



# MELDAR

Revista internacional de estudios sefardíes

Número 4 (2023)





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# ÍNDICE

## Artículos

*La lokura atada en el korasón del moso*. Acerca de la actitud didáctico-moralista de los autores sefardíes de Robinson Crusoe [*La lokura atada en el korasón del moso*. About the didactic-moralistic attitude of the Sephardic authors of Robinson Crusoe]..... 9-22

Marta Katarzyna Kacprzak

Longing for a Lost Past: *Kula 930* and the Istanbul Jewish Community [Añorando un pasado perdido: *Kula 930* y la comunidad judía de Estambul]..... 23-41

Rivka Bihar

Challenges and needs in Ladino teaching among ten language revitalisation activists [Desafíos y necesidades en la enseñanza del ladino entre diez activistas de la revitalización de la lengua]..... 43-69

Kent Fredholm

Spanish and Ladino Versions of The Song of Songs [Las versiones del Cantar de los Cantares en español y en ladino] ..... 71-89

Ora (Rodrigue) Schwarzwald

La «Nation Ponentina» de Venecia. Rastros de la presencia de la comunidad sefardí en el Antiguo Cementerio Judío del Lido [The Venice «Nation Ponentina». Marks of the Presence of the Sephardic Community in the Ancient Jewish Cemetery of the Lido]..... 91-111

Sofia Locatelli

## Reseñas

Moldes, Diego. (2023). *Antonio de Nebrija y su origen judeoconverso*..... 115-118

Roberto Cuadros Muñoz

Díaz-Mas, Paloma. (2023). *Breve historia de los judíos en España*..... 119-121

Ricardo Muñoz Solla



# ARTÍCULOS







## ***La lokura atada en el korasón del moso. Acerca de la actitud didáctico-moralista de los autores sefardíes de Robinson Crusoe***

*La lokura atada en el korasón del moso. About the didactic-moralistic attitude of the Sephardic authors of Robinson Crusoe*

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### **Resumen**

La literatura sefardí moderna se basa principalmente en traducciones o adaptaciones de las novelas occidentales que se publicaban por entregas, tanto en series coleccionables como en folletines incluidos en algún periódico o, a veces, incluso como ediciones independientes. Entre estas obras encontramos las versiones sefardíes de una de las más célebres novelas de la literatura inglesa, esto es, de *Robinson Crusoe*, de Daniel Defoe. En la presente contribución se examinan las cuatro adaptaciones judeoespañolas publicadas entre finales del siglo XIX y principios del XX, haciendo hincapié en la judaización de la trama e indicando los fragmentos que reflejan la actitud didáctico-moralista de sus autores, Rafael Yitshak Benveniste y Ben Tsiyón Taragán.

**Palabras clave:** Robinson Crusoe; literatura sefardí moderna; judaización; Rafael Yitshak Benveniste; Ben Tsiyón Taragán.

### **Abstract**

Modern Sephardic literature is based mainly on translations or adaptations of Western novels that were published in installments, both in series to collect and in serials included in newspapers or even sometimes as independent editions. Among these works we can find the four Sephardi editions of one of the most famous novels in English literature, that is, *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. The aim of this contribution is to study the Judeo-Spanish adaptations published at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, focusing on the Judaization of the plot and indicating the fragments that reflect the didactic and moralistic attitude of its authors, Rafael Yitshak Benveniste and Ben Tsiyón Taragán.

**Key words:** Robinson Crusoe; Modern Sephardi Literature; Judaization; Rafael Yitshak Benveniste; Ben Tsiyón Taragán.

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## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

*Robinson Crusoe*, de Daniel Defoe, es un clásico de la novela mundial que se publicó por primera vez en 1719 en Londres y pronto se convirtió en un superventas traducido a varias lenguas con múltiples reediciones y adaptaciones tanto literarias como cinematográficas. Si bien la novela consta de tres partes, es la primera la que más éxito ha tenido, ya que se sigue editando y traduciendo hasta hoy en día (Pajares, 2012: 96). Como es bien sabido, la obra versa sobre las aventuras de un náufrago que pasó 28 años en una isla desierta cerca de la desembocadura del gran río Orinoco. Las vicisitudes de su vida son una herramienta perfecta para educar a los lectores, sobre todo a los jóvenes. De ahí que el mismo Rousseau viera el fuerte potencial educativo de la obra de Defoe en su *Emilio* (1761-62), considerando a Robinson «como un modelo de dignidad humana y a Viernes como compañero ideal, ejemplo de la bondad natural del hombre» (Sanjuán Álvarez, 2015: 4). Por lo tanto, no es de extrañar que los autores judíos, tanto asquenazíes como sefardíes, también se dieran cuenta de que la historia de Robinson les podría servir como instrumento idóneo para entretener a los lectores y al mismo tiempo transmitirles enseñanzas e instrucción (Kacprzak, 2023: 126).

El objetivo del presente artículo consiste en una breve presentación de las versiones judeoespañolas de *Robinson Crusoe*, si bien nos centraremos en la judaización de la trama y señalaremos los fragmentos que delatan la actitud didáctico-moralista de los autores sefardíes Rafael Yitshak Benveniste y Ben Tsiyón Taragán.

## 2. LOS ROBINSONES SEFARDÍES EN JUDEOESPAÑOL

Conocemos la existencia de cuatro ediciones sefardíes de *Robinson Crusoe* publicadas en aljamía hebraica que, de hecho, se corresponden con dos versiones de la obra, cada una de las cuales fue reeditada posteriormente. La edición más temprana (1881), titulada *El asolado en la izla*, se publicó en *Beraha* *ḥameshuléshet* o *las tres luces*<sup>1</sup> (hb. ‘La triple bendición o las tres luces’) en Salónica. En esta versión, a cargo de Rafael Yitshak Benveniste, *El asolado en la izla* aparece junto con *Séfer ḥaberit*, *El rijo de la vida* y *Bá‘al teshuvá*; mientras que, en la segunda versión, publicada en Constantinopla en 1900, solo está acompañado por *Séfer ḥaberit* y *Bá‘al*

<sup>1</sup> Todas las transcripciones son nuestras. A lo largo del artículo hemos utilizado el sistema de la revista *Aki Yerushalayim* (Shaul, 2003: 7-11) con algunas modificaciones; entre otras, hemos añadido tildes de acuerdo con las reglas de acentuación del español para facilitar la lectura. Además, cabe advertir que en vocablos hebreos la letra *he* <ה> la hemos transcrito como una *h* en subíndice, salvo en posición final de palabra, cuando sirve de signo auxiliar señalando la presencia de una vocal.

*teshuvá*, ya que Leví ben Nahmías no obtuvo los permisos para imprimir *El rijo de la vida* (Lazar, 1999: 851; Šmid, 2019: 121; López Ortiz, 2022: 177).

En lo que atañe al contenido, las dos versiones de *El asolado en la izla* son casi iguales, es decir, las discrepancias son sutiles y conciernen, sobre todo, al plano gráfico-fonético y al léxico. Estas diferencias se deben a la heterogeneidad lingüística del judeoespañol y son consecuencia de la variante hablada en el lugar de origen de los autores. Por consiguiente, se supone que la versión de Constantinopla sería una reedición del texto tesalonicense creado por Rafael Yitshak Benveniste y que Elyahu Leví ben Nahmías no sería el autor de la versión constantinopolitana, sino únicamente su editor (Kacprzak, 2021: 23-24).

Más aún, las dos ediciones de *El asolado en la izla* parecen partir de una traducción bastante fiel al texto original de Defoe, sin embargo, hay que resaltar que en ambos casos desconocemos cuál fue el desenlace de la historia porque el relato no llega a su fin. Estas dos ediciones constan de apenas 10 capítulos y terminan en el mismo momento de la historia, cuando se cumple el primer año de la estancia de Robinson en la isla desierta y este celebra el aniversario de su salvación del naufragio. Aunque en ambas encontramos una nota de los autores que reza «kontinuaremos», no hemos conseguido hallar esa continuación de la obra, puesto que probablemente no se llegó a publicar (Kacprzak, 2021: 24).

Otro rasgo que llama la atención al leer *El asolado en la izla* lo constituyen los topónimos: a lo largo del texto podemos apreciar topónimos tales como *Brazilyen* o las *izlas de Kanaryen*, en los que se advierte la huella del yídish o el alemán. Todo ello nos hizo pensar que tal vez al autor le sirviera de base una versión hebrea o en yídish, de ahí que hayamos cotejado el texto de *El asolado en la izla* con la versión hebrea de Yitshak ben Moshé Rumsch, titulada *Séfer kur 'oni* (hb. lit. 'El horno de la aflicción'<sup>2</sup>), y llegado a la conclusión de que *El asolado en la izla* es una traducción bastante precisa de la adaptación de Rumsch (Kacprzak, 2021: 24).

En cuanto a las otras versiones sefardíes de *Robinson Crusoe*, hemos localizado también dos ediciones realizadas por Ben Tsiyón Taragán. La primera salió a la luz en Jerusalén en 1897 bajo el título *Robinzon o la mizerya*, mientras que la segunda, titulada *La ermoza istorya de Robinzon o la mizerya*, fue una reimpresión de la primera, publicada en Constantinopla en 1924. Ambas versiones se publicaron en aljamía hebraica y probablemente estaban dedicadas al público juvenil. Se nota que Taragán recortó un poco la trama y eliminó las menciones a Jesús, tal y como lo hizo el autor de *El asolado en la izla*. Además, la sintaxis refleja que la traducción de Taragán tampoco se basó en el original inglés, sino

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<sup>2</sup> El título incluye una expresión bíblica de Isaías 48:10. La obra de Rumsch se publicó en Vilna por primera vez en 1861 y después se reeditó tres veces más (Eydtkuhnen, 1872; Vilna, 1883 y 1910) (cfr. Kacprzak, 2021: 22).

probablemente en alguna versión hebrea. No obstante, hasta ahora no hemos conseguido averiguar cuál fue la versión que le sirvió de base (Kacprzak, 2021: 24).

A continuación, se comentarán las similitudes y las diferencias entre las traducciones judeoespañolas y el texto original de Defoe. Nos concentraremos en la judaización de *Robinson Crusoe* y su adaptación para el público sefardí, así como en los aspectos didáctico-moralistas que presentan las versiones judeoespañolas.

### 3. JUDAIZACIÓN DE LA TRAMA Y LA ACTITUD MORALISTA DE LOS AUTORES

*Robinson Crusoe* gozaba de mucha fama entre los escritores de la *haskalá*, llamados también *maskilim* (hb. ‘los educados, ilustrados’), puesto que lo consideraban «un vehículo perfecto» para entretener a los lectores y al mismo tiempo transmitirles enseñanzas e instrucción<sup>3</sup>. Yitshak ben Moshé Rumsch, *maskil* lituano y autor de la versión hebrea en la que Benveniste basó su obra, era consciente de la necesidad de crear un ambiente literario a través de un estilo sofisticado que deleitara a los lectores y transmitiera implícitamente enseñanzas morales. De ahí que judaizara la trama para que su adaptación cumpliera con el objetivo de crear una obra idónea para el lector judío, eliminando para ello las menciones a Jesús y aludiendo en múltiples ocasiones al Jardín del Edén y a Adán a lo largo del texto, así como añadiendo referencias a Dios (Wolpe, 2012: 59). Del mismo modo, Benveniste –rabino, traductor y escritor–, siguiendo la edición hebrea y el estilo poético de Rumsch, judaizó su versión de la historia de Robinson para que lograra el propósito de educar al pueblo sefardí (Šmid, 2022: 165-166; Kacprzak, 2021: 186). Para ilustrar la cuestión hemos elegido el siguiente fragmento<sup>4</sup>:

Ande mi pye pizava, se aparesía la izla a mis ojos, afermoziguada kon su ermozura, kon mucha puja en demazía, vistas de yervados envestidos kon vestidos vedres, milyones de kondjás i rozas, i modos de chichekes vistozos afermoziguavan sus ermozuras, los montes i las kuestas de gozo estavan akushadeadas i rodeadas, i miles de papagayos kon plumas de kolores de entre las ramas loavan i kantavan, i fue la izla en mis ojos semejante a Gan Edén mizma-mente komo adam harishón antes ke le dyera la mujer, kuando él se paseava solo de dyentro de Gan Edén (AI1: 88b).

<sup>3</sup> Muchos de los datos relevantes acerca de las versiones judías de *Robinson Crusoe* se pueden encontrar también en el blog de la Biblioteca Nacional de Israel (Malul, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Para facilitar la orientación en el texto y la localización de los fragmentos concretos empleamos las siguientes siglas: AI1 = *El asolado en la izla* (Rafael Yitshak Benveniste, Salónica, 1881); RM1 = *Robinzon o la mizerya* (Ben Tsiyón Taragán, Jerusalén, 1897).

Por su parte, Taragán –profesor de hebreo que trabajaba con jóvenes en Alejandría– simplificó el lenguaje de su adaptación para crear una versión judaizada para lectores juveniles. Veamos un ejemplo:

A\_la manyana torní de nuevo a\_kaminar por la shara lugar ke inda no kaminí en el día ke entrí en la izla, yo kaminava kampos ermozos kon s[u]s árvoles goloryozos, un ayre visyozo ke aretornava almas asoplava sovre mis karas, me paresía ke me topo en el paradizo (Gan ‘Eden) (RM1: 43-44).

No es de extrañar entonces que el Robinson judío no lea fragmentos del Nuevo Testamento como en la obra original de Defoe, sino del Tanah, es decir, la Biblia hebrea que encuentra entre los restos de la nave naufragada:

En los puntos del reposo i el olgar me engleneava kon el durbín, o meldava un poko en la harta del modo del kaminar a\_las naves, ke todo esto djunto tambyén los tres livros santos, de Torá, Nevi'im u-Ketuvim<sup>5</sup>, topí en la kámara del gran kapitán (AI1: 76b).

En Taragán Robinson lee el Tanah, cuando se pone enfermo:

En vinyendo un poko a mi reposo me pasó por rekodro ke la djente de Brazilya toman una melezina por la fyevre, ojas de tutún. Avrí el armaryo topí unas kuantas ojas i mashkí, así un pedaso de karne, templí un vazo de vino para komer i poder enrezyarme, i después tomí el livro de la Biblia (Tanah) (RM1: 42).

Teniendo en cuenta el hecho de que Taragán era profesor, podemos suponer que eliminó a propósito la mención a que Robinson se emborrachó, ya que su intención era crear un texto idóneo para los lectores juveniles. Si bien en la obra de Benveniste apreciamos una breve alusión a que Robinson se embriagó, hay que resaltar que los dos autores sefardíes redujeron considerablemente las menciones al tabaco y al alcohol con respecto al texto original. Benveniste, por ejemplo, siguiendo a Rumsch, eliminó de su versión numerosas alusiones a fumar en pipa, hecho que refleja la actitud didáctico-moralista de los autores judíos cuyo objetivo era, entre otros, ofrecerles un buen ejemplo a los lectores jóvenes (Kacprzak, 2023: 136).

Conviene, no obstante, hacer notar que el fumar era un elemento inseparable de la vida cotidiana de los sefardíes otomanos. Más aún, el tabaco se consideraba incluso «un producto saludable y preventivo» (Bürki y Sánchez, 2012: 98; Romero y García Moreno, 2013: 114-117), lo que bien ilustra el fragmento de la versión de Taragán que hemos citado más arriba.

<sup>5</sup> Hb. ‘Pentateuco, Profetas, Escritos’, es decir, la Biblia hebrea.

