

EXILE ON NATIVE SOIL

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This article considers the possibility of making historical inferences from *piyyutim*. It begins with an overview of scholarly opinions that warn against reaching unjustified conclusions regarding realia on the basis of *piyyutim* because: (1) a significant portion of the *piyyut* material is based on *midrashim*, and therefore does not reflect the time of composition; (2) the formal requirements of the *piyyutim* (e.g., alphabetic acrostic) restrict the *payyetanim* in their choice of words; and (3) the *piyyut* reflects the scriptural context that is its subject, so that references to the relations between Israel and the nations are likely to reflect the *sedarim* and their *haftarot* rather than any historical reality. As opposed to these views, Shalom Spiegel stressed that even when a *payyetan* employed *midrashim*, he was free to choose material that was close to his heart and expressed the woes of his generation.

The main claim of the article is that in order to make inferences regarding a given *payyetan*'s historical period on the basis of his compositions, one cannot limit oneself to single expressions referring to historical events. One must rather take into account the *payyetan*'s entire *oeuvre* and examine the way he refers to the pain of exile and the hope for redemption. Does he do so even when this is not 'natural'? In what tone does he address these topics? The compositions of three *payyetanim*, each of whom has left behind an extensive corpus, are examined. (1) It becomes clear that in the works of El'azar berabbi Qillir, despite ample opportunity, explicit complaints about the pain of exile are almost entirely lacking, although his poetry expresses strong hope for a speedy redemption. (2) As opposed to El'azar berabbi Qillir, Yannai exploits every possible opportunity to bemoan the nation's distress under the yoke of foreign domination, and his words convey a strong sense of exile, although he is physically located in the land of his birth, the Land of Israel. (3) R. Pinḥas ha-Cohen hardly speaks of subjection and abuse, but the metaphors he employs convey the sense of a static yet discordant situation. These differences reflect political conditions obtaining in the Land of Israel in the periods of each of the *payyetanim*, respectively: Yannai, at the time of the persecution of Justinian in the sixth century; El'azar berabbi Qillir, during the restless period of shifts in political control in the beginning of the seventh century; and Pinḥas, after the stabilization of Muslim rule.