays the role of the poet—suggesting that Klopstock merely “laid the groundwork”—and gives the bulk of the credit to Knecht. In his view, it is Knecht’s sensitivity to the dictates of the poetry that makes his composition successful. But even more, it seems that Knecht’s music, and his responsiveness to the poetry, brings the *poetry itself* to its fullest realization.

Was the reviewer in the *Magazin der Musik* simply exaggerating the success of Knecht’s cantata, or is it possible that he wrote this in earnest? If we accept that Klopstock’s dialogue for Miriam and Deborah was intended to imitate the style of poetry of the Hebrew Bible, as its earliest reviewers claimed, then music would have been as essential to Klopstock’s art as it was to the biblical Psalms. It would not have been enough for the dialogue to be read silently; its full effect could only be felt when it was recited aloud—and, above all, when it was *sung*. Since the poet himself did not supply music, the dialogue awaited a musical champion who could bring it to life through sound.

Zippora Wulff stamped her name on the cover of her copy of Knecht’s *Wechselgesang*, suggesting that it held some significance for her and, presumably, that she played or sang it. Why might she have been interested in this work? The interpretation I have laid out begins to answer this question. The fact that this work appears in the collection of a prominent, educated Jewish woman in Berlin, who would have been familiar with discussions of the intersection of aesthetics, religion, and the arts, reflects her wish to participate in those very discussions, and music served as her point of entry. That numerous contemporary interpretations of Klopstock’s dialogue, published in both specialized literature and in more popular journals, construed it as an imitation of the style of ancient Hebrew poetry, suggests that this work was emblematic of the kind of interaction among religions that was increasingly advocated by enlightened thinkers of late eighteenth-century Berlin. Members of the Jewish community, foremost among them Moses Mendelssohn, located a moral benefit in the aesthetic impact of the arts. And non-Jews, including Klopstock himself, as well as Nicolai and Cramer,

vorgearbeitet aber wohl ihm, daß er ihn verstanden!” Review of *Wechselgesang der Mirjam und Debora*, 60.

suggested that the aesthetic power of ancient Hebrew poetry gave evidence of the value of Jewish culture. The message of Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*—that Christianity, Judaism, and Islam should co-exist within modern Europe and that no single religion can lay exclusive claim to the truth—finds resonance in these assessments of the ancient Hebrew arts. The connection between the value of ancient poetry and the very real politics of eighteenth-century Prussia was made clear by Herder, who asked, “Can one call a nation barbaric that has even a few such national songs?”⁴² Indeed, at the end of the century when the enlightened Jewish writer Wolf Davidson advocated the emancipation of Jews in Prussia, he listed Sara Levy and Zippora Wulff as examples of those whose musical accomplishments justified the full inclusion of Jews in German society.⁴³

According to the reviews discussed here, what Knecht's setting accomplished was nothing less than the recreation of the aesthetic force of ancient Hebrew song in modern musical guise. The commentator in Cramer's *Magazin der Musik* did not suggest that the music itself sounded like that of the ancients, but rather that it responded in the most sensitive way to the meanings and aesthetic cues of the poetry. Knecht's cantata joined the biblical poetic model with the expressive power of eighteenth-century *Empfindsamkeit*. While the Itzig sisters did not have a monopoly on this music—it was printed and presumably enjoyed a wide circulation—by singing Knecht's cantata in their homes, they would have established themselves as conduits for this amalgam of ancient poetry and modern music—the artistic heritage of both Christians and Jews.

Vocal Music in the Itzig Circle: Further Questions

We should not necessarily expect to find this kind of cultural-religious significance in all of the music collected by the Itzig sisters. However, the interpretation I have presented of one of the works

⁴²Herder, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, 240. “Könnte man ein Volk barbarisch nennen, das nur einige solche Nationalgesänge hatte?” Herder, *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie*, 314.

⁴³Wolf Davidson, *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden* (Berlin: Ernst Felisch, 1798), 109.

they owned suggests that further study of their collections from a multi-disciplinary standpoint—one that engages both the music itself and considers its potential significance for the religious ideals of their social and intellectual circle—may yield interesting results. In the hope of prompting further discussion, in the remainder of this essay I will use the example of Knecht's *Wechselgesang* to raise additional questions about the practice and meanings of vocal music, and music in general, in the lives of the Itzig sisters.

