

A CITY IN LOVE WITH THE THEATRE. RAFAEL FARIN AND THE JUDEZMO THEATRE IN SHUMEN*

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Sefardi theatre in Shumen

The northeastern Bulgarian industrial and university town Shumen – earlier called Shumla and from 1950 to 1965 renamed Kolarovgrad in socialist Bulgaria – lies on the eastern slopes of the Shumen Plateau, some 60 miles from the port city of Varna. In 1869, there were approximately 400 Jews living in the town, which borders Dobrudzha to the south where a large Turkish population resides; in 1905, ca. 200 Jewish families resided in Shumen; in 1912, the Jewish population numbered 1,200; in 1934, the number of Jewish residents declined to 601.¹ A clear majority of them, more than 80% according to the latest census we have, spoke Judezmo as their mother tongue. Almost of the Jews in Shumen made *aliya* to the State of Israel, leaving only 88 Jews there. Currently, just a handful of Jewish families live in the city.

The former Jewish *mahale* (Jewish quarter) of Shumen, called “El kortijo grande” (The Big Courtyard) and dating back to the 18th century, was located in the southwestern part of the city at the foot of the old citadel.² There were at that time four charitable organizations, and the two schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, supported by Baron Maurice de Hirsch, had some 250 pupils at the beginning of the 20th century. There was a quite large synagogue and a cemetery.³

Probably unknown to most, the municipal library of Shumen possesses a small number of Hebrew and Sefardi books, mostly grammar books, including some unique or highly rare items, such as a book published in Judezmo and in Rashi characters in 5684/1924:

* Research for this study was made possible with generous support from the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung.

¹ Arditti, Binyamin, *קהילת שומלה – יהודי בולגאריה*, Va'adah Tsiborit, Tel Aviv 1968; see also Aksel

¹ Arditti, Binyamin, *קהילת שומלה – יהודי בולגאריה*, Va'adah Tsiborit, Tel Aviv 1968; see also Aksel Erbahar, Shumla (Shumen), in: Stillman, Norman A. (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, Leiden, Boston 2010, vol. IV, p. 367; Shumen, in: Hazan, Elko, *Jewish Communities and their Synagogues in Bulgaria*, Sofia 2012, pp. 112-115; Haralamova, Beta, *The Past We Should Never Forget* (in Bulg.), in: *La Estreya* II, 6 (2012), pp. 15-25.

² Hazan, Shumen, 2012, p. 113.

³ On the cemetery, see Joseph Covo, *The Jewish Cemetery of Shumen, Bulgaria, 1893-1966* (<http://www.sephardicstudies.org/pdf/bulgaria.pdf>).

Traduksyon libro [!] de las poezias ebraikas de Rosh haShana i Kipur traído ala estampa por Ya'akov Rafael Maestro shohet i hazan sheni de la komunidad israelit-sefaradit de Shumla en Bulgarya.⁴

This book, printed by the well-known “*Estamparia Targovski*” is – at least according to the *Bibliography of the Hebrew Book*⁵ and to Dov Cohen⁶ – the only known volume in Rashi script published in Shumen. In addition, the municipal library has books in Hebrew that were used especially in the Jewish schools. Almost all the Jewish inhabitants of the city at the end of the 19th century were proficient in Judezmo, Turkish and Bulgarian, and, in addition, a number had a good knowledge of French.

In Shumen, a bitter battle over languages was also waged in the early 1870s. According to an article published in 1870 in the Viennese periodical *El Koreo de Vyena*, the traditionalists were vehemently opposed to the battle cry of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, “*Ondi ay frances, non ay fes*” (‘where French is learned, no fez is worn’), and when the school was opened, they demonstratively donned their fez headcover and spoke in Judezmo.⁷

This enthusiasm for the theatre was progressively integrated into everyday Jewish life and spread to the provincial town of Shumen, where the beginning of Bulgarian theatre is usually identified with two performances in 1856 in a public reading room. Plays were also performed at the Bet Sefer, the elementary school of the Alliance Israélite Universelle⁸ founded in 1870, where both Rabbi Baruch Mitrani, a Hebrew reformer and noted precursor of national Zionism, was active for a short time as a Hebrew teacher⁹ and Eliezer Behor Ya’akov (died 1933 in Sofia) served as a teacher. Probably before 1915, Ya’akov staged the play

⁴ Collin & Studemund-Halévy, *Entre dos Mundos*, p. 130, nr. 129.

⁵ See www.aleph.nli.org.

⁶ Cohen, Dov, *The Ladino Bookshelf* (in Hebrew), unpublished doctoral diss., Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan 2011, p. xiii.

⁷ In the *El Koreo de Vyenah* in its January, February, March, and April issues, 1871, a lengthy polemic ensued between the historian Abraham Rosanes of Ruse and Matitayahu of Shumen on the issue of change in education, *El Koreo de Vyenah*, 28 Sivan 5630 / ; see also Tamir, Vicki, *Bulgaria and Her Jews*, New York 1979, p. 136.

⁸ Today this beautiful school building has been converted into a home for the aged, see, Tamir, *Bulgaria*, p. 108.

