



# Klezmer Institute Digital Humanities Projects

The **Klezmer Archive Project** and **Kiseligof-Makonovetsky Digital Manuscript Project (KMDMP)**.

Presented by Christina Crowder, October 5, 2021

POLIN Online Conference: What's New? What's Next!

Panel: New Interactive Internet Approaches to Studying Eastern European Jewish Music

## Two Interconnected Projects

- ▶ The **Klezmer Archive Project** aims to create a universally accessible, useful resource for interaction, discovery, and research on all available information about klezmer music.
- ▶ The ***Kiselgof-Makonovetsky Digital Manuscript Project (KMDMP)*** is an innovative digital humanities collaboration connecting musicians and scholars with klezmer musicians from more than 100 years ago.
- ▶ Both klezmer music and the Yiddish language are the loci of thriving contemporary interest communities; creating digital structures tailored to the interests and needs of these communities is a clear imperative



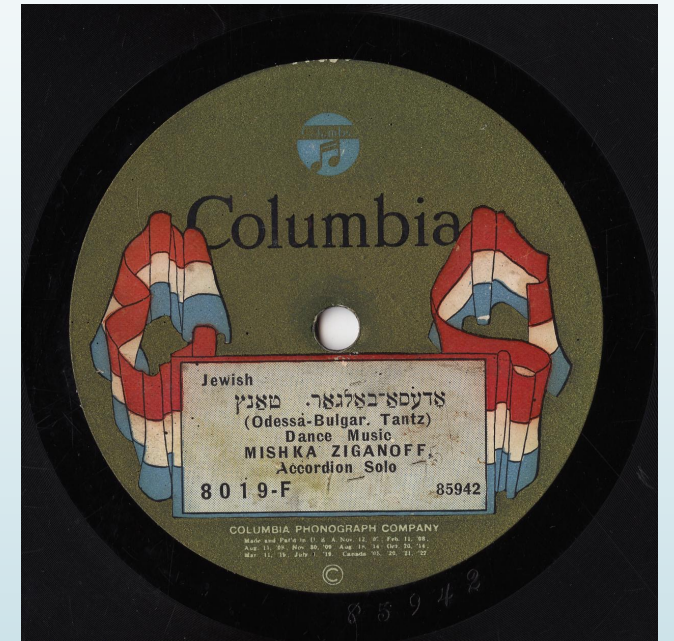
Kiselgof-Makonovetsky  
Digital Manuscript Project  
[klezmerinstitute.org/kmdmp](http://klezmerinstitute.org/kmdmp)



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# The Dream of the Klezmer Archive

- Musicians and scholars of the Klezmer revival dreamed of this resource from the very beginning
- We **now** know that Instrumental klezmer music is a vast repertoire, how do we deal with that?
- How can we use digital tools to extend the reach of individual memory — particularly of musicians?
- How can we capture the knowledge of culture bearers in a Digital space?
- Traditional archives document the artifact, not the music.
- KMDMP is test corpus for Klezmer Archive Project





# Philosophy & Design

- Universally accessible, **useful** resource for interaction, discovery, and research on all available information about klezmer music.
- Bridge the gap between oral history and archives
- Open the “Black Box” of the musical “Artifact”
- Facilitate engagement **by** musicians **as** musicians
- Incorporate computational musicology and music encoding/retrieval tools
- Can be built using existing technology, but goes beyond existing Digital Humanities platforms.



# A Digital Klezmer Archive:

- Open
- Accessible
- Outreach
- Analysis
- Reference  
(Authoritative)
- Organization
- Standardization
- Metadata Attribution
- Curated

Building User Experience (UX) Research  
into the Design Process From the Beginning

# A Talmudic Approach?

- Beautiful, functional layout
- A way to think about layers of metadata
- Traditional Catalogue information
- Corpus-specific metadata and Tune-specific musical formulas
- Relationship or “Semantic” metadata
- Commentary and Discussion