First, that these women owned copies of the *Wechselgesang* and other pieces like it demonstrates that, although their collections consist overwhelmingly of instrumental music, they also sang. This conclusion is supported by other works that bear the *ex libris* of Zippora Wulff and Sara Levy, by the dedication of a 1793 volume of songs to Fanny von Arnstein,⁴⁴ and by the presence of names from the Itzig family in the subscription lists of choral works. Among the pieces in this latter category is the setting by C. P. E. Bach of *Klopstocks Morgengesang am Schöpfungsfeste*, Wq. 239. Klopstock apparently held some significance for the Jews of Berlin, perhaps because he was among the non-Jewish intellectuals who joined in the calls for Jewish emancipation.⁴⁵

If, as I have suggested, the women of the Itzig circle found in the *Wechselgesang* allegorical representations of themselves as well as aesthetic models for the unification of Jews and non-Jews through the arts, we might ask whether they identified with other characters depicted in the songs and cantatas they sang. Could Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach's cantata *Die Amerikanerin* have held a similar allegorical meaning for them? Early America, with the rights it afforded to Jews and non-Jews alike, is known to have represented an ideal of tolerance among enlightened Jews of Prussia.⁴⁶ And what

⁴⁴Ernst Häussler, *VI Deutsche Lieder für Gesang und Clavier: in Musik gesetzt und zugeeignet der Frau Baronesse von Arnstein geborne Itzig* (Vienna: Träg, [1793?]).

⁴⁵Klopstock's ode "An der Kaiser" celebrated the Edict of Tolerance (1782), among the other enlightened triumphs of Joseph II; as Klopstock wrote, "you make the Jews human beings" (*machst den Juden zum Menschen*). See Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, *Klopstocks Oden* (Leipzig: Georg Joachim Göschen, 1798), 2:51. See also Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 461–74.

⁴⁶See, for example, the essay "Schreiben eines deutschen Juden, an den Präsidenten des Kongresses der vereinigten Staaten von Amerika," in *Deutsches Museum*, eds.

about the depiction of *Einsamkeit*—aloneness—in the setting of “Adelaide” by Carl Bernhard Wessely, a Jewish composer whose cantata commemorating the death of Moses Mendelssohn in 1786 was celebrated by members of the *Haskalah* movement?⁴⁷ David Yearsley has suggested that Anna Magdalena Bach used the vocal music in her *Notenbüchlein* to shape her thinking about the Lutheran *ars moriendi*.⁴⁸ Is it possible that the Jewish women of late eighteenth-century Berlin, many of whom were trained in the tradition of the Bach family,⁴⁹ saw vocal music in a similar light—that is, as a means of shaping their identities and religious beliefs?

Knecht’s *Wechselgesang*, C. P. E. Bach’s *Klopstocks Morgengesang*, and the regular participation of Berlin Jews in performances of Graun’s *Der Tod Jesu* after 1801 raise another essential question about practices of vocal music in the circle of the Itzig family: what was their relationship to the tradition of German sacred music?⁵⁰ As Natalie Naimark-Goldberg has suggested, the situation may not be as clear-cut as has been thought in the past. In singing Knecht’s cantata, the Itzig sisters would likely have identified with the women of the Hebrew Bible. Yet those women are not depicted as avoiding the reality of Christianity. Instead, they join characters from the Christian tradition in lamenting the crucifixion. Their religious doctrines may be different, but the arts serve as a bridge that allows people of both

Heinrich Christian Boie and Christian Wilhelm von Dohm (Jan.–Jun., 1783): 558–66.

⁴⁷Wessely’s setting of “Adelaide” (the same poem later set by Beethoven) is preserved in manuscript in SA 1758 with the imprint of Zippora Wulff. The same song appears as the last entry in Bernhard Wessely, *Zwölf Gedichte von Matthisson in Musik gesetzt* (Berlin: in Commission in der Schlesingerschen Lesebibliothek in der Spandauer Strasse, 1793). See Yael Sela Teichler, “Music, Acculturation, and Haskalah Between Berlin and Königsberg in the 1780s,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 103, no. 3 (2013): 352–84; and David Conway, *Jewry in Music: Entry to the Profession from the Enlightenment to Richard Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), 148–49.

⁴⁸David Yearsley, “Death Everyday: The *Anna Magdalena Bach Book of 1725* and the Art of Dying,” *Eighteenth Century Music* 2, no. 2 (2005): 231–49.

⁴⁹Wollny, “*Ein förmlicher Sebastian und Philipp Emanuel Bach-Kultus*” (2010), 19–29 and 43–48.