⁹ Studemund-Halévy, Michael, “Ivri, daber ivri! Baruch Mitrani, un maskil turko-sefardí en Viena”, in: idem et al. (eds.), *Sefarad an der Donau. Lengua y literatura sefardiés en tierras de los Habsburgo*, Barcelona 2013, pp. 175–202, idem, Ivri, daber ivri: Baruch Mitrani. A Turkish Maskil in Vienna, in: *Transversal XIII*, 2 (2012), pp. 9-39; idem, “From West to West and back. Baruh Mitrani, a Turkish Sefardic “Maskil”, in: Rita Sánchez & Marie-Christine Varol (eds), *La Presse judeo-espagnole*, Istanbul 2013, pp. 255-280.

Ya'akov i sus ijos (Jacob and His Children)¹⁰ together with his students at the school. He also translated the play *Musiu Güillom* (Mister William) from French to Judezmo.¹¹

According to Binjamin Arditti, a Revisionist Zionist,¹² the Jews in Shumen were “obsessed with the theatre” in the true sense of the word.¹³ Almost all associations and societies, with the exception of charitable organizations, felt obliged to include theatrical presentations, with or without music, in their events. Aside from some early mention of theatrical performances, the veritable heyday and flowering of the Jewish theatre in Shumen was in the 1920s, and is closely associated in particular with the name of Rafael Farin. However, this period of flowering was to last but a decade.¹⁴

Regarding Shumen, we have more or less certain knowledge of the following theatre performances:

Before 1915, *Ya'akov I sus ijos* (Jacob and his Children), directed by Eliezer Behor Ya'akov.

In 1919, an amateur group enthusiastic about the theatre performed Shalom Asch's (1880–1957)¹⁵ stage play *Im hagal* (With the Stream, 1904), translated into Bulgarian by Lazar Daniel.¹⁶

In 1919, *Yehuda Makabi* was performed in Bulgarian by the Mikra theatre troupe, which was founded in 1918.¹⁷

In 1920, there was a performance of *La ija kazamentera* by the Hebrew poet Abraham Razin (Abraham Rosen / Rosenzweig, 1889–1974) and performed by the Mikra theatre troupe.¹⁸

¹⁰ Arditti, *יהודי בולגאריה*, p. 106.

¹¹ Arditti, *יהודי בולגאריה*, p. 106; Romero, Elena, *La creación literaria en lengua sefardí*, Madrid 1992a, p. 277.

¹² Binyamin Arditti (1897–1982), born in Vienna, was an Israeli politician who served as a member of the Knesset for Herut and Gahal between 1955 and 1965. He also published several books: *The Role of King Boris in the Expulsion of Bulgarian Jewry* (1952); *Bulgarian Jews Under the Nazis* (1962); *Bulgarian Jewry – the Shumla Community* (1968) and *Famous Bulgarian Jews* (1971).

¹³ Arditti, *יהודי בולגאריה*, pp. 105–107.

¹⁴ See Romero, *El teatro de los sefardies orientales*, 3 vols, Madrid 1979, vol. 2, p. 758, nr. 360–1.

¹⁵ Shalom Asch, a celebrated writer in his own lifetime, wrote initially in Hebrew, but I. L. Peretz convinced him to switch to Yiddish. His works were never translated into Judezmo.

¹⁶ Arditti, *יהודי בולגאריה*, p. 106–107; Romero, *El teatro de los sefardies orientales*, vol. 2, p. 758, nr. 360–1.

¹⁷ Arditti, *יהודי בולגאריה*, p. 106; Romero, *El teatro de los sefardies orientales*, vol. 2, pp. 757–758, nr. 359. The Bulgarian National Archive in Sofia (Ladino Collection) possesses a copy of the theatrical play “*Yehuda Makabi, trezladada del bulgar por Abraham Menahem*” in Solitreo Sefardi script.

¹⁸ Abraham Razin was an author of serialized novels; see also Arditti, *יהודי בולגאריה*, p. 106; Romero, *El teatro de los sefardies orientales*, vol.1, 299, nr. 304; Romero, *El teatro de los sefardies orientales*, vol. 2, p. 761, nr. 376.

In 1925, *Don Yosef de Castilla* was staged in Judezmo by the Sosyedad Makabi, which was founded in 1925.¹⁹

In 1926, *Dreyfus* by Jak Loria (1860–1948) was performed in Judezmo.²⁰

In 1926, *Dreyfus* by Aharon Menahem was staged and directed by Rafael Farin.²¹

In 1926, *Don Isak Abravanel* by Aharon Menahem was staged and likewise directed by Rafael Farin.²²

In 1926, there was a performance of *El Avaro* by Molière in Bulgarian.²³

In 1926, *La suegra la kaza arevuelta*, based probably on Anton Todorov Strashimirov's (1872–1937) well-known satiric comedy *Svekurva* (Mother-in-Law),²⁴ considered now one of the best moral comedies in Bulgarian, was staged in Judezmo and directed by Rafael Farin.²⁵

In 1926, Sholem Aleichem's play *Desparsidos i Dispersados* was put on in Judezmo, directed by Rafael Farin.²⁶

¹⁹ See also Arditti יהודי בולגאריה , p. 106; Romero, *El teatro de los sefardíes orientales*, vol. 1, p. 251, nr. 213; vol. 2, p. 776, nr. 443; Romero 1983, pp. 50–51, nr. 65; Romero, *Nueva bibliografía*, p. 193.

