





begun to unfold. *Ma'oz Tzur* recalls the rededication of the Temple only obliquely, centering it as a motif and drawing it into the author's present rather than the Hasmonean past. As the following stanzas reveal, *Ma'oz Tzur* is not so much a poem about *anukkah* as it is a poem about calamity and triumph throughout Jewish history, prompted by the remembrance of the Hasmoneans. Reciting it, we are transported from Egypt to Babylon to Shushan, and finally to Jerusalem. Interestingly, its sixth and final stanza reemerges in print only in the eighteenth century; because this lost stanza includes the acrostic *azaq*, scholars believe it is original to the piyyut.

The author of *Ma'oz Tzur* is known only by his personal name, Mordecai, preserved in an acrostic formed by the first letter of its first five stanzas.. Textual evidence suggests that *Ma'oz Tzur* was written in early thirteenth-century Ashkenaz, after violence from multiple waves of Crusades and blood libels had greatly affected the old center of Jewish Ashkenazi life in the Rhineland Valley. As well as causing the loss of life and the destruction of Jewish homes and institutions, the threat of grave danger impelled many to take the lives of friends, family members, and themselves. We see several responses to such external and internalized violence arising over the course of the twelfth century and into the thirteenth, and I would suggest that *Ma'oz Tzur* is to be included among them.

hopeful typological motif present in Jewish history, one of repeated exile and annihilation—even for ancient and revered generations—but, always, eventual deliverance. In closing, Mordecai expresses a deep yearning for redemption in his own time: “Hasten the end of salvation, wreak vengeance upon the wicked people on behalf of your servant. For the hour has greatly lengthened for us, and there is no end to these terrible times.” Though these stirring words may be challenging, they powerfully demonstrate the dialectic of self-searching and hope that characterized the Jewish response to the uncertainty and fear of prolonged insecurity. By understanding the words of Ma’oz Tzur in their context, we can bring them into our own, engaging with them authentically and meaningfully to explore our own deep fears and abiding hopes.

Tamar Marvin, PhD, is a scholar of medieval Jewish intellectual history and adjunct professor at American Jewish University and Hebrew Union College-JIR, Los Angeles. She also develops and teaches full-credit online courses for the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York. Her research centers on the culture of the medieval Jewish communities of Occitania (Provence) and she is particularly interested in the cultural creativity generated by new systems of meaning – Maimonideanism and Qabbalah—that emerge from a multiplicity of intra- and intercommunal contacts in this crossroads region, situated between Ashkenaz and Sefarad, the Latin West and the Islamicate Mediterranean.



Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies
American Jewish University
15600 Mulholland Drive
Bel Air, CA 90077
310-440-1213
www.aju.edu/ziegler

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