Veamos, además, un ejemplo del escrito de Benveniste en el que Robinson decide curarse con tabaco:

En viniendo a\_mi morada me akodrí, ke la djente de «Brazilyen» toman por afloshar a\_la kayentura, ojas de «tutún», i me akodrí ke en mi kasha me se topan unas kuantas ojas, fui a\_la kasha i tomí a\_las ojas, djunto tambyén el livro de Tanah ke non tuve meldado en él, de kuando ize el kandil. A\_las ojas del tutún las ize en diversos modos, kon diziendo puede ser ke el Dyo baruh הו se apiadará de\_mí i me ará provecho, ke en primero tomí una oja en mi boka, después de esto aremojí una kuantas ojas en el vino i me las beví, tambyén ize sigaros i estuve afumando, ke todo esto me enborachó fina ke ya non tuvo fuersa por puerder estar en pyes (AI1: 86a).

La judaización del texto se manifiesta también en las alusiones al *shabat*, puesto que en *Robinzon o la mizerya* el náufrago en vez del domingo celebra el *shabat*, según leemos en el siguiente fragmento:

Bushkí un árbol i enpesí a\_kavakar sovre él: «En 30 septembro 1659, entró Robinzon en la dita izla». I abasho kavakava kada tadre día por día, nombre del día de\_la semana i el día de shabat i el día del primo de mez kon letras grandes. En esta regla podía saver la cuenta de los días en regla i olgava en el día ke olgan en él la djente povlada i paskuava djunto kon eyos en sus paskuas (RM1: 38-39).

Es más, en la adaptación de Taragán, a diferencia del original, leemos que Robinson, antes de dejar la isla, les mostró ese calendario a los marineros que iban a quedarse ahí para que celebraran las fiestas:

Yeví a\_los moradores nuevos de la izla por amostrarles a mis moradas i a todos mis kapitales ke les ago eredar. Tambyén les amostrí a\_la morada por los kavrones, les enbezí a ornar pan, sekar las uvas, azer manteka i kezo. Tambyén les ize saver los tyempos del anyo asegún el kalendaryo ke kavakí en el árbol, por guadrar a los días santos i las fyestas, i tambyén por saver el tyempo de sembrar i kortar. [...] En este tyempo vide ke es demenester de dotrinar a\_los moradores nuevos de la izla por deshar a\_sus caminos negros i tomar el kamino bueno (RM1: 117-118).

Como podemos ver, no se trata solo de dejarles un calendario, sino de educarlos y mostrarles el camino para que se conviertan en buenas y piadosas personas.

Cabe señalar que los autores judíos eliminaron incluso la mención a Mahoma del original inglés que se encuentra en el fragmento en el que Robinson intenta aprovechar una salida a pescar para escaparse de su amo pirata y Xury quiere marcharse con él (Kacprzak, 2021: 222). Entonces Robinson le obliga a que jure que le será fiel diciendo: «djúrame a\_mí en tu Dyo» (AI1: 53b; RM1: 17), mientras que en Defoe leemos: «swear by Mahomet and his father's beard» (Defoe, 1996: s. n.).



Asimismo, los autores judíos omiten también las menciones a la Inquisición que se pueden apreciar en el original inglés y reemplazan las alusiones al diablo por reflexiones moralistas acerca de Dios que a veces resultan bastante extensas:

Yo después de akayarme unos kuantos puntos le dishe: «Sepas, Vyernes, ke el Kriador de todos los kriados del mundo en muestra lengua lo yamamos “Dyo”, Él es enkuyerto de todo ojo, una luz grande i temeroza, fuerte i poderozo, ke dingún meoyo de presona puede alkansar a entender, Él kreó al mundo i todo lo\_ke en él, todo lo\_ke ay a\_mozotros de Él es dado, los syelos i la tyera, el sol i la luna, las estreas i todo lo\_ke nuestros ojos veen, todos alavan a el Dyo. Kén afueras de Él komanda a\_el sol ke arelumbre de día, i a\_la luna ke aklare de noche? Kén los aforsa a ke guadren sus reglas ke no se aprisen i no tadren sus salidas i sus entradas día por día? Kén enbía relámpagos? Kén asuve nuves por aluviar sovre toda la tyera? Sus orejas syempre akostadas por oyir orasyones de todo ombre, komo Él eskoje lo bueno i aborese lo negro, ansí tambyén envelunta ke sean ansí sus kriados, Él aze asuvir alma de toda kriadura después de su morir en los altos syelos por darles vidas de syempre, ke las vidas de este mundo falso no ay en eyas dingún presyo, ma no todo ombre puede alkansar estas vidas venturozas, solo el ke aklaró su kamino i alimpyó a su alma en la tyera. I kon ké aklare el ombre a\_su kamino? Kon konoser a\_su Kriador i andar en Sus kaminos por amarlo i por apegarse kon Él, por azer djustedad i derechedad kon su kompanyero i por amarlo komo su alma» (RM1: 74-75).

Merece la pena aludir a que en el fragmento correspondiente del original, Robinson le explica a Viernes el origen del diablo y le cuenta cómo se rebeló contra Dios (Kacprzak, 2021: 223). En cambio, Taragán adapta la historia para el público judío y, según leemos a continuación, hace que Viernes le prometa que dejará a su dios: «De agora endelantre yo desharé al Dyo de mis padres i me apegaré kon tu Dyo» (RM1: 75).

Por otro lado, Benveniste, siguiendo la versión hebrea, suple su edición con menciones a animales bíblicos como el leviatán (el peshkado grande) o el *reem* (el unicornio), que podemos apreciar en este fragmento de las reflexiones de Robinson:

Militaryas de miles de kriansas, flakos i fuertes, chikos i grandes, el moshkón fina la ágila grande, la kuala se alta kon su abolamyento a las alturas de los syelos, del más guzaniko chiko, ke un grano de arena le es para él komo una muraya alta, fina el unikorno (reem) el temerozo, ke las montanyas le es para él komo djugete por puerder boltarlas del ondo a\_la buelta, i a akel guzaniko, ke una gotera de rosío le parese a él komo una mar grande, fina el peshkado grande el kual es yamado «levyatán» el kual mete i aze a\_la mar lo de ariva abasho i lo de abasho ariva, todas estas kriansas al Dyo esperan i Él les da a\_sus komidas en sus oras, i tú, ijo de ombre, ke sos yerme i guzano tyenes el sobrevoyo i el koraje por meter mankura en sus kaminos! (AI1: 62b-63a).

Más aún, tanto en *El asolado en la izla* como en *Robinson o la mizerya* se mantiene la cita de Salmos 50:15 que aparece en el original de Defoe: «Yámame en día de angustya te eskaparé i me onrarás» (AI1: 86a; RM1: 42-43). Ahora bien, es llamativo que en ninguna de las

versiones sefardíes ni en la obra de Rumsch aparezca la referencia a Jonás que encontramos en Defoe: «Perhaps this has all befallen us on your account, like Jonah in the ship of Tarshish. Pray, continues he, “what are you; and on what account did you go to sea?”» (Defoe, 1996: s. n.).

Al parecer, a los autores judíos la historia de Jonás les pareció demasiado sagrada para incluirla en una obra secular, ya que el libro de Jonás forma parte de la liturgia judía y se lee en la más importante fiesta judía, el Yom Kipur (Girón Blanc, 2003: 66; Kacprzak, 2021: 200).

Otro rasgo notorio lo constituyen las reflexiones de Robinson acerca de las vicisitudes de su vida y las extensas oraciones a Dios que observamos a lo largo del texto. Así, por ejemplo, cuando Robinson ya está en la isla desierta, sufre remordimientos al pensar en sus padres y achaca la causa de su miseria a la desobediencia y al deseo de viajar y enriquecerse, tal y como leemos en el primer capítulo:

[...] en verdad en mi korasón me arepentí por la negrigura ke ize para mí i para los ke me paryeron. Ma ninguna fuida tengo agora, otro ke esto pensí i lo dishe, ke si el Dyo baruh הו me eskapa un día komo este, tengo ke aboniguar mis kaminos i mis ovras i non tengo ke tornar más a la lokura (AI1: 43b).

O en este otro fragmento:

[...] me apretava la verguensa i el repudyo de mi korasón ke me verguensava dizyendo: tu negrigura ke tu izistes te kastiga i tu mankura te razona, esta es la parte de akel ke se trazyera del kamino verdadero; esta es la eredasyón de akel ijo ke reveya en dicho de los ke lo paryeron! (AI1: 51b)

Debido a las oraciones y los monólogos de Robinson, que muy a menudo parecen sermones, *El asolado en la izla* se inscribe en el marco de las obras moralizantes que forman parte de la *Berahá ʿameshuléshet*.

Si bien Benveniste en su traducción sigue la obra de Rumsch, a veces aporta una descripción, un comentario o una plegaria, como podemos observar en este fragmento del capítulo cuatro, cuando Robinson no puede dormir y se pone a pensar en su destino. El naufragio y las miserias en las que se encuentra las considera un castigo por su pecado y se arrepiente de haberse rebelado contra la voluntad de sus padres:

Ma kuando desbafí un poko, mi esprito se aretornó en mí, i me akodrí ke las piadades del Dyo non se atemaron, i de\_vista ize orasyón a el Dyo baruh הו kon lágrimas de korasón, i dishe: «Senyor del mundo! Tú ke en todo modo de alma de bivo Tu ojo lo mira, atorgo yo, mi Dyo, ke mis pekados me kavzaron este mal, rogo a\_Ti perdona a\_mi pekado, i kítame de esta negra prizyón, Tú sos el ke resives a akel ombre ke atorga en su pekado i se arepyente de él, Tú sos Dyo grasyozo i piadozo, apiádate de mí, adjidéate de mí, esta



orasyón ke de las onduras de mi korasón la esté azyendo, se pare i suva delante de Ti» (AI: 64b).

Es digno de ser tomado en cuenta que toda la plegaria, que va entrecomillada en la versión judeoespañola, no aparece en la edición hebrea de Rumsch, donde leemos solo que Robinson elevó una plegaria a Dios y en el fondo de su corazón prometió quedarse callado (Kacprzak, 2021: 188).

En otro fragmento observamos que Benveniste, inspirado por esa edición hebrea, insertó en el texto un salmo de nueve estrofas que probablemente había sido escrito por el mismo Rumsch. Hay que hacer notar que el libro de Salmos es muy importante en la vida judía. Tanto en situaciones de necesidad como en momentos de agradecimiento y celebración los judíos recitan salmos y de ellos se nutren gran parte de las plegarias. Sin embargo, la estructura y el estilo contemporáneo del salmo incluido en *El asolado en la izla* evidencian que no proviene de la Biblia, sino que es muy posterior. Veamos la primera estrofa:

Mi alma, despértate, bendize a\_tu Dyo grasyozo,  
arenova a\_tus vidas kuando te despertas i avres tu ojo,  
por oír a\_tu boz se akosta la prezensya de el Dyo temerozo,  
despértate, mi alma, ke a el Dyo kantas i alavas ermozo (AI1: 67a).

Conviene señalar que, al traducir el salmo del hebreo, Benveniste se esforzó en conservar las rimas en la versión judeoespañola (Kacprzak, 2021: 201). Este empeño también confirma el propósito de inculcar de manera implícita los valores judíos a los jóvenes lectores de Rumsch y Benveniste.

Taragán, desde luego, comparte la actitud moralista de los autores de las ediciones judías de Robinson Crusoe. Más aún, la expone muy claramente ya desde el comienzo, suplementando su obra con una breve introducción en la que se dirige directamente a los lectores para lanzarles una advertencia sobre las consecuencias de no obedecer a los padres (Kacprzak, 2021: 210), según leemos:

Munchos de vozotros, mis keridos meldadores, oyeríash por seguro a\_mi nombre i munchos de vozotros veríash tambyén a\_mi forma kon vestidos de kuero de kavrito, i a\_mi lado mi esklavo fiel, mi pero, mi gato, mi papagayo, i seguro ternésh gusto de saver mi istorya. I agora me topo delante de vozotros por kontarvos a\_mi istorya, i espero ke deprenderésh de eya munchas kozas buenas.

Yo de mi chikés no oí en boz de mis djenitores i no eskuchí a\_sus consejos i por esto pasaron sobre mi kavesa munchos males. I yo vos rogo de parar myentes byen en mis palavras (RM1: 3).

Asimismo, su afán de educar a los jóvenes se manifiesta también en las alusiones a Dios y al poder del amor paternal. Veamos un fragmento en el que Viernes se encuentra a su padre en la isla desierta donde se desarrolla la novela después de haberlo salvado con ayuda de Robinson de manos de los antropófagos:

Aparado yo de enfrente mirando komo se artan padre i ijo de alegría i gozo, suspirí de onduas de mi korasón i disho: «Maravías del Dyo son muy ondas por alkansarlas, kuánto grande es la amor de padre a ijo i ijo a padre! A esta vista son igual-mente el ijo del rey i el ijo del esklavo. Guay de mí solo i asolado! Tal no fui venturozo de envisyarme kon este modo de visyo! Guay de mí! Kén me dyera un[o]s kuantos puntos por <sup>86</sup>ver a mis djenitores bezarlos i abrasarlos, i echarme a sus pyes por bushkar de eyos pardón i aresivir sus bendisyones i después morir kon kontentés!» (RM1: 85-86)

A ello hay que añadir numerosos refranes y frases de carácter moralizante que se aprecian a lo largo de *Robinzon o la mizerya* y su reedición. Sirva de ejemplo un fragmento en el que Robinson, a pesar de los problemas causados por una fuerte borrasca durante el primer viaje, siente ansias por viajar y por conocer el mundo. No quiere que sus compañeros se burlen de él, de ahí que decida embarcarse en otra expedición rompiendo la promesa que le había hecho al capitán, lo que Taragán explica como la locura juvenil que rige el comportamiento de Robinson y de la que solamente el castigo puede disuadirlo:

Yo saludí a el kapitán i su ijo, i abashí de la nave por tornar a York a la kaza de mi padre, ma dezgrasyadamente ya disho el savyo Shelomó: «La lokura atada en el korasón del m[o]so, palavras sin vara de kastigeryo no lo aleshan». Yo aprontándome para York enpesí a pensar i avlar sovre mi korasón diziendo: «Verdad es ke si no tornaré en kaza de mis povres djenitores mi pekado será muy grande, ma por otra vanda toda mi kompanya de mansevovs se burlarán de mí [...]» No, no, pase sovre mí lo ke fuese i yo no tornaré a York! Así avló mi korasón i mi lokura se mayorgó sovre mí i el dezero de viajar se enfortesyó más muncho de la primera vez (RM1: 10).

A lo largo de las adaptaciones de Taragán hemos registrado también dos refranes que incluyen el vocablo *tiempo*. Veamos el primer ejemplo:

Días de ansya i estremesyón komo estos pasaron sovre mi kavesa, inda el myedo i el pavor no pasaron de mí por entero. Ma el tyempo, ke es médiko de toda yaga, melezinó tambyén a poko a poko la yaga de mi korasón, un día i yo índome a la shara por kortar lenyos mirando por todas las partes vide detrás de mí una grande lapa (me'ará), mi dezero por saver lo ke ay en eya se mayorgó muncho, abashí en eya por verla (RM1: 57).

El fragmento citado nos permite observar una versión sefardí del conocido refrán «el tiempo cura (todas) las heridas». Se trata de un dicho que forma parte de la sabiduría popular y cuenta con distintas versiones en muchas otras lenguas, por lo que no es de extrañar que estuviera también presente en la cultura sefardí.