²⁰ *Dreyfus. Drama en sinko aktos i un apoteoz*, Sofia 1902–1903; reprinted in Studemund-Halévy & Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria*, pp. 38–89; see also Platikanova, Slava (ed.), *Dreyfus*, Tübingen 2014; Romero, *El teatro de los sefardíes orientales*, p. 86, nr. 137; p. 88, nr. 144; 94, nr. 160; Romero, Elena, *Repertorio de noticias sobre el mundo teatral de los sefardíes orientales*, CSIC, Madrid 1983, Dori, Nitsa, *The Dreyfus Affair and its Registration in the Ladino Literature*, 2000 (in Hebrew); see also Papo, Yosef Avraam, *Dreyfus* (MS), National Archives (Sofia).

²¹ Arditti יהודי בולגאריה , p. 106; Romero, *El teatro de los sefardíes orientales*, vol. 1, p. 251, nr. 213; vol. 2, p. 776, nr. 443; Romero 1983, pp. 50–51, nr. 65; Romero, *Nueva bibliografía*, p. 193.

²² *La Verdad* (Ruse) c. 1900. Along with Aharon Menahem, Behor Azaria (1874–1911), Jak Loria and Sento Semo also wrote stage plays about the philosopher of religion and minister to the Catholic kings, Isaac Abravanel; see also Arditti יהודי בולגאריה , p. 106; Romero, *El teatro de los sefardíes orientales*, vol. 2, p. 777, nr. 444; Romero, *Repertorio de noticias*, pp. 50–51, nr. 65; Romero, *Nueva bibliografía*, pp. 183–218 (here: p. 191, nr. 24); *Bibliography of the Hebrew Book* (www.hebrew-bibliography.com).

²³ Avare de Moliere, p.1–15 (National Archives, Sofia); Arditti יהודי בולגאריה , p. 106; Romero, *El teatro de los sefardíes orientales*, vol. 1, pp. 165–175, nr. 27; vol. 2, p. 777, nr. 445. See also *El hazino imaginado. Komedia en tres aktos de Molyer, trezladado de el fransez por Sh. Ataf*, Sofia 1903.

²⁴ Anton Todorov Strashimirov (1872–1937), founder of the dramatic literature in Bulgaria, published his first poems in the journal *Iskra* (The Spark) in Shumen; the start of his active creative career was linked with the theatre in Shumen and Varna. He published the novel *The Salonica Terrorists* (Eskenazi, Jacques; Krispin, Alfred, *Jews in the Bulgarian Hinterland: an annotated bibliography*, Sofia 2002, nr. 1520) and the preface to the poems of Youliy Rosenthal, Sofia 1904 (Eskenasi 2002, no. 1893). He published his satiric comedy *Svekurva* in 1906. Violeta Menahem Levi-Samardzhieva remembered a representation in Dupnitse, 1921, apud Tosheva, Kristina, “El teatro y los judios en Bulgaria: Con esbozo historico”, *Annual / Godishnik* 26 (1991), pp. 244–257 (here: p. 250); see also Nikolov, M. A., *Anton Strashimirov*, Sofia 1965.

²⁵ Arditti יהודי בולגאריה , p. 106–107; Romero, *El teatro de los sefardíes orientales*, vol. 1, p. 427, nr. 631; vol. 2, p. 777, nr. 446.

²⁶ *Desparcidos i dispersados. Espektakulo en tres aktos*, El Djudyo (Varna), XV, 1925 – XVI, 1926; reprinted in Studemund-Halévy & Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria*, 2014, pp. 147–183; Romero, *Nueva bibliografía*, pp. 183–218 [here: p. 204, Nr. 73]. However, Farin translated the play from German, as is

In 1927, *Messhasheah hana'alayim*,²⁷ a stage play and musical translated from French to Bulgarian by Isaac Hayim Shelomoh Eshkenazi (Ashkenazi) was performed.²⁸

In 1927, *Mojeret hagafurim* (Seller of Matchboxes), a stage play and musical operetta translated from French to Bulgarian by Isaac Hayim Shelomoh Eshkenazi (Ashkenazi) was put on.²⁹

In 1929, there was another performance of *Don Izhak Abravanel*.³⁰

This naturally incomplete list is based principally on the studies by Binyamin Arditti, Elena Romero, and Kristina Tosheva. If we supplement this list of the Sefardic theatre from Bulgaria with the Judezmo books published in Bulgaria, and if we then complete this tableau with our still insufficient knowledge of Sefardic literature from Vienna, Bosnia, Herzegovina and Serbia, we can readily see that the number of translations from Yiddish and German into Judezmo is far greater than what numerous researchers have previously assumed, and that many translations or adaptations were by the detour, so to speak, of a German version before then being translated into Judezmo.

Judezmo theatre

Under the Ottoman Empire, Judezmo newspapers in the 1860s were already dominated by novels and novellas, many of them creative adaptations of foreign material, particularly French, Hebrew and German sources. The translations of novellas and theatre were published as installments in newspapers (usually distributed by subscription) or as chapbooks. Both kinds of editions were quite inexpensive and widely available. The texts were very often abridged to some 20 pages and appeared with the indication *trezladado* (translated), *rezumido* (summarized), *imitado*, *adaptado*, *aranjado* (arranged), or *reeskrito* (rewritten); these terms were used synonymously.