## A Guide to the Layout of a Talmud Page

PAGE      TRACTATE NAME      CHAPTER NUMBER      CHAPTER NAME

<sup>[6]</sup> **EIN MISHPAT, NER MITZVAH:**

(Heb., ‘Well of Justice, Lamp of Commandment’) Two indices compiled by R’ Yehoshua Boaz in the sixteenth century. These provide references to major Jewish law codes that report authoritative rulings on topics covered in the Mishnah and Gemara. External works referenced in this way include Rabbam’s (12th c., Spain and Egypt) *Mishneh Torah* (Heb., Repetition of the Law’), the *Shulkhan Arukh* (Heb., ‘Set Table’) of R’ Yosef b. Ephraim Caro (16th c., Israel), the *Arba’ah Turim* (Heb., ‘Four Rows’) of R’ Ya’akov b. Asher (14th c., Spain), and the *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol* (Heb., ‘Great Book of Commandments’) of R’ Moshe b. Ya’akov of Coucy (13th c., France).

<sup>[9]</sup> **OTHER COMMENTARIES:**

Various other commentaries appear in the margins of a printed page of Talmud. None of these minor works cover the entire Talmud,

so different tractates include different commentaries in this area. Among these are the comments of Rabbenu Chananel (11th c., Tunisia), the *Sefer haMafteah* (Heb., ‘Book of the Key’) of R’ Nissim (11th c., Tunisia), *Tosefot Yeshanim* (Heb., ‘Additions of the Ancients’) 13th c. France and Germany), the *Main: Commentary* compiled by the students of Rabbenu Gershom b. Yehudah (11th c., Germany), the *Tosefot Rid* (Heb., ‘Additions of the Rid’) of R’ Yesheyahu diTrani (13th c., Italy), and the *Shittah Mequbbetzet* (Heb., ‘Gathered Interpretation’) of R’ Bezalel Ashkenazi (16th c., Egypt and Jerusalem).

<sup>[4]</sup> **TOSAFOT:** *The Tosafot* (Heb., ‘additions’) are medieval commentaries on the text of the Talmud composed mainly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. *The Tosafot are not the product of a single author or school of commentators, but are rather the work of a variety of talmudic scholars living mainly in France, Germany, and Spain. While Rashi’s comments focus on the plain meaning of the text, the tosafists tend to concentrate on analysis of difficult passages, exploring issues, contradictions, and problems raised by the text of the Gemara. Often the Tosafot approach a subject using the logic and style of inquiry of the Gemara. Occasionally Tosefot address an interpretation or explanation offered by Rashi to examine it more thoroughly or to present an alternative approach to the subject. On a printed Talmud page, the comments of the Tosefot are set in a semi-cursive typeface known as ‘Rashi script,’ and they always appear immediately adjacent to the Mishnah and Gemara in the large block of text positioned opposite Rashi’s commentary.*

<sup>[2]</sup> **GEMARA:** The Gemara (Aramaic, ‘study,’) is an analysis of and expansion upon the material presented in the Mishnah. Taken together, the Mishnah and Gemara make up the Talmud. The Gemara records the oral discussions of a group of scholars, known as *Amora'im*, who were active from about 200 to 500 CE, in the areas of present day Iraq, Israel, and Palestine. These discussions often center around statements of the *Tannaim* and are structured by the anonymous voice of a redactor (or group of redactors) known as the *stam* (Heb., ‘plain’ or ‘unattributed’). There are two versions of the Gemara. The *Yerushalmi* (also known as the ‘Jerusalem’ or ‘Palestinian’ Talmud) was compiled in what is now northern Israel around 400 CE. The *Bavli* or Babylonian Talmud was redacted about a hundred years later in the Jewish communities of Mesopotamia. Traditionally the redaction of the *Bavli* is attributed to R’ Ashi and his student Ravina. The *Talmud Bavli* is the more commonly studied of the two and is considered to be more authoritative when the two offer different legal rulings. The primary language of the Gemara in both versions is Aramaic, although quoted material in Hebrew is common (mostly from biblical texts or earlier *tannaic* material), and words in Greek, Latin, or other languages occasionally occur. In literary form, the Gemara is a complex combination of legal debate, case law, legend, textual analysis, and philosophical inquiry. Its subject matter covers nearly every imaginable facet of ancient Jewish life, ranging from religious, civil, and criminal law to biblical interpretation to speculation about and investigation of the natural world.