Otro ejemplo lo constituye el fragmento en el que Viernes se pone ropa por primera vez, sintiéndose al principio muy incómodo, ya que su vestimenta le molesta. No obstante, con el paso del tiempo, se va acostumbrando: «Ma el tyempo es un buen rejidor igualmente al entendido komo al torpe, i kon días se enbezó su puerpo en vestimyenta komo todo ombre» (RM1: 71).

Se supone que con este dicho Taragán quiso enseñarles a los jóvenes que el tiempo puede considerarse también un buen maestro, ya que la sabiduría y la experiencia dependen de los años.

Como ya se ha dicho, en ambas versiones sefardíes de Robinson Crusoe se multiplican las referencias a Dios y a varios de sus atributos, así como a la naturaleza del ser humano, que no aparecen en el original inglés de Defoe. Veamos algunos casos:

Si el Dyo baruh <sup>HU</sup> me eskapa un día komo este, tengo ke aboniguar mis kaminos i mis ovras i non tengo ke tornar más a\_la lokura (AI: 43b).

Esto ya es savido, el ke es kuryozo por enrikeserse non se livra de esto (AI1: 50a).

Repoza, no te espantes, ke el alto Dyo estará en muestra ayuda por poder pararnos delante de nuestros enemigos (RM1: 79).

Ya es savido ke una alma ke se topa entre dos kontraryos, la esperansa i la pavor, su angustya i su apreto es muy grande (RM1: 109).

Por último, merece la pena aludir al desenlace, puesto que difiere del final de la versión original, dado que Taragán concluye la historia del naufrago con una moraleja: Robinson vuelve a su casa en Inglaterra y decide no viajar más, sino llevar una vida tranquila acompañado de Viernes.

[I] la poka moneda ke trushe kon mí i 200 lira[s] esterlinas ke me dyo el patrón de la nave por [mi] paga, me fue bastante por mantenerme yo i Vyern[es], mi kompanyero. I mi alma aboresyó de viajar más (RM1: 124).

En cambio, en el original de Defoe, Robinson recupera su dinero y se hace rico, y, además, viaja a Lisboa y a Brasil. El Robinson inglés también se casa y tiene hijos. En 1694, cuando muere su mujer, emprende un viaje a las Indias Orientales (Kacprzak, 2021: 211).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONES

En resumidas cuentas, las cuatro ediciones sefardíes de las que tenemos constancia corresponden a dos versiones de *Robinson Crusoe*. La edición más temprana, titulada *El*

*asolado en la izla* y llevada a cabo por Rafael Yitshak Benveniste, se imprimió en Salónica en 1881 y posteriormente se reeditó en Constantinopla en 1900 a cargo de Elyahu Leví ben Nahmías. La segunda versión, titulada *Robinzon o la mizerya* y elaborada por Ben Tsiyón Taragán, se publicó en edición íntegra en Jerusalén en 1897 y después se reimprimió en Constantinopla en 1924 bajo el título *La ermoza istorya de Robinzon o la mizerya*.

En lo que concierne al contenido, se puede observar que Benveniste y Taragán abreviaron un poco la trama. Aun así, tanto *El asolado en la izla* como *Robinzon o la mizerya* se pueden considerar traducciones bastante fieles al texto original de Daniel Defoe. En el caso de *El asolado en la izla* hemos conseguido averiguar que Benveniste se inspiró en la versión hebrea titulada *Séfer kur 'oni* de Yitshak ben Moshé Rumsch, mientras que Taragán probablemente se basó en una versión asquenazí o incluso en varias ediciones en hebreo y/o en yídish.

Asimismo, uno de los rasgos notorios que llama la atención del lector tanto en *El asolado en la izla* como en *Robinzon o la mizerya* es la judaización de la trama con el objetivo de crear un texto apropiado para el lector judío; de ahí que las menciones al tabaco o el alcohol se redujesen y a lo largo de los textos apreciemos algunas referencias al Jardín del Edén y a Adán.

A todo ello hay que añadir que Benveniste y Taragán nos ofrecen la historia del naufragio como una advertencia sobre las consecuencias de la desobediencia y de oponerse a la voluntad de los padres. Por este motivo, a lo largo de los textos podemos apreciar varios refranes y frases de carácter moralizante. Es más, en el caso de *Robinzon o la mizerya* de Taragán el desenlace de la historia difiere del final que conocemos de la versión original de Defoe, dado que el Robinson sefardí vuelve a Inglaterra y decide no viajar más, sino llevar una vida tranquila acompañado de Viernes. Lamentablemente desconocemos el final de *El asolado en la izla*, puesto que dicho escrito consta de apenas 10 capítulos y termina cuando se cumple el primer año de la estancia de Robinson en la isla desierta y este celebra el aniversario de su salvación del naufragio.

Por último, cabe aludir al estilo poético de la edición de Benveniste, en la que abundan alusiones bíblicas y extensas plegarias a Dios. En cambio, la versión de Taragán es más sencilla, es observable que el autor simplificó el lenguaje y condensó la trama, por lo cual todo apunta a que su texto es una versión dirigida a un público juvenil. Hay que hacer notar que las dos versiones sefardíes de Robinson Crusoe tienen más en común entre sí que cada una de ellas con el original de Defoe, lo que se manifiesta, sobre todo, en su carácter judío y en la actitud didáctico-moralista de los autores.

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## Longing for a Lost Past: *Kula 930* and the Istanbul Jewish Community

Añorando un pasado perdido: *Kula 930* y la comunidad judía de Estambul

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#### Abstract

*Kula 930* is a play written, produced, directed, and performed exclusively by members of the Istanbul Jewish community. It was first staged in 1978 and is considered to be the first play in Türkiye since 1947 that was predominantly performed in Ladino (Judeo-Spanish). This study examines the reasons behind the success of the play, from its first rendition in 1978 to its fourth rendition in 2017. The paper analyses the circumstances and the meaning of the play's language and its characteristics while highlighting the evolution of the play within the socio-historical context of Jews in Türkiye.

**Keywords:** Sephardi; Istanbul; Jewish; theatre; Türkiye.

#### Resumen

*Kula 930* es una obra de teatro escrita, producida, dirigida e interpretada exclusivamente por miembros de la comunidad judía de Estambul. Se representó por primera vez en 1978 y es considerada la primera obra teatral escrita y representada en Türkiye desde 1947, año en que se representó predominantemente en ladino (judeoespañol). Este artículo examina las razones detrás del éxito de *Kula 930*, desde su primera versión en 1978 hasta su cuarta versión en 2017. El artículo analiza las circunstancias y el significado del lenguaje de la obra y sus características al tiempo que destaca la evolución de ella dentro del contexto sociohistórico de los judíos en Türkiye.

**Palabras clave:** Sefardí; Estambul; judío; teatro; Türkiye.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Kula 930*, a play written, produced, directed, and performed exclusively by the members of the Istanbul Jewish community, is a satire of community life when many of Istanbul's Jews lived in the working-class neighbourhood of Galata, by the Golden Horn in Central Istanbul. The Istanbul Jewish Community considers *Kula 930* a classic. It was the first play in Türkiye since 1947 that was performed dominantly in Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), the traditional lingua franca of the Jews of Türkiye. Following its first staging in 1978, other versions of *Kula 930* were performed in 1987, 2002, and 2017, with potential future productions in the pipeline. With the steady and persistent decline of Jewish population in Türkiye, and the concurrent decline of Ladino and Sephardic culture, *Kula 930* has become an ode to a long-lost *way of life* that lives in the *shared history* of the elderly members of the Istanbul Jewish community. This paper argues that *Kula 930* represents a reflection of the transition of the Jewish Community of Istanbul, having become increasingly alienated from its traditional Sephardic culture and identity because of the decline of its Ladino vernacular and its identity markers notably *way of life* (active marker) and *shared history/ancestry* (passive marker) (Eberhard, 2018: 34).

There are but a handful of scholarly studies written in Turkish on Jewish theatre in Türkiye. Of these rare studies, such as those conducted by Yaycıoğlu on Sephardic theatre in Türkiye, which includes *Kula 930*, are based primarily on printed materials such as translations by prominent academics like Romeros' and Díaz-Mas' among others, or on the information featured in the play's published brochure. Sephardic theatre in Türkiye has therefore been relatively underexplored. This article is the first study to offer a perspective based on primary sources that focus on *Kula 930* seeking to help remedy this dearth of scholarly inquiry by examining one of the most important plays of the Istanbul Jewish Community with an understanding of the language in which it was performed, namely, Ladino. The recordings of the play from its first rendition in 1978 onwards were accessed and a series of interviews were conducted with those involved in the writing of *Kula 930* including İ. İzzet Bana, Jojo Eskenazi Gözcü, Ferit Kohen, Karen Gerşon Şarhon and Yuda Siliki. Some printed and/or visual sources were obtained for the purpose of this article thanks to the neatly kept personal archives of İ. İzzet Bana and Beno Levi and the efforts of Jojo Eskenazi Gözcü. This access to primary source material and knowledge of Ladino contribute to a deeper and thorough analysis of the play and its broader societal implications. Sephardic theatre in Türkiye is subsequently detailed in this paper and is followed by an explanation about the play, its production, the reasons for its popularity and influence, as well as its underlying meanings.



## 2. JEWS IN TÜRKİYE

Today the Jewish population of Türkiye stands at 12-14,000 individuals out of a total Turkish population of over 84 million. However, this was not always the case. Upon the establishment of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923, the number of Jews in the first census was 81,872 out of a total population of 13 million (Shaw, 1991: 246). Ottoman Empire was composed of various ethnical and religious minorities called *millet*s. Following the foundation of Turkish Republic, series of nationalist policies were enacted in order to unite the multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious structure of what was left of the Ottoman Empire, many of which targeted minorities within the Republic including the Jewish community.

Historian Kedourie calls the effects of nationalism on minorities:

[...] a curse the west has indeed brought to the east [...] A rash, a malady, an infection spreading from western Europe through the Balkans, the Ottoman empire, India, the far east and Africa, eating up the fabric of settled society to leave it weakened and defenceless before ignorant and unscrupulous adventurers, for further horror and atrocity (Kedourie, 2004: 286).

In the context of the Turkish Republic, what Kedourie calls horror and atrocity was carried out through a set of nationalist policies known today as the “Turkification process”. For example, in 1928 there was the *Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş!* (*Citizen, Speak Turkish!*) campaign in which minority groups such as Armenian, Jewish, Greek, Kurds and others were forced to speak only Turkish in public places and public gatherings such as cinema, theatre, tea houses, and public transport. If they refused to comply, they were physically assaulted or in some cases arrested (Bali, 2017). In 1934, there were the Thrace pogroms which took place in highly Jewish populated cities in the European side of Türkiye such as Edirne, Tekirdağ, Çanakkale and Kırklareli. Turks looted Jewish homes, stealing, or destroying their possessions (Bali, 2017). After these pogroms, many Jews moved to Istanbul, while others continued their journey towards the Land of Israel. In 1941, during the height of World War II, and as news trickled in about German atrocities against the Jews, the *Yirmi Kur’a Nafia Askerliği* (*incident of the Twenty Classes*) occurred. Legislation was introduced for the male non-Turkish minority population including the elderly and mentally ill. They were gathered in labour battalions and forced to work in road construction in deplorable conditions. The following year, the *Varlık Vergisi* (*Capital Tax*) was instituted. The tax imposed arbitrary and often unpayable capital taxes on Jews, Armenians, and Greeks and those who could not pay within a month were sent to labour camps in Aşkale and Erzurum to the East of the country where they faced the full force of the sub-zero winter with little provisions (Bali, 2011), a burden they faced while absorbing the news of the horrors of the

Holocaust befalling Europe's Jews. The result of the tax and forced labour was the economic destruction Türkiye's minority groups and the transfer of wealth, production, and economic activity from the minorities to Turks, which effectively amounted to nothing less than the Turkification of the economy (Bali, 2011). As a result, and especially after the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, mass emigration of Jews from Türkiye started.

The following decade the Jewish community witnessed and even fell victim to the 1955 Istanbul pogroms when Turkish mobs attacked private shops and businesses owned by members of the Greek community after false news reports that the government of Greece had bombed the Turkish Consulate in Thessaloniki, the Greek city where Türkiye's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was born in 1881. Although the attacks were largely directed towards the Greek community, shops owned by Armenians and Jews were also plundered and communal properties such as churches and synagogues, cemeteries, and schools were set on fire, leaving over a dozen of people dead (Zayas, 2007). Since the 1970s onwards the community has been physically targeted with deadly terrorist attacks such as the 1986 Neve Şalom Synagogue shooting which left 22 worshippers dead, and the 2003 simultaneous synagogue bombings that claimed the lives of 28 victims.

Language plays a key role in forming unity either as a community or as a nation. Kedouri indicates that "[...] certain European principles made language and nationality synonymous." In this sense, it is worth mentioning that back in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century the French Jews had already initiated spreading French nationalism constituted of French ideas, culture, and values among Sephardic Jews of the Ottoman lands through their secular schools *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU) set up in the region. Although the goal of AIU to bring their Sephardic Jewish coreligionists the knowledge and understanding of how to improve Jewish ideals on self-sufficiency and self-defence through education and vocational training was to some extent noble, by implementing the language of education as French, they, among other things, caused language shift within the Sephardic Jews who until then only spoke Ladino as the language of communication. On the importance of education on language, American linguist Fishman states that authorities of an educational system are deeply implicated in planned language shift since like other agencies of government; education is focused on formal and written language (Fishman, 2006: 320). Fishman asks "What is lost when a language is lost?" and answers:

[...] the heart of what is lost when you lose a language is that most of the culture is in the language and is expressed in the language. Take it away from the culture, and you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers. Culture could not be expressed and handed on in any other way. What would be left? When you are talking about the language, most of what you are talking about is the culture. That is, you are losing all those things that

essentially are the way of life, the way of thought, the way of valuing, and the human reality that you are talking about (Fishman, 1996: 80).

The new Turkish Republic, adopting the European principles on nationalism and language, also tried to achieve language uniformity through its Turkification process. After all, speaking same language means sharing the same culture and having the same values that forms a basis of the social entity called nation (Özkan, 2003). Fishman indicates that whenever a weak culture is in competition with a strong culture, it is an unfair match (Fishman, 1996: 85). Hence, Istanbul Jewry's obligation having to embrace first French and then Turkish as the language of communication and education, and refusal to pass Ladino on to next generations for various reasons resulted the inevitable decline and eventual loss of Ladino and therefore its Sephardic heritage.

### 3. SEPHARDIC THEATRE IN TÜRKIYE

In her PhD dissertation, academic Lockowandt argues that there is little recognition of the Sephardim within hegemonic Ashkenazic and Eurocentric discourses and therefore Sephardic theatre is consequentially relegated to a limited number of specialist studies (Lockowandt, 2012). Perhaps, but one should not forget that there is a significant quantity of academic literature on Sephardic theatre written in Spanish by Spanish speaking academics. Possibly, it is because of the current dominance of English in academia and because it is imperative to know Spanish to understand Ladino that there are few studies on Sephardic theatre in English. In the Turkish context, when one considers the language factor, the small size of the Jewish community, its unwillingness to open up to outsiders so it may keep a low profile, and because recordings were poorly stored, adds to the perceived lack of visibility of Sephardic plays in Türkiye.