All these so-called Judezmo translations or adaptations of various kinds, including those that claimed to be original works, borrowed lexical elements

clearly evident from a comparison of the Yiddish with the German version and from the manuscript version.

²⁷ Arditti יהודי בולגאריה, p. 107; Romero, *El teatro de los sefardies orientales*, vol. 1, p. 341, nr. 360; vol. 2, p. 778, nr. 449.

²⁸ There is very little information on the use of music in Sefardi theatre, and even less is known about the staging of Sefardic plays.

²⁹ Arditti יהודי בולגאריה, p. 107; Romero, *El teatro de los sefardies orientales*, vol. 1, p. 347, nr. 371; vol. 2, p. 778, nr. 450.

³⁰ Arditti יהודי בולגאריה, p. 107; Romero, *El teatro de los sefardies orientales*, vol. 2, p. 785, nr. 484; Romero, *Nueva bibliografía*, p. 191, nr. 24.

from the foreign-language texts and thus depended on them to varying degrees. These texts are described by Olga Borovaya as “rewriting” literature and their authors as “rewriters”.³¹ A thorough study of the source language texts and their translated, adapted or rewritten versions would help to show how translators or “rewriters” overcame the linguistic problems and the social-cultural difficulties in practice. Unfortunately, no systematic research has yet been carried out.³²

As Olga Borovaya has shown, this new genre of secular fiction involved the adaptation of an original work from another language, entailing the translation of instructive texts without even mentioning the possibility of producing original works. In all these literary contexts, language played a key role in determining how Jews negotiated their identities in fiction.

In post-vernacular Judezmo – starting in the mid-twenties of the last century – translation, adaptation and rewriting are a constant presence in Judezmo literature, because it does not engage Judezmo as an everyday language or mother tongue and it serves as a landmark of a new cultural era: acculturated Sefardic life with Judezmo as a second language.

Plays on Jewish Life

Judezmo theatre did not emerge until the second half of the nineteenth century as a so-called “adopted genre”,³³ first as an expression of holiday celebrations, such as Passover, Hanukkah, and Purim, and later as a medium of instruction that was performed in schools or for literary or charitable associations. Three languages were employed by most of the Jews in Europe: Hebrew, Yiddish and Judezmo, in addition to the language of their home countries.

The basic largely negative attitude toward theatre diminished when Jewish life was affected by the Jewish Enlightenment movement and the movement for Jewish emancipation. Even if Judezmo theatre always sought to provide entertainment, it was meant to be a venue of moral education and enlightenment, a school open to everybody. The idea of creating a Judezmo theatre was appealing to the Westernizer because it seemed to be a good means of teaching morality and religion. These plays and sketches often appeared in periodicals,

³¹ Borovaya, Olga V., *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Bloomington 2012, p. 140.

³² See Borovaya, Olga V. “The Serialized Novel as Rewriting: The Case of the Ladino Belles Lettres”, in: *Jewish Social Studies* 10 (2003), pp. 30–68; eadem, Borovaya, Olga, “New forms of Ladino cultural production in the late Ottoman period: Sephardi theater as a tool of indoctrination”, in: *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 2, 1 (2008), pp. 65–87, here, p. 67.

³³ Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture*, 2012; Romero, *La creación literaria*, 1992, p. 22.

sometimes in serialized form, and quite a few of them were not even meant for staging.

Judezmo theatre emerged as plays on Jewish life, written in Judezmo by named authors or created by a member of the local Sefardi community, and staged by a group of amateur actors of the Sefardi community for a purely Sefardi audience, very often for religious and educational purposes, charitable propaganda, or fundraising. Sefardi dramatists were rabbis, teachers, local literati, intellectuals, or publicists involved in Sefardi journalism as publishers, editors, translators or contributors to one or several newspapers.

When Sefardi literati were putting together a repertoire for the new theater, they did not have any domestic texts to utilize. They had to import French theater for material to borrow, such as works by Racine, Molière, Delphine de Girardin, Scribe, Eugène Labiche, Emile Juillard, Octave Mirbeau, Henry Bataille or Georges Courteline. Other literati created original plays, turning to biblical stories and episodes of Jewish history (stories about Queen Esther or Joseph and his brothers), and later, to the local situation. Zionist authors favored dramatic and violent episodes where Jewish heroes and heroines demonstrated their patriotism and dedication to Judaism by saving the land and the people of Israel, for example, the stories about Yiftah, Debora, David and Goliath, Queen Esther, the Binding of Isaac, Bar Kochba, etc.³⁴

In the early twentieth century, the repertoire of Judezmo theatre included more plays on Jewish life (“return to the ghetto”), especially in Eastern and Central Europe and Palestine, mainly translated from Hebrew, Yiddish, German, Dutch, and Russian – most of the latter via Hebrew. These texts showing traditional Jewish life between Nostalgia and Modernization allowing Jews to reconnect with the past. The preferred Jewish authors were, along with Sholom Aleichem, the Yiddish writers Shalom Asch (1880–1957) and Shalom An-ski (1863–1920), the author of the *Dibbuk*, translated into many languages, including Judezmo.³⁵

The languages of the theatre performances were predominantly Hebrew, Judezmo, and French. In Bulgaria, one key center for the Jewish theatre was the

³⁴ The State Archives in Sofia has very important holdings of Judezmo manuscripts.