<sup>[1]</sup> **MISHNAH:** The Mishnah (Heb., ‘repetition’) is the primary record of the teaching, decisions, and disputes of a group of Jewish religious and judicial scholars, known as *Tannaim*, who were active from about 30 BCE to 200 CE, mostly in the areas now known as Israel and Palestine. Originally transmitted orally, the Mishnah was redacted into its current form and committed to writing around the year 200 CE by R’ Yehudah haNasi. The language of the Mishnah is Hebrew. The Mishnah is divided into sixty-three ‘tractates,’ which are organized into six ‘orders’ according to their subject matter.

<sup>[3]</sup> **RASHI:** *Rashi* (an acronym for R’ Shlomo Yitzchaki) was an eleventh century scholar active in France. *Rashi compiled the first complete commentary on the Talmud. His commentary focuses on helping students understand the plain meaning of the text. Both the Mishnah and Gemara are written in a brief, terse style, without the use of punctuation or vowel markings. Rashi’s comments are therefore directed toward helping readers work their way through the text and understand its basic form and content. Rashi also offers explanations of unusual or rare vocabulary and concepts and occasionally indicates preferred readings in cases where manuscripts differ. Rashi’s commentary is always set in a semi-cursive typeface called ‘Rashi script,’ is positioned on the gutter side of a printed page of Talmud.*

<sup>[5]</sup> **MESORET HASHAS:**

(Heb., ‘Transmission of the Six Orders’) An index compiled by R’ Yehoshua Boaz (16th c., Italy), later expanded by R’ Yesheyahu Berlin (18th c., Germany). *Mesoret haShas* provides cross references to similar passages elsewhere in the Talmud.

<sup>[8]</sup> **GLOSSES:**

Most modern printed Talmud editions include short definitions, comments, emendations, and cross references from a variety of scholars active during the 17th through 19th centuries. Among the most important of these commentaries are those of R’ Eliyahu b. Shlomo (the ‘Gra,’ or ‘Gaon of Vilna,’ 18th c., Lithuania), the *Hagahot haBah* (Heb., ‘Commentaries of the Bah’) of R’ Yoel Sirkes (17th c., Poland), the comments of R’ Yesheyahu Berlin (18th c., Germany), and the *Gilyon haShas* (Heb., ‘Marginalia on the Six Orders’) of R’ Akiva Eger (19th c., Germany).

<sup>[7]</sup> **TORAH OR:** (Heb., ‘Torah is Light’) Compiled by R’ Yehoshua Boaz (16th c., Italy), this index provides citations for biblical references.