Elena Romero coined the term 'Judeo-Spanish theatre' for published texts or performances that fulfil at least one of the following criteria: that they are written or expressed in Judeo-Spanish. They have been created by a member of the Judeo-Spanish community, they have been written, or staged for a Judeo-Spanish audience (Romero, 1979: 426). During the 1960s onwards, the Sephardic Jewish community of Istanbul continued its cultural activities through the establishment of several youth clubs such as Dostluk Yurdu Derneği – DYD (Friendship Association), Yıldırım Spor Kulübü – YSK (Lightening Sports Club) and Göztepe Kültür Derneği - GKD (Göztepe Culture Association). Seeking to unify and consolidate dwindling Jewish community through a range of cultural and sportive initiatives, these clubs became the focal point of the community and were administered entirely on voluntary basis and generated financial

resources by receiving charitable donations and assistance from the Chief Rabbinate. These clubs became a crucial support system for the community and provided a secular outlet for expressions of Jewish identity outside of the synagogue. Amateur plays within the Istanbul Jewish community blossomed through these youth clubs with at least one new production performed every year. Usually, they were performed in a mixture of languages used by the Jewish community, usually Turkish, French, and Ladino. But if in Ladino, it was just partially and scattered into the script.

The Istanbul Jewish community chose not to open its cultural activities to the rest of Turkish society and keep their cultural activities away from “outside eyes.” The writers and producers of these community plays wrote for an audience that was exclusively their community co-religionists. Since “a play’s success is measured by its ability to deliver a feast of affects” (Schaefer, 2016) and “considering that affect is tied to the expressive and representational dimensions of art, to the feelings and emotions that art elicits [or not]” (Ott, 2017: 3), it would be fair to say that the success of a community play was based on the emotions that it stirred within the members of the Jewish community in Istanbul exclusively. In other words, from inception to production to performance, the very thought that the play would either be viewed or attended by individuals outside of the community was both unfathomable and unwelcomed.

Members of the Jewish community in Istanbul gave little thought to the broader societal significance of the meaning of these plays, both in terms of what they portrayed, and, to some extent, what they suppressed<sup>1</sup>. These annual amateur plays were performed and created with the sole intention of entertaining, pleasing, and educating members of the community, while also raising funds from ticket sales for those in need. Their significance was so underappreciated that Bana, the director of the first three renditions of *Kula 930*, recalls that the plays were not even recorded because the required equipment was seen as an unnecessary expense<sup>2</sup>. Even when community plays (and other cultural events taking place on stage) were finally recorded, they were not given the necessary care and attention in both their recording and preservation. The lack of attention to the storage of recorded files was also due to the change of location and the later closure of some of these community clubs<sup>3</sup>. Thus, only a handful of recordings are now available for researchers, and, alas, the same is true for printed materials such as brochures, fliers, and leaflets. The idea that these

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Ferit Kohen, Istanbul, 7 December 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with İ. İzzet Bana, Istanbul, 29 November 2021.

<sup>3</sup> DYD and YSK merged in 2013 to become Alef. GKD was obliged to move to a new venue for a couple of years due to an urban transformation project in the Asian side of Istanbul. Interview with Ferit Kohen, Istanbul, 7 December 2021.

plays, which were amateur, fun, and their primary purpose was to get members of the community together (including the opportunity for young men and women to meet), and raise funds would be of academic interest was, at the time, inconceivable. Recordings are few and far between and limited to those made by private members of the audience, which is extremely difficult to locate. In this study, three out of four renditions' recordings were viewed. Although the 2002 and 2017 recordings of *Kula 930* were at one time available to see on the Internet, the recording of the 1987 rendition was obtained thanks to the personal archives of one of the main playwright's Bana. There are only either short or blurry images of the first rendition in 1978, kept by Beno Levi in his personal archive.

#### 4. *KULA 930*: SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

*Kula 930* (1978) was the first ever play that was staged dominantly, and not just partially, in Ladino in Istanbul by DYD. There were some precursors and sources of inspiration for *Kula 930*. One was a short 15-minute sketch called *Fikso*. Fully performed in Ladino, *Fisko* was staged by DYD a year before *Kula 930* and helped identify the demands and expectations of the audience<sup>4</sup>. *Kula 930*, set in the Jewish neighbourhood of Galata, follows the life of the neighbourhood drunk, Moiz, who seduces Bulisa who is married to Mando, a man considerably older than her. After Mando discovers the affair, his marriage to Bulisa is in turmoil. Meanwhile, the play follows a parallel story about young Sara, who has two suiters for her hand in marriage.

Bana recalls that the primary aim of his play was to revive and reintroduce Sephardic songs back into the Jewish community in Istanbul (Bana, 2007). One of the sources of inspiration was the play *Boustan Sephardi*. Staged in Israel in 1970, *Boustan Sephardi* was written and directed by non-other than Yitshak Navon, the fifth President of the State of Israel whose paternal ancestors were Sephardic Jews who settled in the Ottoman lands. The play tells the story of a Sephardic neighbourhood in Jerusalem during the 1930s through a mixture of song and narrative which together celebrate the vibrant lives of the community's residents. Despite the fact that none of the *Kula 930* writers had actually watched the play yet heard it by word of mouth after it was staged, Bana indicates that *Kula 930* is inspired by *Bustan Sephardi* in concept only and it has a completely different plot and narrative. This was eventually acknowledged by Navon himself who had previously accused Bana of

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with I. İzzet Bana, Istanbul, 29 November 2021.



plagiarism, only to take back this accusation after actually seeing the third rendition of *Kula 930* performed in Israel in 2003<sup>5</sup>.

In 1974, singer Yehoram Gaon (the son of Sephardic Jewish parents) released an album containing Ladino songs which later, after some time, reached Bana's ears around the same time as *Fikso* was being written. Bana recalls that this album was "mind-blowing," hearing the tunes and rhythms which he had heard his parents and grandparents hum, beautifully composed and played by an orchestra and sung by a well-known singer<sup>6</sup>. Hearing these Ladino songs, Bana felt inspired to create not only *Kula 930* but also the recording group *Los Pasharos Sefaradis*<sup>7</sup>. The four playwrights of *Kula 930*, namely, İ. İzzet Bana, Jojo Eskenazi Gözcü, Selim Hubeş and Yuda Siliki came together in 1976 to shape *Kula 930* and base the play around Ladino songs such as *Ay Dos Anyos*, *Adio Kerida*, *Durme Durme*, *Avre Este Abajur* and *Tres Kalvinas en un tiesto*. In other words, *Kula 930* was born as a result of the desire of a handful theatre and music loving amateurs to *reconnect* with their Sephardic heritage through Ladino expression<sup>8</sup>.

The challenges of producing a play featuring Ladino songs while also depicting Jewish lives in the Galata neighbourhood were numerous. Bana recollects that it was difficult to cast the appropriate Jewish actors to star in the play. For one, during the 1970s, women who appeared on stage were frowned upon by Turkish society including large sections of the Jewish community; however, this problem was partially mitigated by the fact that the Istanbul Jewish community was both small and insular meaning that because everybody, more or less, knew each other it was tolerated that women would appear in community plays. Still, there was a limited number of candidates which meant that nobody was actually turned down for a part due to the tonality or pitch of their voice<sup>9</sup>. Participation in *Kula 930* was never closed, and all were welcome<sup>10</sup>. In 1978, the play was staged in DYD by 13 amateur actors, which was just about the right number for the 20 square meter stage. However, as the play garnered more attention in subsequent years and attracted wider community audiences, the production was moved to bigger stages including those of up to

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Based in Istanbul, *Los Pasharos Sefaradis* is a Sephardic vocal and instrumental group primarily composed of four members who have performed together since 1978, namely, Karen Gerşon Şarhon (voice), İ. İzzet Bana (voice), late Selim Hubeş (voice, oud, guitar), Yavuz Hubeş (voice, kanun, oud), the latter two members left the band in 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with İ. İzzet Bana, Istanbul, 29 November 2021; Interview with Jojo Eskenazi Gözcü, Telephone, 22 December 2021; Interview with Yuda Siliki, via Zoom, 6 January 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with İ. İzzet Bana, Istanbul, 29 November 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

100 square meters. As a result, as the size of the audience grew so too did the size of the cast and the production in general. Another challenge was the play's promotion. In 1978, as communication technologies were limited, the main channel for publicity was through the announcement section of the community's weekly newspaper *Şalom*. Other methods included putting up posters on the DYD bulletin board for club attendees to see. News of the play was also spread through word of mouth by regular attendees of these plays. Such methods have been used for over 40 years to promote each rendition of the play. However, with new technologies and developments in communication, adverts for the play are now also emailed, posted on community's social media accounts, and shared on instant messaging platforms, a more effective and direct way for the play's promotion.

In every rendition of the play, there was a live band. In the first 1978 version, there was a very small two-person band. However, by the time of the last rendition in 2017, directed not by Bana who oversaw the first three renditions, but by Ferit Kohen upon the special request of the Jewish Community Management, the band increased from two to ten musicians and featured additional instruments such as the kanun and the flute while the band was supervised by a professional music director<sup>11</sup>. According to Kohen, who is a stage schooled performance professional and a younger member of the Istanbul Jewish community, every aspect of this rendition of the play was planned by professionals including direction, setting, lighting, and music<sup>12</sup>. However, one of the main reasons of *Kula 930's* success lies in the actors who have been acting the same role over forty years. Although throughout the forty years some extra scenes were added, the plot in itself has not undergone a major change but the interaction and bond between the characters and the audience have certainly improved in each rendition establishing the success of the play.

## 5. THE PLOT AND CHARACTERS OF *KULA 930*

The lead male character, Moiz, is a drunkard and womanizer who is despised by his neighbours. However, what is striking is that throughout the play he is never made to feel an outcast and the audience likes him. This begs the question, what is it about the Moiz character that is endearing? Eskenazi Gözcü recalls that in the Jewish neighbourhood of Galata there was in fact a drunkard nicknamed Şap who could always be seen, bottle in hand, swaying this way and that, and was the source of inspiration for the character Moiz<sup>13</sup> and the audience was reminded of him or perhaps, the audience is responding to the

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Ferit Kohen, Istanbul, 7 December 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Jojo Eskenazi Gözcü, Telephone, 22 December 2021.

portrayal of Moiz by actor Jojo Eskenazi Gözcü who has played Moiz in every version of *Kula 930*. Eskenazi Gözcü made the character Moiz resonate through the character's wit and clever use of language and improvisation and his ability to manipulate the nuances of Ladino. This makes Moiz a comical rather than a tragic figure who dominates the play. Indeed, as soon as Eskenazi Gözcü appears on the stage stumbling with a bottle in hand, the crowd erupts into applause, even before he has uttered his first line. Eskenazi Gözcü's popular characterization of Moiz has reached such a level of popularity that it has led to a spin of series of *Moiz plays*<sup>14</sup>.

Equally important is actress Karen Gerşon Şarhon's portrayal of the leading female character Bulisa in three renditions of the play (1978, 1987 and 2017). Like Eskenazi Gözcü, Gerşon Şarhon's mastery of Ladino is key to her successful characterization. She is able to go back and forth with Eskenazi Gözcü whenever he slips off script and improvises, creating comical scenes, often in a household setting, that highlight family tiffs and banter in a way that appears natural and easy. In the Sephardic theatre tradition, both theatrical and intellectual texts praise the Sephardic lifestyle of old which emphasize the importance of traditional roles for women such as being faithful to the wishes of their husbands or to being a doting mother while the man is faithful to his religious obligations and other social conventions (Valentín, 2010: 96). However, Bulisa, who is married to an older man named Mando, is unfaithful to her husband and, finally, caves into Moiz's advances and does so when everybody else is at *selihot*<sup>15</sup>, indicating her lack of religious feeling. Bana states that this character is believable since such affairs were rumoured to have actually happened in real life. Gerşon Şarhon remembers that because of her role which depicted a cheating wife, some members of the community, unable to separate fiction from reality, made disparaging and inappropriate remarks to her parents<sup>16</sup>! Luckily, the actress's parents simply shrugged them off as nonsense. However, in the play the real reason why Bulisa has an affair with Moiz is because the scriptwriters needed an excuse for Bulisa's husband Mando to perform one of the most famous Ladino songs, *Adio Kerida* (Goodbye My Love), after he catches them together. At first Mando breaks up with Bulisa but takes her back once she returns home

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<sup>14</sup> A series of approximately fifteen plays featuring Moiz have been performed; however, now he is a settled family man, and feature comical circumstances of Moiz's Jewish home life. Since Jojo Eskenazi Gözcü has played the character Moiz, so often some community members even think that he is in reality Moiz rather than an actor. These Moiz plays are produced by the Istanbul Jewish community and performed predominantly in Ladino until 2007 and predominantly in Turkish onwards.

<sup>15</sup> From Rosh Hashanah, Jewish New Year, to Yom Kipur, the Day of Atonement, a series of special prayers for forgiveness takes place before sun rise called Selihot because early morning hours are considered a time of mercy and request before God, see Behar, Nisim, 2004, 259, *El Gid Para el Praktikante – Dini Uygulama Rehberi* (Istanbul: Gözlem Gazetecilik Basın ve Yayın AŞ).

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Karen Gerşon Şarhon, via Zoom, 28 December 2021.



apologizing after her relationship with Moiz falls apart, and, soon, happiness and order is restored to the household.

The theme of restoring order and happiness is also reinforced by the marriage of the younger couple Sara and David. Sara has two suitors who compete for her hand, namely, Sami and David. Sami is from the Kuledibi neighbourhood, one of the surrounding areas around the Galata Tower, but David, whose father owns a jewellery store, lives in the more well-to-do Yazıcı Sokak. Throughout the play, Sara's parents<sup>17</sup> are enthusiastic about the potential match between Sara and David. Through Sara and David's courtship, the audience gets a glimpse of how relationships developed during the 1930s, highlighting the lack of liberty and choice for women when it came to their future and the heavy involvement of parents in their children's marital choices. The final act of the play is the wedding of Sara and David, leaving the audience at the play's most delightful and celebratory stage, but also on a conservative form of reinforcement that, in the end, everything ends as it should be; Bulisa is reunited with her husband, a young Jewish couple get married, while Sami, the failed suitor, finds another Jewish girl in the later renditions. Thus, the play ending by establishing a Jewish family through marriage and another one on the horizon implies the continuity of the Istanbul Jewish community for generations to come.

## 6. REASSURANCE OF CONTINUITY: THE EMOTIONAL APPEAL OF *KULA 930*

In order to understand the reasons for *Kula 930*'s popularity, it is important to explain its characteristics, its meaning, its significance, and the emotions it imbues. *Kula 930* breaks many traditions associated with Turkish Sephardic theatre; it does not retell a biblical story, explain the expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, or adapts a European play unlike many other community productions. Instead, the playwrights of *Kula 930* wanted to satirize their own community for the viewing delectation of community members<sup>18</sup>. The play is akin to an insider joke made at a time when Istanbul Jewry was experiencing social change and cultural transition. The community was seeing its numbers dissipate after mass immigration to Israel between 1948 and 1951 (Toktaş, 2006: 505). Those who remained became part of a post-ladino identity shift, developing an identity that was more secular and less associated with religious tradition and practice or the use of Ladino. These changes in identity offered

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<sup>17</sup> Sara's father was performed by Selim Hubeş and Sara's mother was performed by Rozet (Haim) Hubeş who were also the artistic consultants of the play. Rozet Hubeş pursued a professional acting career and is currently a permanent cast member of the Istanbul Municipality City Theatre.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with İ. İzzet Bana, Istanbul, 29 November 2021; Interview with Jojo Eskenazi Gözcü, Telephone, 22 December 2021; Interview with Yuda Siliki, via Zoom, 6 January 2022.

significant ammunition for satire. Thus, *Kula 930* served as a mirror to Istanbul Jewish community's life in Galata neighbourhood that although already obsolete still existed in living memory. In fact, one or two of the playwrights had actually grown up in Galata<sup>19</sup>.