³⁵ The classic adaptation and interpretation of the story of *Der Dibbuk* (*A Dybbuk or between two Worlds*), which inspired various artistic and musical treatments, is a popular play by Shalom An-Ski (alias Zainwil Salomon Rappoport). The *Dibbuk* was translated, adapted and published in Judezmo by Jacques Cappon (*Entre dos mundos or HaDybuk. Legenda dramatica en 4 actos*, Sofia ca. 1930); see Collin & Studemund-Halévy, *Entre dos Mundos*, 2007, p. 29, nr. 47; see also Romero, Elena, “Nueva bibliografía de ediciones de obras de teatro sefardíes”, in: *Sefarad* 66, 1 (2006), pp. 183–218, here p. 207, nr. 88.

city of Shumen, whose most outstanding representative was the amateur stage director, journalist, translator and amateur writer Rafael Farin.

Brothers in Spirit: Sholem Aleichem and Rafael Farin

Sholem Aleichem (alias Shalom Yaakov Rabinovich), the “psychologist of the Jewish people”,³⁶ who was born 1859 in Pereyaslav (a village 95 km south of Kiev in Ukraine) and died in 1916 in New York, is considered alongside Mendele Moicher Sforim and Yizchak Leib Peretz (also known as Yitskhok Leybush Peretz) as one of the most important classic authors of Yiddish literature. Translated into many languages, he enjoyed great popularity, especially with German, American and Bulgarian readers.³⁷ Among them, Rafael Farin was one of his most keen and enthusiastic readers, who not only translated Sholem Aleichem’s works into Bulgarian and Judezmo, but also wrote as an author “in the spirit of Sholem Aleichem”.³⁸

As a passionate lover of the theatre, according to the memoirs of his friend Binyamin (Buko) Arditti, the pharmacist, Zionist journalist and gifted translator Rafael Farin, born in Shumen in 1889 and died in 1951 in Lod,³⁹ was greatly enamored by the writings of Sholem Aleichem, today still popular in Bulgaria, because like Sholom Aleichem, “Rafael loved life and surrendered himself to it”.⁴⁰ Farin shared this love with the Sefardic public, which between 1919 and 1931 repeatedly asked for stage plays and dramatic sketches by Sholem Aleichem. At least four of his works were translated into Judezmo during those years, simultaneous with the translation of a far larger number of Sholem Aleichem’s works into Bulgarian.⁴¹

Based on the unfortunately inaccurate data given by Binjamin Arditti, Rafael Farin presumably translated three books by Sholem Aleichem into Bulgarian

³⁶ “El psihologo del alma del pueblo“, *El Djidyó*, Salónica, 1925, 37a.

³⁷ The first translations of Sholem Aleichem in Bulgarian appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, when in 1910 the newspaper *Vesti* published a few stories translated from German into Bulgarian. According to Hristo Yordanov, more than 17 of his stories and books were published between 1918 and 1985 in Bulgaria. See Yordanov, 1987, pp. 236-238. See also Fridhandler, *Indexes*, 1907; Eiherr, *Übersetzung*, 2013.

³⁸ It should be noted that the first Bulgarian translations of Sholem Aleichem were from German, not from Yiddish or Russian, see Brantz, *Sholom Aleichem*, p. 225.

³⁹ About his life see his unpublished Memoirs (in Bulgarian): *Rafael (Buko) Farin. Shumen-Bulgaria 1889 / Lod-Israel 1950*, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem (BU/Is/1d); Arditti, Binyamin, *יהודי בולגאריה - קהילת שומלה*, Tel Aviv 1968.

⁴⁰ Arditti, *יהודי בולגאריה*, pp. 106–107.

⁴¹ Brantz, Rosa, “Sholom Aleichem in Bulgaria”, in: *Godishnik/Annual* 22 (1987), pp. 223–236.

between 1918 and 1928.⁴² In 1925–26, the journal *HaShofar* published a Bulgarian translation of *Menahem-Mendel* without however mentioning the name of the translator.⁴³ Rafael Farin is also believed, at least in the view of the Bulgarian local historian Niko Mayerov from Shumen, to have translated a further classic text by Sholem Aleichem, *Tevje the Milkman*,⁴⁴ but we have likewise not been able to locate a copy of this translation.⁴⁵ In addition, he is supposed to have translated sections of *Don Quichote* into Judezmo.⁴⁶

In his short bibliography on the Judezmo theatre, Abraham Yaari mentions three works by Sholem Aleichem:⁴⁷

- *Desparcidos i Dispersados. Spektakulo en tres aktos, trezladado del alman por R. Farin.*
- *Mazal bueno. Para mazal bueno. Komedia en 1 akto. Trezladado del ebreo por Abraham Matarasso.*
- *Para mazal bueno (Komedia en un akto) i syertas notas sovre Sholem Alehem rekojidas por [Izhak David Florentin], Saloniko 1931.*

Rosa Sánchez lists three or four works by Sholem Aleichem, including *Desparcidos y dispersados; El médico / A Doktor; Mazal Tov / Enhorabuena / Para mazal bueno*.⁴⁸

⁴² Arditti, בולגאריה יהודי, p. 105.

