



Nadav Ovadia

**A Klezmer Gem in the Salons of Kings.**

**Georg Noëlli and his Pantaleon-Cymbal**

Erstbetreuer: Prof. Dr. Louis Delpech

My doctoral project is situated at the intersection of several fields of research and musical practice: historically informed performance practice, organology, the history of European Jews, historical ethnomusicology, and the musical history of the *Haskalah* and the Enlightenment. Georg Noëlli (1727–1789), an instrumentalist, composer, and a Jewish musical celebrity, is the pivotal element of the project. Born into a Jewish family that fled the Portuguese Inquisition for London, Noëlli toured in Europe and Russia before settling as a court musician in Ludwigslust (Germany) and being baptized in the Lutheran confession in 1781. His life is a fascinating example of various trends towards assimilation and modernization happening in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Jewish circles, and Noëlli himself was a cultural agent of musical modernity and interculturality.

In addition to this cultural environment, which will be the subject of a detailed study, this project also aims to revive the instrument that Noëlli was the last to master, the *pantaleon-cymbal*. This was an enlarged version of the traditional *hackbrett*, an instrument consisting of a wooden resonance box on which multiple strings are stretched and struck with two small wooden sticks, one in each hand. This rare instrument, an ancestor of the modern pianoforte, was sometimes seen as the highlight of festive courtly events in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and disappeared shortly after Noëlli's death. In a somewhat similar way to Noëlli, the *pantaleon-cymbal* itself appears to have been rooted in the Jewish klezmer tradition and simultaneously flourished in the general Gentile culture.

Although there is yet no scientific reconstruction of a *pantaleon-cymbal*, it is already possible today to experiment with the reconstruction of its musical qualities on modern and historical dulcimers, such as the modern Salzburger *hackbrett* and the Italian *salterio* of the Baroque period. Several literary and musical sources, including a limited repertoire of scores originally written for the *pantaleon-cymbal*, document the varied musical use of this instrument: solo, with an ensemble or in an orchestra and it could play a melodic and/or harmonic role.

The perception of the *pantaleon-cymbal* by the circles of the Enlightenment and the aristocracy is documented in letters and concert reviews. These sources highlight the artistic quality of the performance on the *pantaleon-cymbal*, as well as the connotations that its music had for these listeners, as "music of the Ancients", evocative of biblical instruments. These perceptions probably contributed to Noëlli's success as a Jew. His trajectory and the destiny of his instrument raises questions about the lability of musical practices between popular and learned, Ashkenazi and Sephardic, Jewish and Christian social spheres.