The play starts with a Jewish Professor alone on stage<sup>20</sup>. The year is 2030 or 2528 depending on the rendition. The historicizing professor of the future eruditely explains to the audience about how Judaism and Jews still exist in Türkiye, and then goes on to set the scene of the play by drawing the audience's attention to how Jews lived back in the 1930s in the Galata Tower area (in Ladino *Kula*, hence the name of the play). The professor's narration from the future features in all of *Kula 930*'s renditions, the underlying purpose of which is to reassure the audience of the continued existence in Türkiye of Judaism, its traditions, culture, and values. This professor from the future intervenes in the play on several occasions to offer his opinions about Judaism, relationships, and women. However, those who have viewed more than one version of *Kula 930* would have no doubt noticed that the playwrights revised the professor's remarks about women over the years. His comments in early versions (and later version too) sound, if not misogynist, then passé for 21<sup>st</sup> century tastes. For example, in the second rendition, when Bulisa's husband Mando takes back his wife after she has a brief affair with Moiz, the Professor remarks, "Here we see the superiority of man as he is forgiving." Siliki, one of the playwrights, states that he and Hubeş had progressive ideas even for their period and these remarks were intentionally introduced for two reasons; to break the dull narration of the professor and to cause stirs in the audience by these appalling remarks<sup>21</sup>. However, even the cast of the play did not understand this effort as these kinds of remarks were seen as normal in the 70s or 80s and were not challenged neither by the cast nor by the audience<sup>22</sup>. Eventually, this line disappears in the 2002 and 2017 versions of the play. In fact, in 2017, a Jewish woman from the future is introduced in attempt to equal the gender balance of the narrators. However, she is still portrayed as intellectually inferior – she is a student of the male Professor. Reflecting on this, Kohen states that with a play so rooted as *Kula 930*, and still acted by many of the same cast, even as director he was not at liberty to make too many modifications<sup>23</sup>. Instead, later renditions included greater interactions between the Professor and Moiz, the only character who can actually see the scholar from the future.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Jojo Eskenazi Gözcü, Telephone, 22 December 2021.

<sup>20</sup> In the second rendition, the Professor is acted by Mario Levi, a renowned writer in Türkiye.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Yuda Siliki, via Zoom, 6 January 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Karen Gerşon Şarhon, via Zoom, 28 December 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Ferit Kohen, Istanbul, 7 December 2021.

The playwrights Bana, Eskenazi Gözcü, Hubeş and Siliki, as well as leading actress Karen Gerşon Şarhon, who was part of the revision process of the play's second rendition in 1987, have all insisted that when creating *Kula 930* they had no specific agenda or ulterior motive other than to entertain their friends by satirizing people who spoke Ladino or the francophone Jews who spoke French<sup>24</sup>. However, the phenomenal success of the play lies in the audience's reaction to it. Although Ladino was less spoken, it was not yet obsolete and there were many Jews who knew Ladino even though they were reluctant to pass it on to the next generation. This fact found its way into the play. It is noteworthy to mention that in the first two renditions of the play, it is not only the leading male and female characters Moiz and Bulisa who speak Ladino but all the characters with the deliberate exception of the young couple (Sara and David) and the heartbroken suiter (Sami) who speak Turkish. Gerşon Şarhon indicates that having the young couple speak Turkish is an anachronism since back in the 1930s all Jews, young or old, would and could speak Ladino<sup>25</sup>. Also, Bana admits that already in 1978, the younger generation could not speak proper Ladino and therefore, they opted for the young actors to talk in Turkish rather than broken Ladino<sup>26</sup> highlighting the generational language shift. On the loss of a language Fishman indicates:

[...] a new *modus vivendi* has worked out. When languages die, people do not stop talking. Cultures do not fold up and silently steal off into the night. They go on and they talk the new language. They go on in the other language; they work out a new relationship between language and culture. [...] because of that new relationship, it becomes very difficult to bring back and to strengthen the old language, which is already undergoing so many stresses (Fishman, 1996: 86).

In the Istanbul Jewry context, this new relationship was formed due to the loss of active identity markers namely *place of residence, way of life* and *social networks* (Eberhard, 2018: 34) that led to decline of Ladino. After the 1970s, much of the Jewish population migrated, primarily, to other Istanbul neighbourhoods such as Kurtuluş, Şişli and Gayrettepe (and later on to the more outer Sarıyer and Göztepe neighbourhoods) into modern houses with better infrastructures leaving the Jewish neighbourhood of Galata where they could live their Jewish identity to a full extent enjoying openly the cultural heritage of their *shared history/ancestry*. As anthropologist-linguist Sapir indicates "language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives" (Sapir, 1921: 100). As the neighbourhood of the

<sup>24</sup> Interview with İ. İzzet Bana, Istanbul, 29 November 2021; Interview with Jojo Eskenazi Gözcü, Telephone, 22 December 2021; Interview with Karen Gerşon Şarhon, via Zoom, 28 December 2021; Interview with Yuda Siliki, via Zoom, 6 January 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Karen Gerşon Şarhon, via Zoom, 28 December 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with İ. İzzet Bana, Istanbul, 29 November 2021.

Sephardic Jews of Istanbul dispersed, they began to lose elements of their Sephardic cultural traits as a result of losing their active identity markers. They also gradually lost their language, another active marker, which was replaced with Turkish language and culture.

## 7. CHALLENGING PERCEPTIONS OF JEWS IN TÜRKIYE

The Jews portrayed in *Kula 930* challenge stereotypes associated with Jews in Türkiye being a wealthy and educated elite and shows that such presumptions are not historically accurate. In the first rendition the male characters are simple tradesman while the women are homemakers. In the third rendition, a Jewish doctor is introduced. Also in the third rendition, one of the main playwrights, Hubeş, expanded the play to include an opening song (in Ladino) which retells the life in Galata Jewish neighbourhood and introduced new characters such as Matmazel Behar, her lover who is a sailor, and a Greek woman named Sarımadam, and, based on an apparent real-life story of a boy with a worn-down shoe during the Jewish celebratory festival of Purim.

One of Hubeş' additions in the third rendition is a letter that Moiz receives from France. The audience discovers that Matmazel Behar is the only person in the entire neighbourhood who is literate because nobody else is able to read it. In the fourth rendition this development is modified to have Matmazel Behar being the only person who can read French. Still, this highlights the levels of literacy and education among many Jews in Türkiye and contrasts the impression made in scholarly work or oral history projects on Jews in the Galata/Pera districts, sources which focus on the cultural and socio-economic contributions of wealthy Jewish families such as Kamondo, Barnathan, Boton, to name a few (Gabay, 2020). Being depicted as poor or illiterate are not positive recollections and often suppressed in memory and it is therefore unsurprising that written historical sources tend not to dwell on such hardships and difficulties, and instead, focus on the rich Jewish culture and the sense of community. However, such positive recollections offer an incomplete picture of the history of the Istanbul Jewish community, even reinforcing the "Jews are an elite" stereotype. In this sense, *Kula 930* serves a sobering reminder that many within the community were culturally rich yet materially poor.

*Kula 930* avoids direct engagement with politics, and it is also noteworthy that there are no Muslim characters in the play while there is a synagogue right in the middle of the set, which is frequently used and referred to as it is the heart of Jewish communal life and Jewish identity. Gerşon Şarhon and Siliki both stated that the presence of Muslims was a taboo subject for many in the community and the elders thought that speaking Ladino would keep them away from having to blend in with Muslims: "if you cannot speak their language, you

cannot fall in love” as some elder members of the community liked to say<sup>27</sup>. As the Istanbul Jewry lost its vernacular Ladino, *Kula 930* started falling from grace. In addition, the change in the socio-economic structure of the Jewish community in Istanbul over the forty years of time does not favour the play’s success causing the play have a shelf life.

## 8. A PLAY WITH A SHELF LIFE

As the popularity of the play grew, the production’s running time also increased. The first rendition was only 90 minutes long; however, the third stretched to two and a half hours and featured additional songs, scenes, and children’s dances. For the fourth rendition Kohen says that he and his team embarked on a process of breaking and bending the play, excluding certain parts and extending others in order to decrease its running time which he felt was too long and to add depth and substance into the characters and story arcs which was especially necessary some of the characters who had been added over the years such as the Greek woman Sarımadam, a tea house proprietor who performs a classic Greek song<sup>28</sup>. One of the main playwrights Eskenazi Gözcü recalls that this specific addition originates in the third rendition of the play and was based on an actual tea house that existed<sup>29</sup>. It was a place where many Jewish men would stop after work for a game of backgammon or a chat with friends before going home. Bana explains that this character was introduced because many members of the audience recalled their friendship with members of the Greek community, so much so that some Jews could speak Greek and were familiar with Greek music. It signifies that the Jews of the Galata district were not totally insular and mixed with non-Jews, albeit few Muslims. Still, in Bana’s version Sarımadam plays only a small part and appears quite suddenly in the production. Under Kohen’s later direction, Sarımadam is developed by highlighting a doomed romance that occurred between her and Moiz that was unable to overcome their religious differences. This back story explains why Moiz is partial to a beverage. Another change under Kohen’s direction was to increase the number of parts spoken in Turkish, even tuning down the use of Ladino in some parts of the play by providing Turkish translations of the Ladino in Turkish through the lines of another character during the play and also having Turkish subtitles in the up-title device.

These changes also reflect the wishes of the directorate of the Jewish Community in Istanbul who wanted to open the production to broader Turkish audiences. Indeed, from the late 1990s onwards, the Jewish Community in Türkiye began reconsidering the necessity

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Karen Gerşon Şarhon, via Zoom, 28 December 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Ferit Kohen, Istanbul, 7 December 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Jojo Eskenazi Gözcü, Telephone, 22 December 2021.



of keeping a low profile and decided to open up, at least partially, to Turkish society. However, this broader Turkish public was carefully selected and consisted of people considered “friends.” Which group is more “likeminded” to the other, though, is the question that needs to be asked. Opening the play to Turkish friends who are likeminded to them may not present any issues for the Istanbul Jewry since Istanbul Jewry has assimilated to the secular liberal Turkish way of life well.

The use of Ladino and the way of life of a Sephardic community in a Jewish neighbourhood could have been appealing to other Sephardic communities outside of Türkiye such as those in the Balkans who originally settled in the former Ottoman Empire or in the Americas who also had similar, if not the same, Ladino songs, which are the core of the play. In other words, *Kula 930* would have had broad resonance with those Sephardic communities that emigrated from the Ottoman lands. In fact, the play was supposed to travel to Greece and the US, but due to financial constraints and a lack of sponsorship, these invitations were reluctantly declined. Instead, the play’s performances were limited to Türkiye and Israel. *Kula 930*, which was written for a Jewish audience in Türkiye, travelled to Israel and performed to Jews of Turkish origin. Members of the Sephardic communities of Bulgaria and Greece attended the play in Israel as well as the Spanish and Portuguese ambassadors with significant interest and enthusiasm. This was bittersweet as many Jews migrated from Türkiye to Israel and some members of the audience were reminded of their former lives of a bygone year. On this note, Gerşon Şarhon indicates that since *Kula 930* is a dynamic play with modifications and improvisations in later renditions<sup>30</sup>, some jokes that highly amused the audience in Türkiye were lost on the audience in Israel, having lost touch with their Turkish roots and had assimilated to Israeli culture over the years<sup>31</sup>. The same fate may soon befall renditions of the production in Türkiye when performed to younger members of the audience who do not understand Ladino. In other words, in Israel, the play was not Sephardic enough and in Türkiye it is not Turkish enough. Perhaps this could be remedied by more parts of the play being performed in Turkish, as Kohen did in the fourth rendition, but this only highlights the demise of the traditional lingua-franca and cultural marker of the Jews of Türkiye.

## 9. CONCLUSION

Considering the fact that the Jews of Türkiye faced oppression over the past century, *Kula 930* presents rose-tinted past of the Jewish community’s heyday in Republican Türkiye

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Karen Gerşon Şarhon, via Zoom, 28 December 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

when Jews were able to live a full cultural life and experienced it together in a community. This represents longing for a mythical golden age of Jewish life. Its success demonstrates the nostalgia of many within the Jewish community that there was a period in Turkish history that Jews could be part of the national project while also maintain a strong communal identity. The key factor for the success of the play is its fans, audience members who had actually experienced life in Galata, could if not be fully accepted as Turkish, speak Ladino, and lived his/her Jewish identity within the confines of the neighbourhood. And that this cultural life, although poor and experienced a turbulent relationship with broader Turkish society, was culturally vibrant. For those who did not experience this, the play's intricacies and significance are harder to grasp let alone understand the language in which it is performed. Regrettably, this means that the play has an expiry date and a short one at that. As the brochure of the third rendition in 2002 states:

Those who were children when *Kula '930* was first staged are now grownups. They have their own children now. The children who at least understood Judeo-Spanish that day left their place to a generation that does not understand a word of this beautiful language. Also, many of the older generation who spoke this language have passed away. However, we have prayers and traditions that we want the new generation to know. We have beautiful songs that we do not want to be forgotten. That is why, 23 years later, we are playing *Kula '930* once again with the same cast, the same text, and the same songs.

As this shared history of Ladino fades, so does the meaning of *Kula 930*. This is why in the fourth rendition of the play in 2017, Kohen tuned down the Ladino parts. However, *Kula 930* is a unique play that gets its strength not only from its language but also from the feelings and emotions that it stirs. If this is also lost – and from the interviews conducted with the actors, this is possible, – what is left of the play is a frail plot and not fully developed characters as their traits and identity is assumed by the traditional audience. Hence, *Kula 930* is a classic with a shelf life of two decades at best.

*Kula 930*'s birth, popularity, its success over four decades, and its eventual decline resembles the Sephardic Jewish community's life span in Türkiye. Although Jews are not Turks because of their ethnic and religious differences, there are little cultural traits that allow them to define themselves as Sephardi Jews while the community dwindles into oblivion. Yet, in each rendition *Kula 930* accomplishes documenting the way of life Sephardic Jews in Istanbul had until recently. It might be said that Istanbul Jewry is at the verge of losing its Sephardic traits having shifted steadily to Turkish traits and *Kula 930* is the reflection of this.

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## Challenges and needs in Ladino teaching among ten language revitalisation activists

Desafíos y necesidades en la enseñanza del ladino entre diez activistas de la revitalización de la lengua

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#### Abstract

This article presents results from interviews with ten teachers engaged in Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) revitalisation. The purpose of the study is to collect Ladino teachers' experiences to understand the challenges they face and the needs they express to continue their activities.

Challenges were related to students' linguistic backgrounds, students' and teachers' confidence about expressing themselves in Ladino, and to views on language normativity. The teachers expressed needs concerning finding stable teacher positions, about creating a Ladino proficiency test and certificate, developing resources for language teaching, and updating Ladino's vocabulary to reflect contemporary life. Creating venues for learners to use the language, and opportunities for Ladino teachers to meet and discuss pedagogical issues were seen as important.

The teachers' views differed considerably regarding questions on language norms, and the need for an official language certificate. The results point to the need for further discussions, and for teacher development initiatives.

**Keywords:** Ladino; Judeo-Spanish; language revitalisation; language teaching; Sephardic studies; Jewish languages.

#### Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de entrevistas con diez profesores comprometidos con la revitalización del ladino (judeoespañol). El propósito del estudio es recopilar las experiencias de docentes de ladino para comprender los desafíos que enfrentan y las necesidades que expresan para continuar con sus actividades.