⁴³ *HaShofar* XVII, 1925, 11: 5–8 (14.12.1925); 12, 1925: 4–9 (25.12.1925); 14, 1926: 4–12 (15.1.1926); 16, 1926: 5–8 (29.1.1926); 18, 1926: 4–9 (12.2.1926).

⁴⁴ Mayerov, Niko, *Evrejskata mahala v moite spomeni*, [s.n.], Shumen 2011, p. 28; see also Sánchez, *Difusión y recepción*, 2006, pp. 180–181.

⁴⁵ According to the handwritten catalogue deposited in Yad Vashem of the collection of books of Benjamin Arditti, there is only one book by Rafael Farin in his library, namely *Menahem-Mendel*, see Collin, Gaëlle; Studemund-Halévy, Michael, “Le fonds judéo-espagnol bulgare de la Bibliothèque de Yad Vashem (Jerusalem): le fonds Benjamin Arditti”, in: *Miscelánea de estudios árabes y hebraicos / Sección de Hebreo* 56, 2007, pp. 163–179.

⁴⁶ Mayerov, *Evrejskata*, p. 28. Nissim Farhi, a pharmacist living in Shumen, still recalls Farin and his passion for the theatre very well, as well as his translations for the theatre, including also parts of *Don Quichote*, as he told me in a conversation in Shumen in 2011. For the Israeli writer Izhak Ben-Rubi, the ability of Judezmo-speaking (and reading) Jews in the original Spanish explains why no Judezmo translation was ever made (“Don Quijote y los hijos sefarditas”, in: *Anales Cervantinas* 2 (1952), pp. 374–37; Rachel Amado Bortnick, the founder of Ladinokomunita, translated chapters of Don Quijote into Judezmo (ladino), “Don Kishot de la Mancha”, in: Moscona, Myriam & Sefami, Jacobo (eds.), *Por mi boka: Textos de la diáspora sefardí en ladino*, México, D.F., 2013, pp. 226–237.

⁴⁷ Yaari, Abraham, “לחולדות הדרמה הישראלית דרמות בלדינו”, in: *Bamah* 3, 21–23 (1934), pp. 11–14.

⁴⁸ Sánchez, *Difusión y recepción*, 2006, p. 176.

Finally, the magnificent *Bibliography of the Hebrew Book* lists four of his works in Judezmo translation:

- *Para Mazal Bueno/Mazal Tov*, in: *El Makabeo* (Salonica, 1919), trezladado del ebreo por Abraham Matarasso.⁴⁹
- *Mi kapo de anyo*: Broshura muy divertyente, kontenyendo la [...] pyesa [...] El Mediko, del grande eskribano [...] Sholem Alehem, consejos a las mujeres, maksimas i proverbyos, Saloniko, c. 1920, in: *El Djudyo* (1920).
- *Desparcidos i Dispersados*, Spektakolo en tres aktos, trezladado del alman por R. Farin, in: *El Djudyo* (1925–1926).⁵⁰
- *Para mazal bueno* i syertas notas sovre Sholem Alehem. Rekojidas por I[zhak] F[lorentin], Saloniki (1931).⁵¹

Rafael Farin, who in Shumen not only directed Jewish stage plays for a Jewish theatre-going public but also adapted numerous plays for the stage, shared his lifelong enthusiasm and love for Sholem Aleichem with translators and authors such as the journalists Abraham Matarasso and Isaak David Florentin, who translated plays by Sholem Aleichem into Judezmo.

It is thus not surprising that the first book publication of Farin we know of, which appeared in Shumen in 1925, was the first book in the series (probably founded by him) entitled “Jewish Humorous Library”: namely the epistolary novel *Menahem-Mendel* by his favorite writer Sholem Aleichem.⁵² It was published by the Jewish youth organization *Mikra Makabi* and printed by the well-known printer Spas Popov.⁵³ According to the title page, this is a translation from German, a language that Rafael Farin, linguistically gifted, knew well, since he had learned German while studying for two years at the Leipzig College of Management (*Handelshochschule*). Later, he also taught German at the commercial school in Shumen.

Farin’s second book in Bulgarian is likewise a translation of the collection of novellas by Sholem Aleichem published in Berlin in 1925 and entitled *Di Ershte*

⁴⁹ Romero, *El teatro*, 1979, p. 328.

⁵⁰ Romero, *El teatro*, 1979, p. 227.

⁵¹ Romero, *El teatro*, 1979, p. 328.

⁵² *Menahem Mendel*. Translated from the German by R. Farin, Shumen 1925.

⁵³ Brantz, *Sholom Aleichem*, p. 228. On the bibliography of the works of Sholem Aleichem in Bulgarian, see Yordanov, Hristo, “Shalom Aleichem’s Books Translated and Distributed in Bulgaria”, in: *Godishnik/ Annual 22* (1987), pp. 236–238 (here: p. 235).

Yidishe Republik, which Farin brought out in Shumen in 1927 in Bulgarian as *Parvata Evreiska Republika / Spored Istinskoto odisanie / na edin Otcheviden / Prevel: R. Farin / Knigata i skladiran i prevodatcha be Shumen 1927 (The First Jewish Republic. An Authentic Description of a Witness)*.⁵⁴ Along with these two works in Bulgarian, Farin may well have translated a third by Sholem Aleichem, which appeared in the periodical *HaShofar* without mention of the translator's name.⁵⁵ The first two translations can be found today in the Shumen municipal library.

