Many outstanding Jewish scholars from medieval Al-Andalus treated music as a subject of theoretical inquiry as well as in relation to its practice. Due to his influential stature as poseq (rabbinical arbiter) and philosopher, the rulings of Maimonides and his ideas about music have been scrutinized more frequently than those of his contemporaries, especially after the modern publication of his responsum and commentaries of the Oral Law from the eighteenth century on. Towards a more comprehensive appreciation of his thought about music, this modest contribution analyses another passage by Maimonides on music, contextualising it in the framework of the musical culture of the Andalusian Jews during his lifetime.

From the outset a basic idea dominates the literature on our subject, i.e. that Maimonides 'was extremely antagonistic to all poetry and...
“music” or that ‘his relation to the art of music was negative’. This perception was based on two widely quoted of his responsa concerning music. One is a responsum against the singing of piyyutim in the synagogue services. The second one is his responsum to the Jewish community of Aleppo on the singing of Arabic songs with instrumental accompaniment in weddings. First published by Goldziher and soon after translated to Hebrew by Schmiedl, this second text remains a cornerstone of the rabbinic literature on music.

We shall examine in brief these responsa before addressing in detail the text that occupies us here. Maimonides was aware of the increasing degree of musicality being introduced to synagogue services in Al-Andalus during his time through the singing of piyyutim. It is becoming clear that ‘music’, in its modern Western sense, was absent from the synagogue until the development of the piyyut (no earlier than sixth century CE). Prayers were chanted with diverse types of cantillation or recitation patterns rather than with well-defined ‘melodies’. The piyyut was then an aesthetic revolution of musical implications for Jewish public worship that started in the East and spread rapidly to

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3 A.Z. Idelsohn, Jewish Music in its Historical Development (New York 1929) 126.
6 I. Goldziher, ‘Das Gutachten des Maimonides über Gesang und Musik’, Monats- schrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums 22 (1875) 174-180; A. Schmiedl, ‘Teshuvah ‘aravit ne-ha-rambam’, Beit ozar ha-asifrut 1 (1887) 17-29. (A respona in Arabic by Maimonides). It apparently circulated in Spain, for it is mentioned by Jacob ben Asher, Tur orah hayyim, 560. For the most recent scholarly edition of this text and bibliography see, Adler, Hebrew Writings, no. 550, 240-244.