Los desafíos estaban relacionados con el perfil lingüístico de los estudiantes, con la confianza de los estudiantes y de los profesores para expresarse en ladino y con opiniones normativas sobre la lengua. Los maestros expresaron necesidades relacionadas con la búsqueda de puestos docentes estables, con la creación de una prueba y un certificado de dominio del ladino, con el desarrollo de recursos para la enseñanza del idioma y con la actualización del vocabulario del ladino para reflejar la vida contemporánea. Se consideró importante crear espacios para que los estudiantes puedan practicar la lengua y oportunidades para que los docentes se puedan reunir y discutir cuestiones didácticas.

Los puntos de vista de los docentes diferían considerablemente en cuanto a normas lingüísticas, y la deseabilidad de un certificado oficial de dominio del idioma. Los resultados apuntan a la necesidad de más discusiones y de iniciativas de perfeccionamiento pedagógico.

**Palabras clave:** Ladino; judeoespañol; revitalización lingüística; enseñanza de lenguas, estudios sefardíes; lenguas judías.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. A personal note from the author

During the Covid19 lockdown in 2020, I stumbled upon an advertisement for an online Ladino course. I am trained as a Romance language teacher and linguist, and at the time, I was finishing my Ph.D. dissertation on aspects of teaching Spanish as a foreign language in Sweden. I remembered having read about Ladino and being fascinated by the language, but I did not really know that people around the world still spoke it. I was intrigued by the chance to learn it myself, and I applied for the course. What I met was a vibrant, vivid, and very welcoming community of speakers, many of whom were deeply engaged in saving their language, and in opening their culture to new-comers.

As a researcher in applied linguistics and educational sciences, I currently focus on issues regarding minority language teaching and revitalisation. I consider teaching – in the widest possible use of the term – to be an integral part of language revitalisation. During my own Ladino studies, I found that little had been written on Ladino teaching. When a research funding was made available in 2022 by the Centre for Language and Literature Education of Karlstad University, I decided to make a contribution to the field. The present article is, thus, my humble attempt to further the investigation on Ladino teaching and revitalisation, and, at the same time, to give something back to the community of teachers and speakers who shared their language and culture with me.

### 1.2. Ladino – a brief description

*Ladino*, also known as *Djudeo-Espanyol*, *Djudezmo*, *Judaeo-Spanish*, and other glottonyms<sup>1</sup> (cf. August-Zarębska, 2020; Bunis, 2018), is the language of the descendants of the Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 and, shortly after, from Portugal (for an historical overview, see Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2000). A majority of the exiled Sephardim eventually settled in the Ottoman Empire, where sultan Bayezid II welcomed the new subjects and, no doubt, the skills and economic assets they would bring (Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2000). Based on late medieval Castilian Spanish and other Romance languages of the Iberian Peninsula, Ladino has retained many archaic traits, especially regarding pronunciation, but it has also developed its own lexical and morphosyntactic characteristics, mixed with a substantial

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<sup>1</sup> The teachers who were interviewed for the present study preferred different names for the language, generally opting either for *Ladino* or *Djudeo-Espanyol*, i.e., Judaeo-Spanish. In this article, *Ladino* will primarily be used to denote the language, except for quotes where interviewees chose other terms.

number of borrowings from Hebrew, Turkish, Greek, French, and others. The language has several dialects in different areas where it is or has been spoken (Bunis, 2018). There are two official institutions who work for the preservation of the language: the Israeli-based *Autoridad Nacionala del Ladino*, founded in 1996, and the *Akademia Nacionala del Ladino*, established in 2019 and affiliated with the Royal Spanish Academy. Alongside these institutions, many less official organisations, and a large number of grassroots activists strive to revive the language.

Ladino was traditionally written in Hebrew characters. In printed texts, the semi-cursive Rashi font was usually used, but texts can also be found in Hebrew square letters, *Meruba*.<sup>2</sup> For handwriting, the cursive *Solitreo* script was commonly employed. Latin script became increasingly more common after the Turkish spelling reform of 1928 (August-Zarębska, 2020; Bunis, 2019). Today, Latin script is commonly used in Ladino publications, generally using the orthographic rules adopted by *Aki Yerushalayim*, one of few remaining Ladino language magazines (cf. Varol, 2002).

Due to the devastating consequences of the Second World War (see, for instance, Mazower, 2006, and Naar, 2016, on the devastation of the Sephardic community of Salonica), but also to such circumstances as Turkish-only language policies in the 1930s and 1940s (Gerson Şarhon, 2011) or the social prestige of the Hebrew language in Israel (Spolsky & Shohamy, 1999; Zuckermann, 2020), resulting in strong tendencies within the post-war generations to switch to other, majority languages such as Turkish, Greek, Hebrew, Castilian Spanish, or English, the survival of Ladino is imperilled (Bunis, 2018; Moseley, 2010). Relatively few fluent mother-tongue speakers remain, and Ladino is now primarily spoken in family and in religious contexts (Kirschen, 2019), which entails that the language generally is not used outside quite limited settings.

The exact number of Ladino speakers in the world is unknown, and estimates vary considerably. Harris (2011), who perhaps states the most cautious figures, calculated that only around 11 000 speakers of varying proficiency levels remained in 2009, and that many of them did no longer speak the language fluently but, rather, remembered isolated words and sayings from their childhood, without using the language as an everyday vernacular. Other sources mention larger numbers of speakers, for instance Ethnologue (2023), who classes Ladino as an endangered language counting between 10 000 and one million mother tongue speakers.

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<sup>2</sup> The last recurrent publication using Rashi script was the Salonica-based newspaper *El Mesajero*, which was forcibly closed down in 1941 by the German occupants in Greece (Benbassa & Rodrigue, 2000). The last publication in Ladino printed in Meruba characters was the New York-based *La Vara*, published between 1922 and 1948 (Bürki, 2010).

Ladino's dire situation is aggravated by the fact that the majority of the remaining native speakers are in their sixties or older (Gerson Şarhon, 2011; Harris, 2011), and by the fact that the language is rarely passed on to younger generations (Harris, 1994; 2011). Indeed, we may today see the last generation of native Ladino-speakers (FitzMorris, 2014), and the language may face extinction if no new speakers are created. Despite this alarming situation, Ladino has been less researched than other Romance languages originating in the Iberian Peninsula, and less than other Jewish languages. Furthermore, there are, hitherto, effectively no studies on Ladino learning or teaching. Therefore, relatively little is known about how teachers teach Ladino, what resources they use, what they think about their teaching efforts, what challenges they encounter in their teaching, and what they need to keep up their language revitalisation activities.

## 2. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study gathers the experiences of ten activists involved in promoting Ladino learning and Ladino language revitalisation. In this article, language teaching is seen as an essential part of language revitalisation. Furthermore, teaching is understood as any activity, great or small, undertaken with the intention that another person shall learn some part of the language, be it vocabulary, grammar, syntax, pronunciation, writing skills, et cetera.

The purpose of the study is to collect these experiences in order to understand better the challenges that Ladino teachers encounter in their language revitalisation efforts and the needs they express to continue their activities.

The following research questions are asked:

- 1) What major challenges do Ladino teachers see in their current Ladino teaching activities?
- 2) What needs do Ladino teachers see for future Ladino teaching and revitalisation?

## 3. METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

The researcher contacted 15 Ladino activists who – in different ways and in different contexts – promote the language by engaging in teaching activities, and in creating resources for learning Ladino. Some of them were trained as teachers (in other languages, or in different subjects), whereas others had no formal teacher training. For the sake of simplicity, they will all henceforth be referred to as “teachers”.

Eleven out of the fifteen contacted teachers agreed to participate in the study. Due to unforeseen events, one of the intended interviews did not take place, and all in all ten participants were interviewed: five women and five men, of different ages, based in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. To secure their anonymity throughout the article, they will be referred to as Teacher 1 to Teacher 10. Among the ten teachers were speakers of Ladino as a mother tongue or heritage language, with Sephardic family backgrounds, as well as others that may be described as “new speakers”<sup>3</sup> of Ladino, that is to say, (predominantly younger) activists without any Sephardic origin, who have learned Ladino as a foreign language as adults.<sup>4</sup> The teachers are presented briefly below in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of participating teachers.

PARTICIPANT	SPEAKER STATUS
Teacher 1	mother tongue/heritage language speaker
Teacher 2	mother tongue/heritage language speaker
Teacher 3	mother tongue/heritage language speaker
Teacher 4	mother tongue/heritage language speaker
Teacher 5	new speaker
Teacher 6	mother tongue/heritage language speaker
Teacher 7	mother tongue/heritage language speaker
Teacher 8	new speaker
Teacher 9	new speaker
Teacher 10	new speaker

Teachers 1–9 had all gained considerable experience of teaching Ladino and of other activities aimed at revitalising Sephardic language and/or culture. They taught or had until recently taught at universities, and/or in privately arranged courses in formal as well as informal settings (i.e., in regularly arranged classes or in less official contexts). Teacher 10 had limited experiences of teaching Ladino to high-school pupils at the time of the interview, but was planning to implement a university programme of Sephardic studies.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the concept of *new speakers*, see Hodges (2021).

<sup>4</sup> The participants were not asked about their family backgrounds or about being/not being of Sephardic origin, but all commented upon it when talking about how they began teaching Ladino. To reduce the possibilities to identify the participants, considering the small number of Ladino teachers world-wide, the description of the participants is kept vague on purpose, and further information about the participants' backgrounds, what languages they use in their classes besides Ladino, their professions or other activities outside Ladino teaching will not be given in this article.



Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom, and recorded (sound only) with a Dictaphone. The interviews ranged between forty minutes and one hour and forty-five minutes, amounting to a total of approximately nine and a half hours of recorded data. The interviews were predominantly performed in Ladino, intertwined, when needed, with words in other languages that the interviewer and the interviewees had in common. Using Ladino as the main language was a choice based on the philosophy that the study should not only be a study *on* Ladino, but also *in* Ladino and *for* the Ladino speaking community, thus reinforcing the use of Ladino not only as an object of study but, indeed, also as a language *for* scientific study. The article, thus, is intended not only to serve academic purposes but also to support a pedagogical discourse within the Ladino-speaking community.

The recorded interviews were manually transcribed by the researcher. A qualitative content analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Bryman, 2016) of the transcriptions was performed. In this process, common topics that the interviewed teachers agreed upon, and topics that they did not agree upon, were crystallised. In the analysis, special attention was given to comments on challenges or difficulties, and to expressions of needs and wishes for future language revitalisation activities.

#### 4. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND EARLIER STUDIES ON LADINO TEACHING

The present study contributes to the field of Sephardic studies by providing insights into Ladino teacher practices and views on language revitalisation. According to Olko and Sallabank (2021: 1), there has recently been an increase in “initiatives, both grassroots and top-down, to counteract the devastating loss of linguistic diversity and to promote multilingualism and the use of local languages”. This is certainly true when it comes to initiatives for Ladino, particularly from the onset of the Covid19 pandemic in 2020, when a large number of online activities for learning and using Ladino were created (for an overview of such activities, see Yebra López, 2021).

So far, though, the increase in language revitalisation activities has not entailed any significant increase in studies on Ladino teaching and learning. In earlier publications, Refael (2001) offers an overview of Ladino courses in Israel; Koén-Sarano (2001) gives an account of her experiences as a Ladino teacher, and Santa Puche (2001) describes a proposed outline for a course on Sephardic history and Ladino. More recently, Gerson Şarhon (2011) briefly describes what motivates young persons to learn Ladino in Turkey. These publications, however, do not focus on teachers’ needs for developing their teaching activities and provide few possibilities to compare different teachers’ experiences.

Language revitalisation may be realised in many different forms. Regardless of which activities or resources are utilised, revitalisation efforts must be implemented together with and in great respect for the language speakers themselves (Olko and Sallabank, 2021; Zuckermann, 2020, 2021). The present study was inspired by *Revivalistics* perspectives on research about language revitalisation, in line with Zuckermann (2020, 2021), and by advice on language revitalisation outlined in Olko and Sallabank (2021), and in Hinton (2010). Zuckermann (2020, 2021) states the importance of working *with* the community of speakers of a language, and Hinton (2010: 35) emphasises that “linguistic research must also serve the interests of the community whose language is being documented”. With this in mind, the researcher, who himself started learning Ladino in 2020, endeavoured to conduct the interviews in Ladino, thus involving the language itself in the study, rather than merely watching language practices from the outside.

Language revitalisation efforts may be more or less influenced by subconscious language ideologies or explicit language attitudes (Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby, 2021), shaping normative views on the language in question. One of the main ideologies regularly found among minority language speakers, according to Woolard (1998, cited in Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby, 2021: 107), is the “ideology of authenticity”, implying an expectation to use a certain language variety rather than any other, something that may cause problems for new speakers of a language. This idea is opposed to the “ideology of anonymity” (ibid.), suggesting that a language is open for all speakers, regardless of their origin and of how they have acquired their knowledge of the language. This ideology also implies the existence of a standardised language variety, more or less void of dialectal or local forms of expression.

Revitalisation efforts for Welsh and, in particular, for Hawai’ian are often mentioned as good examples, offering structured language learning possibilities for children at school through immersion programmes (for brief overviews, see Morgan, 2013; Wilson & Kamanā, 2013), in the case of Hawai’ian also involving pupils’ families and older, mother tongue speaking generations, in line with the so-called Mentor-Apprentice program designed by Hinton (e.g., 2001; Pine and Turin, 2017; Zuckermann, 2021). Progress has also been made with similar approaches to endangered regional languages such as Elfdalian in Sweden (Sapir, 2017), or Inari Saami in Finland (Helander et al., 2023).

However, as Olko and Sallaband (2021: 5; cf. Zuckermann, 2021) point out, providing school children with minority language lessons may also prove counterproductive if competent teachers and/or useful teaching resources cannot be found, something that is not always easy when it comes to less commonly taught languages, or languages with a small number of speakers. Ideally, mother tongue or heritage speakers of an endangered language

engaged in language revitalisation programmes would be trained in linguistics as well as in language teaching (Hinton, 2010), but this is often not the case. In addition to competent teachers, there is also a need for “user-friendly” resources such as grammars and dictionaries “accessible to lay communities” (Zuckermann, 2020: 243), and for young persons who can strengthen their language proficiency and become language custodians (Zuckermann, 2021).

Ladino is no longer – or to a very little extent – used as a vernacular in the homes and in the streets, a situation that is disadvantageous to the chances of survival or revitalisation of the language. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the language is a highly diasporic one, its speakers residing all over the world, and often without any Ladino-speaking community close by. However, some scholars have pointed out that such geographically-based communities may not be the only solution for a language to thrive and for language revitalisation to succeed, which is good news for a “post-co-territorial language” (Benor, 2008: 1070) such as Ladino. Indeed, online communities are seen as a new way to build linguistic communities where native and new speakers of the language and partakers of the culture can gather and form what Held (2010) calls a “Digital Home-Land” (cf. also Brink-Danan, 2010; Yebra López, 2021). Since 2020, Ladino has attracted an unknown number of learners of all ages (Cruz Çilli, 2021), many of whom partake in online activities for learning and/or for practicing the language.

The increase in language revitalisation activities since 2020 involves indeed the use of many online resources. In two of the few articles written on Ladino teaching and learning, Gerson Şarhon (2011) and Santa Puche (2001) write that if new generations of Ladino speakers are to be created (be it as native speakers, or as new speakers), Ladino learners need access to adequate educational resources. This may be a challenge for any language, especially for languages with few speakers, but, here too, the challenge for Ladino is increased by the diasporic character of the language. The fact that it is spoken by individual speakers all around the world, rather than in homogenous communities based on geography, and studied by new speakers with different mother tongues, may impede or significantly complicate the adaptation of language revitalisation models that have proven successful for other minority languages, such as language immersion programmes in pre-schools and schools (cf. Warschauer et al., 1997).