⁵⁰On the annual performance of Graun’s cantata see Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn’s Revival of the St. Matthew Passion* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2005), 195–96. Naimark-Goldberg discusses the religious questions surrounding the participation of Jews in performances of this work in “Remaining within the Fold: The Cultural and Social World of Sara Levy,” forthcoming in “Sara Levy’s World.”

faiths to empathize with one another. This interpretation resonates with Naimark-Goldberg's findings about the reading practices of Jewish women in Enlightenment Berlin: these women read the New Testament for its emotional value, allowing themselves to experience it as a work of literature in the *empfindsamer Stil*.⁵¹ Moreover, as Naimark-Goldberg has shown, the women in Sara Levy's immediate circle celebrated Christian customs as markers of their participation in German culture.⁵²

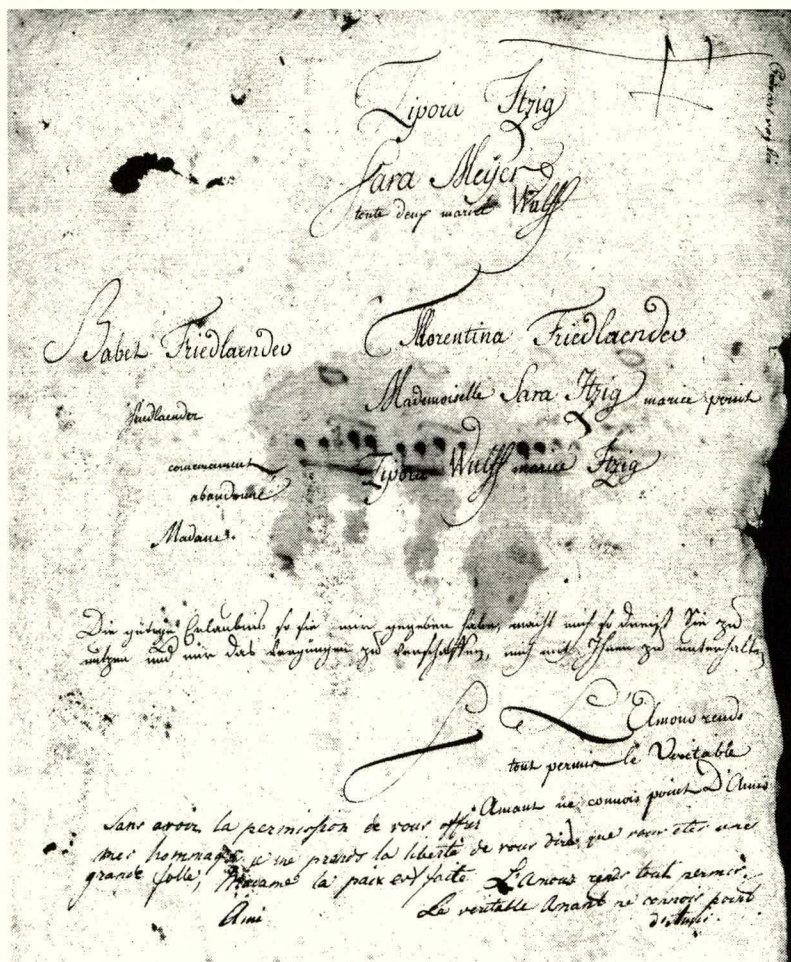
If the Itzig sisters did sing, and if they saw vocal music as a means of *Bildung* and the shaping of the self, why is vocal music so little represented in their surviving collections? To answer this question I turn away from Knecht's *Wechselgesang* to glean evidence from another source: SA 1584, which contains an aria from Pierre Monsigny's opera *La belle Arsène*, one partbook of which bears the *ex libris* of Sara Levy. The opera, based on Voltaire's poem *La bégueule*, tells the story of a spoiled young woman who is transported to an enchanted island where all of her wishes are granted. Ultimately she recognizes the futility of this existence and returns to reality. The possibilities for a moralizing, allegorical interpretation relating to the Itzig daughters notwithstanding, for our purposes, the significance of this manuscript lies in other details.

First, included within the materials that bear the shelf mark SA 1584 are a keyboard/vocal part and a flute part; it is the latter that has the imprint "SSLevi," the characteristic *ex libris* of Samuel Salmon Levy and Sara Levy. Since the flute part is designated for "flauto trv. primo," it is clear that other partbooks are missing. Furthermore, a page at the back of the vocal partbook containing annotations that are apparently in the hand of Zippora Wulff (Figure 3) indicates that

⁵¹Naimark-Goldberg, *Jewish Women in Enlightenment Berlin*, 87.