# Agile Project Design Informed by Industry Practice

Individuals & Interactions over  
Process & Tools

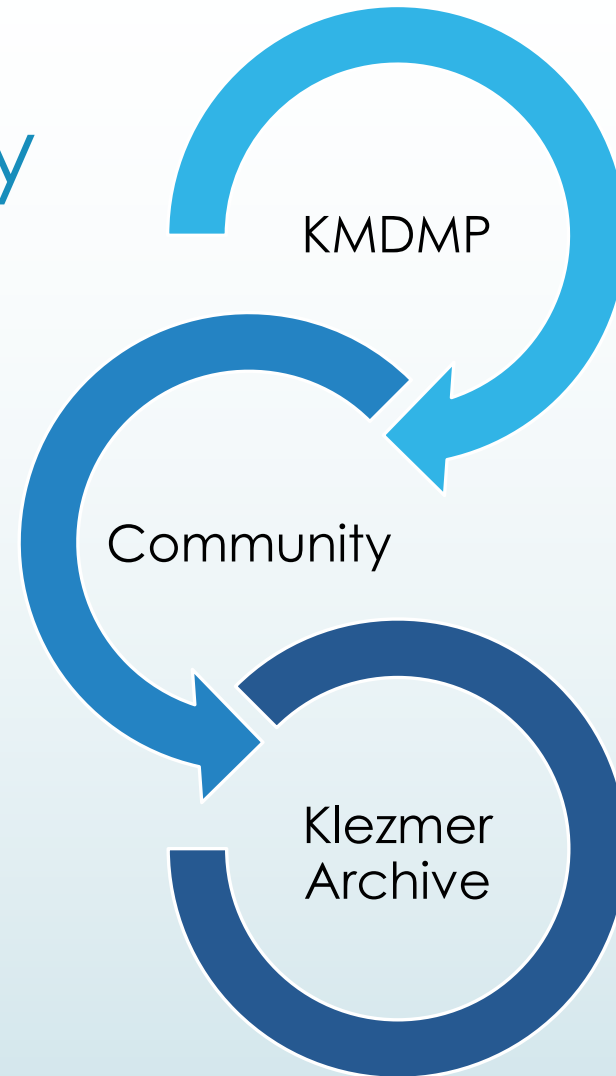
Stuff that Works

Collaboration

Responding to Change

Iterate, Iterate, Iterate

Community Organizing  $\cong$   
Agile Development (Ari Davidow)





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**“This will be a huge advance in recognition and visibility for eastern European Jewish music studies within our circle and out to the larger world.” — Mark Slobin, emeritus, Wesleyan University**

**“For cultural communities that are interested in maintaining continuity with the past within a living tradition, the ability to capture the accumulated knowledge of current practitioners as well as documentation made in the past is an important potential tool.”**

**— Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, NYU**



— דעם קלזמער אינסטיטוט —  
— THE KLEZMER INSTITUTE —





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**“As a music theorist whose interests lie in computational and empirical methods, I am excited by the fact that an oral tradition such as Klezmer music ... could be made available for future researchers and students to explore. This will change the conversations we have about how tonality, folk music, improvised music, and oral traditions work in music, and is an astonishingly important project ....” — Dan Shanahan, Ohio State University**

Learn more about the project and project team at  
[klezmerinstitute.org/klezmerarchive](http://klezmerinstitute.org/klezmerarchive).



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— THE KLEZMER INSTITUTE —

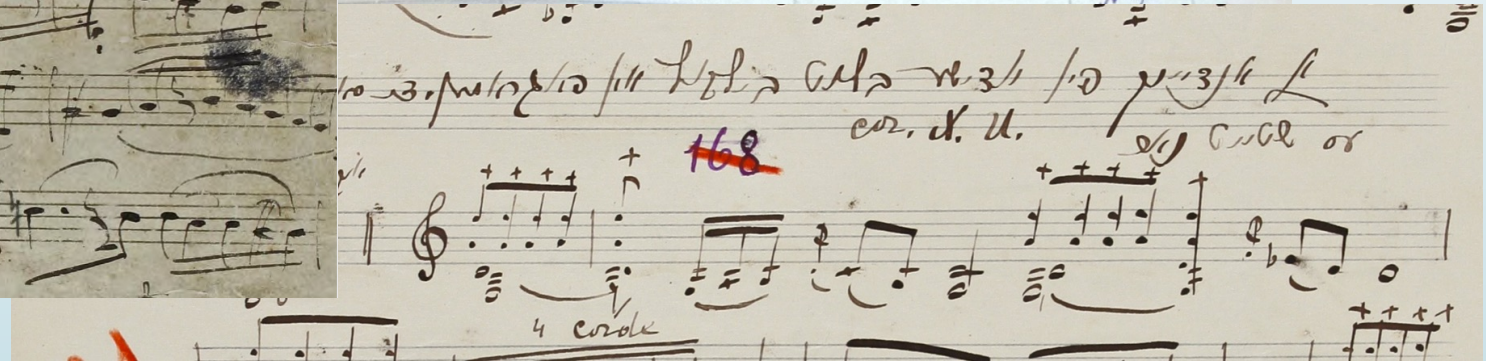
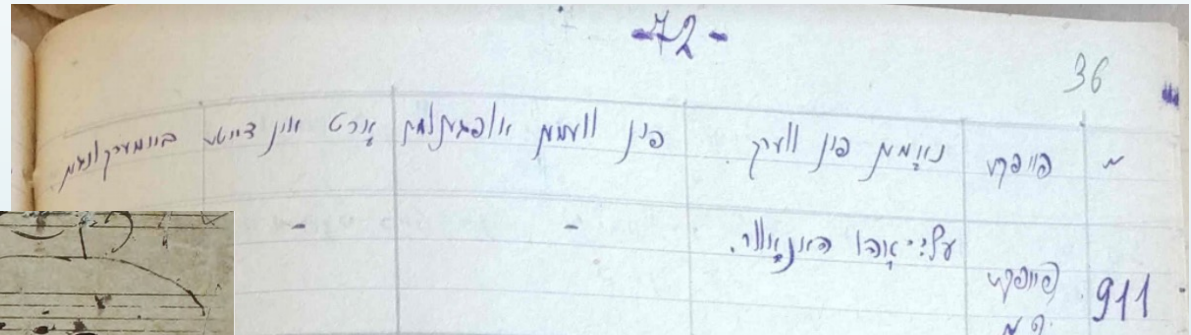