## 5. RESULTS: CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

This section of the article first offers a brief overview of the interviewed teachers’ activities. After this, results regarding research questions 1 and 2 are presented. Quotes in

Ladino are given as examples of topics mentioned by the interviewed teachers. The spelling conventions of *Aki Yerushalayim* (“Grafía del djudeo-espanyol sigún el metodo de Akí Yerushaláyim”, 2023) are used in the quotes. Some quotes are abbreviated to omit pauses, self-corrections, and repetitions. English translations are given in [brackets]. The results are further discussed in the final section of the article.

### 5.1. Teaching activities and resources

As noted above, there has been an increase in Ladino revitalisation efforts, especially in online settings, since 2020 (Cruz Çilli, 2021), and several of the interviewees, for instance Teachers 2, and 8, talked about a “renasimyento de la lingua” [a renaissance for the language]. Teacher 8 also stated: “kreo ke en algun momento, i puedeser no en syen anyos, ma presto, ke la djente va empesar a eskrivir i avlar de *este* momento” [I believe that at some point, and perhaps not in a hundred years, but soon, that people will start writing and talking about *this* moment], that is, he spoke of the current period as one of crucial importance for the language and its future survival. This feeling was also mirrored in Teacher 4, who talked about the growing interest in Ladino among students of all backgrounds, saying: “esta lingua tyene una atraksyon, no se deké” [this language has an attraction, I do not know why].

The ten interviewed teachers learned Ladino and started teaching it in different ways and for different reasons, but all expressed a strong love for the language. Teacher 8 said: “esta lingua me topó” [this language found me]; such feelings of discovery or rediscovery of a nearly lost language were expressed by several of the teachers, by heritage Ladino speakers as well as by teachers who had learnt the language as a foreign language. In many of the interviews, strong feelings of responsibility were also evident among the teachers. Again, this was clearly expressed by Teacher 8, who said: “malgrado ke no so sefaradí, kreigo ke tengo una responsabilitá de ayudar la djente ke keren ambezarsen la lingua, i yo la puedo ambezar” [even if I’m not a Sephardi myself, I think that I have got a responsibility towards the people who want to learn the language, and I am able to teach it].

The teachers presented a variety of teaching activities. Many produced their own teaching materials, (texts, web-sites, films, vocabulary lists, grammar explanations, and so forth), but also made use of previously published books, recordings, newspaper articles, et cetera, which they further adapted to use in their classes. For instance, Teacher 4 used her own translation to English of a previously published textbook written in Hebrew, and Teacher 6 let his students read historic articles in Ladino newspapers published in his hometown before the Second World War.

Five of the teachers (2, 3, 4, 5, and 8) also involved mother tongue Ladino speakers in their classes or in course assignments, or expressed a will to strive for increased contacts across generations between language learners and mother tongue speakers. Teacher 8 specifically mentioned language revitalisation models for Hawai'ian as an example to follow, with structures for allowing cross-generational language contacts. Activities like these were generally made possible thanks to digital resources.

Indeed, the vast majority of the teachers' activities were performed via online applications such as Zoom, FaceTime, and similar, but at least six of the teachers had also taught in-person classes at universities or at other, less formal institutions prior to the Covid19 pandemic. Digital resources such as Google groups, and WhatsApp groups were also used, and some of the teachers posted language learning resources in Facebook groups, on YouTube, Twitter, and similar platforms. Likewise, the *Ladinokomunita*<sup>5</sup> e-mail group was mentioned as a language learning resource, as every message sent to the group is moderated, and sometimes commented, by a group of volunteering Ladino speakers. For instance, at intervals the group moderators admonish members to use the *Aki Yerushalayim* orthography (“*Grafía del djudeo-espanyol sigún el metodo de Akí Yerushaláyim*”, 2023), and inform them about these guidelines (e.g., *Las Reglas del Grupo*, *Ladinokomunita*, message #68987, 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2022).

The importance of the use of digital resources for Ladino revitalisation is reflected in the words of Teacher 9, who claimed that *online* revitalisation is essential for Ladino, as this is the only way to reach all of the speakers, due to Ladino's diasporic nature: “solamente un ambezamiento en linea puede ayegar a toda la djente ke lo avla” [only online teaching can reach everyone who speaks it]. This is in line with Yebra López' (2021) views on Sephardic online community building and Held's (2010) concept of a Digital Home-Land.

The number of students or participants in the teachers' activities ranged from a handful to, in one case, over 800 individuals. According to Teacher 2, there are few young learners who eventually become active Ladino speakers, a fact reflected also in Gerson Şarhon's (2011) survey of the situation for Ladino in Turkey. The majority of the other interviewees, however, seemed to have a greater age variety among their students. Teacher 9 described his students as “djente de todas partes del olam, i de todas las edades” [people from all over the world, and of all ages], specifying that he had had students from 15 to 96 years of age. As a rare exception, Teacher 10 had so far only introduced the language to high school pupils. A growing number of younger learners may, perhaps, reflect a change in attitudes during the last decade since Gerson Şarhon (2011) conducted her study, but it is too early to

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://ladinokomunita.groups.io/g/main>.

conclude whether a growing interest in the language will also lead to a sustained increase in active, younger speakers.

## 5.2. Challenges in Ladino teaching

Many of the challenges mentioned by the interviewed teachers regarded circumstances correlated to students and to students' previous knowledge of different languages. The very nature of Ladino itself and the teachers' differing views on language normativity provided further challenges, all of which influenced the teaching activities. Other challenges concerned the lack of updated teaching resources, such as textbooks, and the teachers' own experienced language proficiency, as well as their lack of professional development as language teachers. These challenges will be exemplified in the following subsections.

### 5.2.1. *Challenges related to students*

Seven teachers (1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9) mentioned challenges in Ladino teaching related to their students. To one of them, Teacher 8, the challenges mainly consisted in managing large online groups in Zoom. Teachers 8 and 5 also mentioned that handling online studies via Zoom, WhatsApp and other digital applications can be difficult not only for teachers, but also for some students, especially in the older age groups who may not be used to such technologies. Teacher 5, however, herself being one of the elder participants in the study, declared that nothing is impossible, saying: "I yo puedo azer i estas kozas" [Even I can do these things too].

Generally, thus, managing teacher-student interaction in online applications was not seen as a big problem. The seven teachers mentioned above described that the complexity of their teaching activities was increased, rather, by the fact that students with mixed language backgrounds (different mother tongues and/or knowledge of additional languages, and with varying language proficiencies) partook in the same classes. Teacher 9 clarified that these difficulties are particularly noticeable in groups where only some of the students know Castilian Spanish, while others are familiar with the Hebrew language and/or orthography, a mix of student backgrounds that was common in his and in some of the other teachers' classes. Hebrew speaking students can more easily learn how to read Ladino written in Rashi script, whereas as Latin script may come easier for students with other linguistic backgrounds, such as Spanish or English.

Different language backgrounds among the students also affected teaching oral production. According to Teachers 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9, Ladino pronunciation is more difficult to master for Spanish speaking students than for students with other mother tongues,



presumably because Ladino and Spanish are typologically very similar, but differ in terms of spelling conventions and pronunciation. Teachers 1, 7, and 9 specifically mentioned the letters <b> (pronounced [b]), <v> [v], <h> [x], <sh> [ʃ], and <j> [ʒ] as challenging for Castilian speakers.<sup>6</sup> Teachers 5 and 9 had solved these issues by making separate classes for students who know (some) Castilian Spanish, and for students who do not. When teaching to read and write in Rashi script, similar strategies were sometimes adopted for students who do/do not know how to read Hebrew characters. Teacher 9 summarised these pedagogical choices by saying: “paradoksalmente kale azerlo diferente para ke el resultado seiga el mizmo” [paradoxically, one has to do things differently in order to get the same result].

### 5.2.2. *Challenges related to language anxiety and to feelings of belonging*

Teacher 5 mentioned that online discussion groups that she had organised herself before starting to teach formally, had helped her to gain linguistic confidence and to start talking, which was helpful for her to dare start teaching the language. Teaching Ladino may feel particularly daunting for a teacher who is not a mother tongue speaker. Indeed, initial feelings of apprehension towards teaching Ladino were a circumstance mentioned by Teachers 5 and 8, both new speakers of Ladino, but indeed also by Teacher 4, who grew up in a Ladino speaking family but who had not actively used the language for quite some time when she decided to start giving lessons, encouraged by an active Ladino mother tongue speaker.

Confidence about expressing oneself in Ladino is important not only for Ladino teachers or teachers-to-be, but also, of course, for prospective language learners. Fear of using a target language, or *language anxiety*, is a well-known phenomenon in foreign language learning, not only in face-to-face learning environments, but also in online settings (Russell, 2020; for an overview of research on language anxiety, see Toyama and Yamazaki, 2021). Such fears were mentioned by Teachers 3, 4, and 5. Insisting on the active use of Ladino in classes was emphasised by Teacher 4 as important in order to prevent students from using other languages to talk *about* Ladino, which would not develop their Ladino proficiency. Teachers 3, 4, and 5 also underscored the importance of making students with a low linguistic self-esteem feel part of the Ladino speaking community.

Becoming a part of the Ladino speaking community is important also for Ladino teachers. Teacher 5, who had learnt Ladino as a foreign language, expressed humility as

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<sup>6</sup> The pronunciation of these letters differs between Ladino and Castilian Spanish, Ladino having conserved the medieval pronunciation to a higher degree. In Castilian, the letters <b> and <v> are both pronounced [b] or [β] depending on context; <h> is no longer pronounced; the [ʃ] and [ʒ] sounds, preserved in Ladino, have merged to [x] in modern Castilian.

regards the task of offering classes in Ladino, stating that she not only teaches it to others, but that she also learns from the experience; particularly so in classes where beginners mix with mother tongue/heritage speakers, which is not seldom the case. Teacher 7 said that he engages in activities specifically aimed at mother tongue or heritage speakers, hoping to be able to revitalise their language proficiency in order for them, in their turn, to help future speakers to gain a good, authentic Ladino proficiency, and for them to be able to train future Ladino teachers, a strategy recommended also by Hinton (2010). Teacher 5 mentioned similar thoughts and tried actively to mix heritage speakers hoping to regain their mother tongue with beginners in her classes.

Working with mother tongue or heritage speakers of Ladino was also mentioned by Teachers 4 and 8, who work actively to create “apprenticeships”, settings where Ladino learners can engage in online or offline conversations with older speakers of the language. One of these teachers, who himself is not a heritage speaker of Ladino (Teacher 8), said:

[Mi kolega] i yo podemos ambezar la lingua, somos profesores, [ma] no avlamos la lingua komo muestra lingua materna, i pensamos ke sería muy ermozo de mostrar a nuestros elevos ke *ay* djente ke avlan ... Mos da otra perspektiva, kreigo, sovre el uzo i la valor de la lingua. [[My colleague] and I, we can teach the language, we are teachers, [but] we don't speak the language as our mother tongue, and we think that it would be very beautiful to show to our students that *there are* people who speak it ... It gives us another perspective, I believe, of the use and the value of the language.]

The importance of connecting younger persons engaged in Ladino revitalisation with older generations of mother tongue speakers to help developing a genuine, oral proficiency was also mentioned by Teacher 2.

### 5.2.3. *Challenges related to the language itself and to views on language normativity*

Grenoble (2021: 11) argues that the fact that a certain language has a standardised form may be beneficial for producing textbooks and other written sources that can be used for language revitalisation, as well as for use in social media, chat messages and so forth. She underscores that this is not a requirement for language revitalisation, but that it may be helpful. The interviewed teachers showed different opinions regarding language norms and *what* Ladino to teach. Because Ladino is a diasporic language which has had several historical centres, the language has developed varieties differing in pronunciation, writing systems and orthography, as well as vocabulary.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> To this may be added *Ḥaketía*, the western branch of Sephardic Spanish historically spoken in today's Morocco. This sister language to Ladino was not discussed in the interviews.

As for orthography, the participants all said that the *Aki Yerushalayim* system (“Grafía del djudeo-espanyol sigún el metodo de Akí Yerushaláyim”, 2023) was preferable for writing Ladino with Latin script; views differed, however, about the use or non-use of accent marks. For some interviewees, such as Teacher 1, the use of accent marks was not a question they had thought about before the interviews. Teacher 1, a mother tongue Ladino speaker, thought that it would be difficult, also for mother tongue speakers, to learn the rules for when to use accents. However, she said that she encouraged her students to indicate the accentuation of new words, to learn the correct pronunciation: “Kuando tenesh menester de meter aksentos para akodrarvos, meteldo!” [When you need to place stress marks to remember, do it!]. Likewise, Teacher 2 said that accents are necessary in texts for students, especially if there are no sound recordings to listen to: “Para ambezar, kale meter los aksentos” [To learn, you have to place accents]. Teachers 1, 2, and 9 all thought that accents may be useful to distinguish between homographs, such as *gato* [‘cat’] and *gató* [‘cake’], or verb forms like *avlo* [‘I speak’] and *avló* [‘he/she spoke’]. However, whereas Teacher 9 wanted to restrict the use of accents to cases like these, stating that the language would be easier for beginners without having to learn where to use stress marks, Teacher 2 said that she had started to consider accents as ever more useful and necessary. These differences in opinion may constitute a challenge in Ladino teaching *per se*, as students take courses with different teachers and encounter diverse ways to write the language.

The to-be-or-not-to-be of accents is also a discussion seen in other Ladino contexts, for instance in the YouTube interview with Ladino activist Benni Aguado (Ladino21, 2022). Another example is Aldo Sevi, the chief editor of *Aki Yerushalayim*, who writes: “En mi opinión sería mejor si los ke eskrivimos en esta lingua empesemos a indikar los aksentos para ayudar a la djente ke se están ambezándola” [In my opinion, it would be better if we who write in this language start indicating the accents to help people who are learning it] (Sevi, 2023: 4). The latter opinion is particularly interesting, as the orthography of *Aki Yerushalayim* is often purported as normative for contemporary Ladino spelling (e.g., Varol, 2002), and this norm seems, perhaps, to be changing.<sup>8</sup>

Another challenge related to the teaching of orthography and written language norms concerned the use of Rashi and/or Solitreo. Among the interviewees, Teachers 5, 6, and 9 chose not only to teach Latin script, but also to include lessons on reading Ladino written in Rashi, and Solitreo. The other teachers only used Latin script in their classes. The teachers who did include Rashi and Solitreo did so because they considered it as a part of the

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<sup>8</sup> The use or non-use of accent marks in *Aki Yerushalayim* has seen several changes since the publication of the first number of the *revista*; for a detailed overview, see Álvarez López (2017).

Sephardic cultural heritage, and because they saw a need for more scholars able to read historic documents that will otherwise remain inaccessible to research.

The teachers showed differing views on how to include dialectal varieties of Ladino in their classes. Whereas some of them emphasised the importance of reflecting the linguistic variation in their courses, others talked about the need to use a more standardised form of the language, reflecting so-called ideologies of authenticity or anonymity (Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby, 2021: 107). Finding a standardised form of Ladino may present another challenge, however, as the teachers did not agree on where to find it. Teacher 8, for instance, said that he wanted to “dar valor a la diversidad linguística” [value the linguistic diversity], but he also claimed that he predominantly used the Istanbul variety of the language, stating: “no es posible avlar todo” [it is not possible to speak every (variety)]. Teacher 7 stated that he considered the Istanbul variety of Ladino as the de facto standard form of the language, due to the fact that it has preserved the largest number of speakers, and that it is used in contemporary publications such as *El Amaneser* and *Aki Yerushalayim*. He thought that this variety, therefore, should be the one predominantly taught to others. This view was to some extent also shared by Teacher 5, and by Teacher 6, who claimed that the Istanbul variety of Ladino had been the standard for Ladino publications also outside Istanbul, for instance in Salonica before the Second World War.<sup>9</sup> Teacher 1 also considered Turkish dialects of Ladino as the most relevant for teaching, but did not single out a particular Turkish variety.