⁵²Among the Christian customs that Naimark-Goldberg identifies as common, even among the members of the Itzig family who remained faithful to Judaism throughout their lives, was the celebration of Christmas by means of Christmas trees and the exchange of gifts. She demonstrates that it would have been entirely possible for Bella Salomon (sister to Sara Levy, Zippora Wulff, and Fanny von Arnstein) to have given her grandson, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, a copy of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* as a Christmas gift—a circumstance that R. Larry Todd has doubted on account of Bella's religious orthodoxy. See Naimark-Goldberg, "Remaining Within the Fold" and R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), 123.

Figure 3. Annotations, apparently in the hand of Zippora Wulff, to D-B SA 1584



the *ex libris* of Sara Levy was added after the manuscript was initially used. This is clear from the list of women given by Zippora who were apparently involved in using the manuscript: Zippora herself, her sister-in-law Sara Meyer, “Florentina” (presumably Blümchen) Friedländer, the young “Babet” (Rebecca) Friedländer, and finally, “Mademoiselle Sara Itzig mariée pointe”—“not married at all.”⁵³ Babet Friedländer may have been too young to be made fun of in this way, but Sara, who must have been past her sixteenth birthday by this point (a fact that can be deduced from the marriage dates of the other women), was a ready target.

The fact that one of the annotations in the manuscript refers to Sara Itzig as unmarried while the *ex libris* was obviously added after she was married in 1783 is significant. In addition, only the flute part bears her name—not the vocal/keyboard part. How many other vocal manuscripts might have been included in her collection at one time but were never identified with her distinctive stamp? Peter Wollny has assumed that this is the case with Wilhelm Friedemann Bach’s wedding song “Herz, mein Herz, sey ruhig,” Fk. 97, a parody of the middle movement of his solo keyboard concerto in G major, Fk. 40.⁵⁴ And how many pieces originally owned by Zippora (as we may infer from her extensive annotations to SA 1584) or another of Sara’s sisters might later have been subsumed within Sara’s collection? Did Sara mark with her *ex libris* only those scores that she wished to be associated with for posterity?

What do the names on SA 1584 tell us about the milieu for vocal performance in the Itzig circle? They suggest that this aria was used in a private context, among family members or close friends. Such a private setting stands in contrast to generally accepted views of

⁵³Biographical information on these women is available in Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community*, and Keuck.

⁵⁴See Wollny, “Sara Levy and the Making of Musical Taste,” 659, and his inventory of Bach sources in Levy’s collection in Wollny, ““Ein förmlicher Sebastian und Philipp Emanuel Bach-Kultus”” (2010), 74. David Schulenberg conspicuously avoids associating this song with Levy, since it does not bear her imprint; see Schulenberg, *The Music of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach* (Rochester: Univ. of Rochester Press, 2010), 263. While I find it plausible that this song may have been written in honor of Levy’s wedding, I think Wollny’s logic—that the text “markedly avoids any Christian metaphors”—does not take account of the nuances of the relationship of women like Sara Levy to Christianity and to music with sacred Christian themes.

music-making that the Itzig sisters hosted in their homes. While in past scholarship these social-musical gatherings have been understood within the category of the “salon,” that term is anachronistic, having first been used to describe these events only in the 1840s.⁵⁵ As Barbara Hahn has argued, the term “salon” raises misleading connotations and assumptions about the nature of these cultural events, evoking a picture of an exclusive, high-society gathering with formalized institutions and procedures.⁵⁶ Instead, the gatherings in Berlin, including those hosted by Sara Levy and her sisters, could encompass everything from large, formal events to much smaller, more intimate meetings of family and a closed circle of friends. In this sense, they are a manifestation of what Ulrike Weckel has called “the contemporary culture of visiting among educated people” that flourished throughout Germany over generations.⁵⁷ In some cases these gatherings would have involved a broad cross-section of Berlin society, with Jews and Christians, sometimes in large numbers, gathering in a single space. In others, the gatherings could have been considerably more private, with only family members and intimate friends in attendance. This, indeed, is the picture presented by Zippora’s annotations to SA 1584, which