In 1924, Farin translated one of the most popular Yiddish plays by Sholem Aleichem, *Tsezeyt un tsheshpreyt* (Scattered Far and Wide), which appeared in Varna 1925/26 in the periodical *El Djudyo* entitled: *Desparsidos i Dispersados, spektakulo en tres actos, trezladado del alman*.⁵⁶ This “Dramatic Play in Three Acts” deals with a family that is falling apart, in which all of the dramatis personae espouse and represent an idea according to which they organize their life: the daughter Hanna represents a life of study and education; the son Haim is a Zionist, another son is a Social Democrat. The mother Malke is pious but too weak to stand her ground against her children, and to some extent does not take what they say seriously (*Se yo lo que los crios van dahtaniando?*).⁵⁷ Central here is the married couple Schalant, who see themselves forced by the catastrophes that occur (their eldest daughter Flora elopes, their son is arrested, their daughter Hanna's engagement is dissolved), to finally come to terms and deal with their children. When, at the end of the play, the husband asks his wife about their children, she answers him: “scattered and dispersed over all the seven seas” (*desparcidos y dispersados por todas las ciete partes del mundo*).⁵⁸ An analysis both of the manuscript and the printed version shows that Rafael Farin adhered very closely to the German translation of the Yiddish original and that he had a masterful touch in rendering Sholem Aleichem's linguistic virtuosity in Judezmo translation.

⁵⁴ Brantz, *Sholom Aleichem*, p. 228.

⁵⁵ *HaShofar* XVII, 1925, 11: 5–8 (14.12.1925); 12, 1925: 4–9 (25.12.1925); 14, 1926: 4–12 (15.1.1926); 16, 1926: 5–8 (29.1.1926); 18, 1926: 4–9 (12.2.1926).

⁵⁶ Written in 1903, it describes the conflict of generations and was performed many times on stage with great success *El Djudyo*, XV, 1925, [1], 16.10., 38: 3–4; [2] 39, 23.10., 3–4; [3] 40, 30.11., 3–4; [4] 6.11., 41, 3–4; [5] 13.11., 42, 3–4; [6] 20.11., 43, 3–4; [7] 27.11., 44, 3–4; [8] 4. 12., 45, 3–4; [9] 11.12, 46, 3–4; [10] 47, 18.12., 3–4; [11] 25.12., 48, 3–4; XVI, 1926, [12], 1.1., 1, 3–4; [13] 2, 8, reprint in Studemund-Halévy & Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria*; see Romero, *El teatro de los sefardíes orientales*, p. 227; Sánchez, *Difusión y recepción*, 2006, p. 176.

⁵⁷ Studemund-Halévy & Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria*, p. 151,

⁵⁸ Studemund-Halévy & Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria*, p. 183. This is similar to the Yiddish expression on which the title of the play is based: “*Tsezeyt un tsheshpreyt oyf ale shive yamim*”; see Harshav, Benjamin, *The Meaning of Yiddish*, Berkeley, CA 1990, p. 37.

The only theatrical play we know of authored by Farin is the comedy *El Amor victorioso*, of which there is only a typed manuscript version extant.⁵⁹ This witty play is animated by the spirit of Sholem Aleichem, and in its language it resembles that of the characters in Farin's translated work *Desparisidos i Dispersados*. The play is full of Turkish expressions, which is not surprising, because, despite the language reforms that were instituted in the mid-19th century and led to the modern Bulgarian standard language, there are thousands of Turkish and Balkan Turkish words in Bulgarian, and more than half of the inhabitants of Shumen were ethnic Turks.⁶⁰ Farin himself had a good knowledge of Turkish. Along with Turkish and Hebrew words, there are a number of Gallicisms and Italian words, as well as lexemes from Bulgarian and German. We do not know as yet whether this captivating comedy – playful with idiolects, metalinguistic and sociolinguistic hold of the play, rich in code-, dialect- and style-switching – which is set in a “contemporary small provincial town” (*se passa en noestros dias en una sivdad de provincia*)⁶¹ was written by Rafael Farin himself or is one of his many unpublished translations or adaptations. But since Farin as a rule notes if a work is translated, and in this case has not included such a note, we assume that he is the author of this play.

As a poet, translator or journalist, Rafael Farin used the nom de plume “Nirlafar” or “Niraf Leafar” (anagram of the authors name), and as journalist the pseudonym “Alkolombrie Meshofistra” and “Nirlafar”, under which he published witty satirical *pismos* (letters) in the leading Bulgarian Zionist weekly *Razvet* (The Dawn) of Sofia and in the Judezmo-Bulgarian weekly *Ha-Shofar* of Plovdiv.⁶² Despite considerable effort, I have to date been able to find only two solitary examples of these letters. He was not only a gifted writer, but also a fervent supporter of Revisionist Zionism and an admirer of the Revisionist Zionist leader, author and orator Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880–1940). It is not surprising that the *drugar* (druggist) Rafael Farin ran as a candidate in Shumen for the Revisionist Zionists (without success).⁶³

Rafael Farin invested and lost much money in his passion for the theater, and he managed to finance this as a druggist by the sale of salves, albeit meagerly,

⁵⁹ Studemund-Halévy & Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria*, pp. 117–146.