# Kiselgof-Makonovetsky Digital Manuscript Project

- An innovative digital humanities collaboration connecting musicians and scholars with klezmer musicians from more than 100 years ago.
- Designed as a low-cost, volunteer-driven project using easy-to-access platforms such as Google Drive, Facebook, Google Groups and a simple web page.
- In its first year has attracted more than 200 registered participants, who have digitally notated more than half of the 1,400 tunes in the corpus.

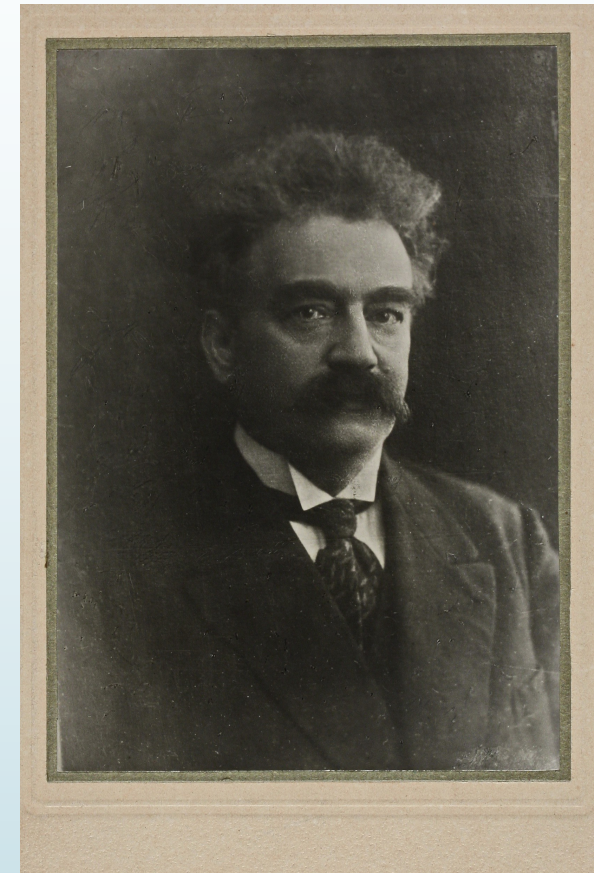
# What is the Corpus?

- 26 Notebooks with handwritten music collected by Kiselgof during the An-Ski ethnographic expeditions 1912-1914. ~650 pages
- Moshe Beregovski's handwritten catalogue of the Kiselgof material.
- Klezmer Manuscript (Wedding MS, ~1938) of Avrom-Yeshie Makonovetsky ~200 pages
- 850 pages total
- ~1,400 tunes (!)



# Attribution

Original documents are archived at the Institute of Manuscripts, Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine. All project materials are shared under Creative Commons 4.0 Attribution license.





# Project Phases, Events, & Partnerships

Phase 1: Dissemination

Phase 2: Digitize & Translate

Phase 3: Analyze, Perform, & Transform

Regular Events: translation sessions, “playalong” sessions, “Digitizathons”

Partnerships: Invited guest at Yiddish Summer Weimar 2021.