⁵⁵Naimark-Goldberg, *Jewish Women in Enlightenment Berlin*, 188. The problems with the historiography of the “salon” are laid out in pages 188–92; Ulrike Weckel, “A Lost Paradise of Female Culture? Some Critical Questions Regarding the Scholarship on Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century German Salons,” in *German History* 18, no. 3 (2000): 310–36; Barbara Hahn, *The Jewess Pallas Athena: This Too a Theory of Modernity*, trans. James McFarland (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005); Liliane Weissberg, “Literary Culture and Jewish Space Around 1800: The Berlin Salons Revisited” in *Modern Jewish Literatures: Intersections and Boundaries*, eds. Sheila E. Jelen, Michael P. Kramer, and L. Scott Lerner (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 24–43. See also Petra Wilhelmy-Dollinger, *Die Berliner Salons: mit historisch-literarischen Spaziergängen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000); Deborah Hertz, *Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988); Deborah Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans: The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2007); Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community*, and Cyril Reade, *Mendelssohn to Mendelssohn: Visual Case Studies of Jewish Life in Berlin*. *Studies in German Jewish History* 8 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), ch. 4, “Brendel Mendelssohn, Brendel Veit, Dorothea Veit, Dorothea von Schlegel: Identities in Transition.”

⁵⁶Barbara Hahn, “A Dream of Living Together: Jewish Women in Berlin Around 1800,” in *Jewish Women and Their Salons*, 150–51.

⁵⁷Weckel, “A Lost Paradise of Female Culture?” 318, cited in Naimark-Goldberg, *Jewish Women in Enlightenment Berlin*, 191.

point to a closed social circle and to the use of the manuscript as a vehicle for private family entertainment.⁵⁸

Finally, the manner in which vocal music was “employed” can be inferred from Zippora’s annotations to SA 1584; the picture that emerges resonates with the themes of Knecht’s *Wechselgesang* that I have described. In addition to a quotation from Corneille,⁵⁹ the annotations include whimsical lines which Zippora seems to have composed herself. The German reads, “Die guetige Erlaubnis so sie mir gegeben habe, macht mich so dreist Sie zu nutzen und mir das Vergnuegen zu verschaffen, mich mit Ihnen zu unterhalten” [The kind permission granted me makes me so bold as to avail myself of your company and the pleasure of conversing with you].⁶⁰ And the French, equally mysterious: “Sans avoir la permission de vous offrir mes hommages, je me prends la liberté de vous dire, que vous etes une grande folle” [Without having permission to pay my respects to you, I take the liberty of telling you that you are a great fool]. Whom could Zippora have been addressing in these two statements? The formal second person used in both languages, in combination with her tongue-in-cheek approach to her addressee (she “avails herself” of the company of the addressee, “converses” with the addressee, and calls the addressee “une folle”) raises the possibility that she was writing either to the fictional protagonist of the aria, or even to the manuscript itself.

⁵⁸The same is likely true of the duets for two keyboards, which I discuss in “At the Crossroads of Musical Practice and Jewish Identity: Meanings of the Keyboard Duo in the Circle of Sara Levy,” in “Sara Levy’s World.”

⁵⁹The passage, from Pierre Corneille, *Cinna, ou la clémence d’Auguste*, reads, “L’amour rend tout permis, le veritable amant ne connois point d’amis” (Love renders everything permissible / The true lover knows nothing of friendship). Corneille’s work had been reprinted with commentary by Voltaire in 1764 and again in 1774; see *Theatre de P. Corneille avec des commentaires, et autres morceaux intéressans, nouvelle édition, augmentée* (Geneva: s.n., 1774), 1:422. Voltaire had been in Berlin around the middle of the century, attracted by the court of Frederick the Great; see Steven M. Lowenstein, *The Berlin Jewish Community: Enlightenment, Family, and Crisis, 1770–1830* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 20. Corneille’s *Cinna* was one of the works cited in Moses Mendelssohn’s essay “On the Sublime and Naïve in the Fine Sciences”; see Mendelssohn, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 195 and 204.

⁶⁰My thanks to Paul Berry for his advice concerning the transcription and translation of this passage.

Zippora and the women in her circle “availed themselves” of Arsène, or the gathering of paper that contained Arsène’s foolish words, as a means a means of stimulating conversation, as a vehicle for socialization through music. Is it possible that, as with Knecht’s cantata, they recognized something of themselves in this character? Could the Itzig sisters have enjoyed Arsène’s aria while simultaneously taking it as a cautionary tale as they formed their own identities? It seems likely that, as I have suggested, this was the approach that they took to Knecht’s cantata: the *Wechselgesang der Mirjam und Debora* served both as a musical pastime and as a means to understand their own place in the shifting social and religious landscape of Berlin during the Age of Enlightenment.

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