⁶⁰ Turan, Ömer, *The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria, 1878-1908*, Ankara 1998.

⁶¹ Studemund-Halévy & Collin, *La Boz de Bulgaria*, p. 157.

⁶² See, for example, *Razvet*, Sofia, 15.10.1930. On Jewish journalism in Bulgaria, see Nassi, Gad (ed.), *Jewish Journalism and Printing Houses in the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Isis Press, Istanbul 2001; Israel, Salvator, “Evreiski periodichen pechat na ladino i ivrit v Balgarija”, in: *Annual/ Godishnik* 1 (1967), pp. 139–167.

⁶³ *Razvet*, Sofia, 1-2-1931.

paying the printers with its proceeds.⁶⁴ His family supported him, at least morally, and in any case was proud of him. In her memoirs (in Bulgarian), his sister Karolina wrote:

My brother Buko [Rafael] was very well-read and gifted musically. He was also very smart. My father often asked him for advice, and he wrote some satires that we preserved in the family. He played the guitar and mandolin. We often sat on the stairs, he played and we sang. He had a beautiful voice, loved to tell jokes.⁶⁵

If that is all that is extant of his work, the question arises as to what happened with his posthumous papers, especially the manuscripts that his sister Karolina mentions in her memoirs.⁶⁶ At the moment, we can only answer this question with some hesitation. But in our search for Judezmo books, periodicals and manuscripts in Bulgaria, during numerous trips to the country, we have located more than two dozen manuscripts of stage plays, all unknown, most in Solitreo script, and a small number in Rashi and Latin script. The publication of these texts would substantially expand our knowledge of Judezmo language and literature, not just in Bulgaria.

Turning to Life: Farin as translator of Sholem Aleichem

A Judezmo speaker (sometimes) and a Judezmo author (always) remains aware of multiple registers, borrowed but not wholly assimilated from a variety of languages and dialects. He consciously selects an expression from among these various registers for a specific effect, thus adding a witty meta- or sociolinguistic significance to the utterance. For Farin, the polyglot and linguistically witty amateur playwright from Shumen, Aleichem's subtle and complex mix of languages from earthy Yiddish, combined with German, Hebrew and Slavic elements, represented a huge linguistic challenge. After all, in the grotesque picture gallery of Jewish characters he created (*Menahem-Mendel*; *Tevje the Milkman*), each one of the *dramatis personae* is assigned the role of bearer of both a political-social idea and a distinctive and unmistakable language, giving rise to the most ludicrous kinds of confusions. Provincial *bon vivants* and loud-

⁶⁴ Arditti, *יידדי בולגאריה*, pp. 105–107.

⁶⁵ Farhi, Karolina, *My Memoirs* (in Bulgarian), unpublished manuscript, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem (BU/Is/1d).

⁶⁶ Part of Farin's manuscripts and family documents are located at the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem (BU/Is/1d).

mouthed *parvenus* alternate with religious Jews and worldly Zionists, small-town *belles* in their frippery, and ironically resigned married women, traditionalists and modernists. In addition, there appear jealous old fools and dubious merchants, cheeky domestics, sleazy marriage brokers of both sexes, fathers and mothers crazy to get their daughters engaged, and daughters fanatically eager to be wed.

The translator Rafael Farin characterizes and caricatures his *dramatis personae* with a special linguistic wit, giving each one of them a distinctive linguistic repertoire. He succeeds in weaving together different registers that he correlates with different social characteristics and linguistic surfaces, including social factors such as age, gender, occupation, origin and the like. A sort of theatrical heteroglossia emerges in which multiple languages, dialects or registers are used for the traditional motives of verisimilitude or humor.⁶⁷ Farin is successful in this not only due to his exceptional command of Judezmo but also by means of his skillful employment of non-Spanish (often rare) words from Hebrew, Turkish, Romanian,⁶⁸ German, French, and Italian.

As a translator, Rafael Farin uses a mixture of everyday vernacular, sometimes journalese, peppered with numerous words from modern languages. He also introduces several proverbs (*riflanes*) in these plays, which can all be found in numerous Bulgarian proverb collections known to us:

coando vas mesclando las colis con las letchougas
el consejo di la moujer es poco i el que no lo toma es loco
el loco gasta el savio se lo come
el que ijas tiené con perros cosfoegra
ijo mio si tomas haver assouvi escalon, si tomas moujer abacha
escalon
la manzana no caye lejos del arbol
segun el padre ansi y los crios
vestido à la trenta i ouna alfoneti

If (literal) translation is a transfer from one literary system to another and tends to be more curatorial, and (free) adaptation involves the creation of a new text

⁶⁷ Carlson, *Speaking in Tongues*, 2006; see also Schmid, Beatrice et al., *Zwischen Tradition und Moderne: Eine corpusgestützte Untersuchung zur Sprache der südosteuropäischen Sepharden (1880–1930)*, <<http://pages.unibas.ch/sefaradi/tradmod/index-de.html>>

⁶⁸ The Farin family maintained close family and personal ties to Romania, see the memoirs of Karolina Farhi, *Memoirs*, unpublished manuscript.

and tends to be more transformative, then the playwright Rafael Farin, however, translated rather than adapted.

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