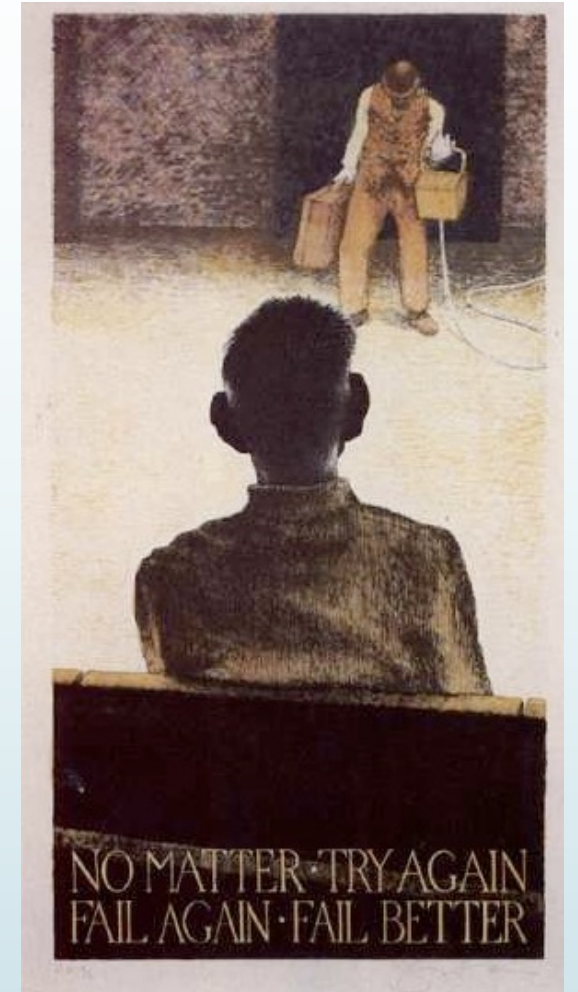


# KMDMP Infrastructure

- KMDMP Commons web page for registered participants
- “Heft” PDFs for each notebook, the catalogue, and the Makonovetsky MS.
- Simple numbering system for each tune = Pdf # + Heft # + Item #
- Platform agnostic for digitized music files: uploads as .native, .xml, .pdf
- Google “Tracking Sheets” coordinate volunteer work on the tunes and text.
- Discussion fora on Facebook and Google Groups.
- Zoom meetings for translation, playalongs, and digitization events.
- Player Folios will be published starting in the second year
- Play Music!!!! — the notation is what’s on the page, the klezmer is what’s between your ears.

# Risks & Rewards

- Following the imperatives of your founders is rewarding.
  - Increases easily-available European klezmer music by factor of five, restores "voice" of informants.
  - Open, non-hierarchical structures naturally uplift women's and gender-non-binary voices.
  - Can be a community-building space that flattens the distance between practitioner experts/academics and less experienced practitioners.
- 
- Allocate limited time & energy to what's right in front of you — Iterate like crazy.
  - Build a scaffold — trust the community to make the house, but pay attention to their needs.
  - Being platform agnostic (music software) means extra work on the back end (Integromat)



# KA & KMDMP Project Teams & Advisors







## Anna Rogers, Project Instigator

**The klezmerim interviewed by Kiselgof were professionals**, with an eclectic collection of different tunes in their repertoire that let them earn a living, generation after generation, adapting to the new tastes and audiences. Their voices faded through numerous social cataclysms - but **luckily, the archive survived**. While these materials are very important for research, **their biggest impact is going to be when they return to fingers of the musicians and the feet of the dancers, when they continue their journey through human hearts**. Luckily, we discovered this time capsule at a post-revival time, when there is a generation of new klezmerim more than capable of processing and reviving this repertoire. **The communities of Yiddish Summer Weimar, Yiddish New York, Klez Kanada, etc. are the real heirs of those who contributed to the archive in the first place**. Why not pass them their inheritance, and let them develop it further - while helping to create a curated academic edition?