On a less Turko-centric note, Teacher 2 wanted to establish a “standard mínimo” [a minimum standard] of the language to teach to students. Such a standard variety would concern both writing (including, e.g., spelling conventions), as well as other forms of the language, such as morpho-syntax, or which vocabulary to use. However, the same teacher also stated that the linguistic variation within the language is not well known among all of the native speakers, and that she herself was gaining conscience about it as she kept working with the language. This means that, even to mother tongue speakers of Ladino, reflecting the language’s varieties in teaching activities may pose a challenge, especially if they are not represented in textbooks or other available teaching resources.

Teacher 3 recommended mentioning differences between regional varieties of Ladino when teaching the language, but she was more concerned to emphasise Ladino’s non-Castilian-ness; if Ladino has a Spanish sounding word and a Turkish sounding word for the same thing or concept, she preferred to use the Turkish word, to highlight that Ladino is something different than Spanish. To Teacher 4, separating Ladino vocabulary from Castilian Spanish was also important, as to Teacher 7, who wished to preserve the

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<sup>9</sup> This claim has not been verified by other sources.

“correct” forms of the language and to avoid its “contamination” of other languages, especially Castilian Spanish. He saw this as a challenge when new Ladino speakers who know Castilian Spanish learn Ladino and, perhaps, even begin teaching the language. Therefore, Teacher 7 expressed that he focused on strengthening the language proficiency among heritage speakers of Ladino, so that they in turn may be able to train new teachers. He saw a danger in relying too much on Castilian Spanish speakers: “Si el djudeo-espanyol va ser arebivido por avlantes de kastilyano ... se arebiva komo un dialekto del kastilyano” [If Djudeo-Espanyol is revitalised by Castilian speakers ... it will be revitalised as a dialect of Castilian Spanish]. Teacher 8, on the other hand, stated that it is a good thing that students of non-Sephardic backgrounds also learn the language, as this in turn encourages mother tongue speakers to use the language themselves.

The most outspoken defender of Ladino’s linguistic varieties, Teacher 9, stated that the dialectal variation in itself is an intrinsic part of what makes Ladino, Ladino, and therefore of great importance also for the teaching of the language. He said:

Yo penso ... ke la naturaleza diasporika i plural i diversa, i extraterritorial, del ladino no korresponde kon una estandarizasyón i kon una normalizasyón i ke no es menester ke el ladino seiga o tenga los atributos de otras linguas soi-disant modernas para ke seiga konsiderada una lingua propria. ... No veigo deké aprovar de ser komo otras linguas kuando no es komo otra lingua [I think ... that the diasporic and pluralistic and diverse, and extraterritorial, nature of Ladino does not correspond to any standardisation or normalisation, and that there is no need for Ladino to be or to have the attributes of other so-called modern languages to be seen as a proper language. ... I do not see why it should try to be like other languages when it is not like any other language].

Teacher 9, however, stated that he preferred one written standard form for the language, based on the *Aki Yerushalayim* orthography, without explaining why he preferred a certain orthographic standard rather than keeping a variety of traditional spelling systems.

### 5.3. Teacher’s need for further Ladino teaching

Many of the expressed needs for future Ladino revitalisation are, quite naturally, directly or indirectly related to the expressed challenges presented in the previous section. Some needs are related to teachers’ working conditions. Others concern questions about language standardisation, the access to textbooks and other teaching resources, and access to venues where the language can be used. Finally, the teachers mentioned needs concerning professional development as language teachers.

### 5.3.1. *Students and stable teaching conditions*

Teachers 2 and 3 mentioned the need for more students to enable further courses in the language. Teacher 3 said: “No tengo menester de otra koza, solamente [elevos] *interesados*” [I don’t need anything else, only (students who are) *interested*]. She explained that she had had hundreds of students with varying degrees of commitment, when she had offered courses free of charge. Lately, she had started offering courses for a tuition fee. New students still arrive continuously, albeit in smaller numbers, but showing greater commitment compared to before. However, the teachers do not only need an influx of students; they also require stable positions as teachers. Teacher 3 clarified that it would be beneficial if Ladino teachers could get paid in order to give courses for free to more people: “Sería muy bueno, por egzemplo, ke los maestros aresivieran su paga, de la parte de una universitá o de una institusyón, i pudieran ofreser los cursos de baldes a la mayoría de la djente” [It would be very good, for instance, if the teachers got paid, from a university or an institution, and could offer courses for free to a majority of people].

These stances may seem contradictory at first, but the need for universities or other institutions to secure Ladino teaching by financing teachers was also reflected in the interview with Teacher 6, who currently teaches for free. He said that he felt no need for himself to get paid for his efforts, but that he did not consider this a sustainable solution for the future of Ladino teaching: “no kreo ke puede continuar ansina” [I don’t think it can go on like this]. Teacher 6 emphasised that future teachers need to be able to make a living out of their teaching. In the same vein, Teacher 9 talked about the importance of creating stable teaching posts for Ladino teachers and researchers at universities or within the *Autoridad Nasionala del Ladino* as a way to secure future Ladino teaching.

### 5.3.2. *Language proficiency certificates*

A topic partially related to teachers’ opportunities to find stable teaching posts in academia or elsewhere concerned the possible establishment of some kind of official certificate of Ladino language proficiency (comparable, for instance, to the *DELE Spanish Diplomas*<sup>10</sup> based on the proficiency levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*<sup>11</sup>). Such a certificate could possibly be managed by an official body like the *Autoridad Nasionala del Ladino*, who would, then, organise standardised language tests and issue the certificates.

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<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.dele.org>.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions>.



Here, too, views among the interviewed teachers were quite disparate. Some of the teachers had never thought of such a thing before, or, in the case of Teacher 8, presented no specific, personal views on the question. Teachers 1, 3, and 4 conceded that a language certificate might be a good idea, as they believed that an official document stating a person's Ladino proficiency could help raising the language's status. Teacher 3 pointed out that a certificate could also be useful for prospective future Ladino teachers seeking a position within academia, adding that it could possibly be a prerequisite for accessing a Ladino teacher formation course, if such a course was to be implemented.

On the other hand, Teacher 8 commented that he was aware of divergent views among other Ladino activists on official language certificates, and Teacher 9 saw such "proyectos institucionales de normalización i estandarización" [institutional projects of normalisation and standardisation] as incompatible with the diasporic, differentiated and extraterritorial nature of Ladino. This shows, once more, that different views on the nature of the language and different ideologies regarding language revitalisation affect the teachers' ideas on how to teach, revitalise, or preserve the language.

### 5.3.3. *Updated resources for teaching and learning, and an updated vocabulary*

Nine out of ten teachers mentioned the dearth of updated resources for teaching, or difficulties to get access to texts to use in their classes. Teacher 6 expressed a need for further digitisation of archival media, such as newspapers published in Ladino, to ease the retrieval of historic texts to be used in teaching. Seven teachers (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9) talked about the need for new textbooks, in printed as well as digital formats. Among them, Teacher 4 explained that a textbook may be a good support for teachers in general, and for new teachers in particular, as it may help them to design a new course and, even, to strengthen their courage to start teaching the language. Talking about Ladino textbooks, Teacher 5 commented that the existing ones are becoming quite dated, and that she would like to see new resources adapted to younger learners' preferences: "Estamos en 2022. Los elevos tyenen otra manera ... nesesitan ser mas interactivos, i el mundo es mucho mas rapido" [We're in 2022. The students have another way of ... they need to be more interactive, and the world is much faster]. This view was also expressed by Teacher 2, who said: "si keres ke ambezemos a los mansevos, devemos azer kozas en el internet i en chikos pedasos" [if you want to teach young people, we have to do things on the Internet and in small bits].

Teacher 9 pointed out that prospective Ladino learners may not always have the opportunity to find a teacher. With this in mind, apart from traditional resources to be used in teaching, he also mentioned specifically the need to develop "productos para ke la djente puedan ambezarsen el ladino sin menester de profesor" [resources for people to be able to

learn Ladino without the need for a teacher]. This would be particularly useful for a language as Ladino where there is a shortage of teachers and for which there so far exist no official language teachers' training courses. According to Teacher 9, one part of creating such resources could consist in simplifying some of the older, existing textbooks, which he considered too complicated and possibly demotivating for some students.

All of the interviewed teachers taught Latin script, based on the *Aki Yerushalayim* orthography, but, when discussing needs for future teaching, five of them (3, 5, 6, 8, and 9) also mentioned the need to teach how to read Rashi and Solitreo scripts. Teacher 5 explained this need by saying: "porke la kultura sefaradí fina el sekolo vente está eskrita en rashi" [because the Sephardic culture, up till the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is written in Rashi]. Teachers 6, 8, and 9 talked about the need to train new Ladino speakers in reading the old scripts, and Teacher 8 particularly stressed the need to create further resources for learning Solitreo. For Teacher 9, teaching Rashi and Solitreo was seen as "un djesto de-kolonial" [a de-colonising gesture], connecting the language to its historical origin. Teachers 8 and 9 emphasised that teaching Rashi and Solitreo is important not only for future research, but also for being able to help the Sephardic community, where the great majority have lost the ability to read documents left by older relatives. Thus, additional resources to learn the different scripts are also needed.

Teachers 1, 2, and 8 talked about the need for new words in Ladino, specifying that the language lacks an updated, contemporary vocabulary. Teacher 1, a mother tongue speaker of Ladino, said: "No tenemos bastante biervos, porke la lingua mia era de kaza, de ... kozas simples" [We don't have enough words, because mine was a language of the home, of ... simple things]. In the same vein, Teacher 2 claimed that: "Ay palabras ke m'estan dando inyervos, ke no ay el ekivalente en djudeo-espanyol. Komo traduzes la palabra *dude*?" [There are words that get on my nerves, that don't have an equivalent in Judaeo-Spanish. How do you translate the word *dude*?].

Closely related to this issue is the need for new or improved Ladino dictionaries, a necessity mentioned by teachers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 8. Two of the teachers specified that they wanted to see online dictionaries,<sup>12</sup> and Teacher 4 said that she saw a need for a dictionary specifically designed for beginner learners. Teacher 7 also mentioned the need for an accessible Ladino grammar and a book on Ladino pragmatics.

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<sup>12</sup> Some Ladino dictionaries are, indeed, available online. The most complete is the Avner Peretz Ladino-Hebrew online dictionary (<http://folkmasa.org/milon/pmilonh.htm>). As for printed dictionaries, there are a handful (e.g., de Tolédo et al., 2021; Kohen & Kohen-Gordon, 2000; Nehama, 2003; Perahya, 2012; Perahya & Perahya, 1998), of varying exactitude. One problem concerning the existing dictionaries is their varying quality and the fact that one ideally needs to speak Hebrew, Turkish, French, and English to be able to make use of them all.

#### 5.3.4. *Venues for learning and for using the language*

Teachers 5 and 10 talked about the importance of making Ladino visible in schools. Teacher 5 mentioned that this should be done in Israeli schools, as a way to raise the level of awareness about Ladino as a part of the Israeli cultural heritage. Likewise, Teacher 10 wanted to include lessons about Jewish history and language in Spanish schools, as a way to raise consciousness about an oft-forgotten part of the country's history.

To create new generations of mother tongue speakers, Teachers 1 and 7 mentioned the need for Ladino preschools ("mestras") or schools ("eskolas") where young children may learn the language, at least for one or a few hours a week. Teacher 7 said that the only place where this may still be possible is Istanbul, considering the fact that the city still has a Sephardic community of a certain size, or, perhaps, in some Sephardic communities in Israel; "ama está muy *skeptiko*" [but I am very *sceptical* about it].

Teacher 3 also expressed a need not only for schools where children can learn Ladino, but also for a greater number of courses for adult learners, in more countries around the world, and adapted to learners' different mother tongues, for instance with textbooks and other resources available in different languages. However, for this to become reality, Teacher 3 believed that Ladino activists "need to provide places where there is a need to use the language",<sup>13</sup> that is, places where Ladino *can* be used and *must* be used, also outside of educational contexts. This was an idea shared by Teachers 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, and 9. Teacher 3 continued: "Me parese ke para ke la lingua tenga un avenir, tenemos ke dar espasyos ande la lingua se pueda uzar" [I believe that for the language to have a future, we have to create spaces where the language can be used]. Such a place would ideally be physical, a part of the geography, but Teacher 3 also acknowledged that the Internet can provide and already *is* providing venues where the language is spoken and must be spoken by people who want to participate, "komo una shena avierta" [like an open stage] where Ladino speakers can engage more actively and less formally in spoken conversation. She pointed out that platforms enabling these "open stages", such as Zoom, come with a cost and that someone has to pay for them. She would like to see a university, or some other academic institution help the community out with this. Ideally, the *Autoridad Nasionala de Ladino* and/or the *Akademia Nasionala de Ladino* could help facilitating the infrastructure needed for this kind of solutions.

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<sup>13</sup> "Me parese ke tenemos ke dar lugares ande esto sea menester de uzar."

### 5.3.5. Teachers' pedagogical development

The necessity to reach and teach people (that is, in order to foster new Ladino speakers) does not only concern a need to find more students, as mentioned above, but also a need to find new teachers. Currently, there are no courses aimed at becoming a Ladino teacher, or offering training in language teaching methodologies for already active Ladino teachers. Teacher 3 underlined that, in order to open Ladino schools or to be able to offer Ladino classes in already existing schools, there is a need for courses on language teaching methodologies for already active, or future teachers. She said: “me parese ke ay tantos cursos oy ke no tienen una didaktika profesionala” [it seems to me that there are many courses today that do not have a professional pedagogical approach]. This was echoed by Teacher 5, who wanted to see financial support for individuals who want to become Ladino teachers, as well as language education research projects focused on Ladino teaching and learning. To accomplish this, Teacher 5 wished for “un komité pedagójiko” [a pedagogic committee], perhaps under the auspices of the *Akademia Nasionala del Ladino*.

In lieu of official teacher training courses, Teachers 3, 4, and 5 proposed online meetings for active Ladino teachers to exchange experiences, discuss pedagogical ideas, share resources and tips for teaching, and so forth. Teacher 3 said:

Me plazería ke tuvieramos un luguar ande los maestros pudíamos konoseremos, avlar kada uno kon otro, kualo estás aziendo, ke te reushió kon la djente, ke les plaze a los elevos, kenes se ambezan mas o menos o deshan pasar el tiempo...? Esto sería una koza interesante, komo una espesie di *simposio* de maestros *no* maestros de ladino. [I would like for us to have a place where the teachers could get to know each other, to speak to one another, what are you doing, what went well for you with people, what do the students like, which ones are learning more or less or are just there to while away the time...? This would be an interesting thing, like a kind of symposium for teachers *not* (trained as) teachers in Ladino.]

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The results presented in the previous section showed some common concerns or thoughts about current and future Ladino teaching, as well as diverging views on the topic. Common challenges and needs expressed by the teachers concerned issues related to students, teachers, and the language itself, and to the availability of updated textbooks and other resources for teaching.

Varying language backgrounds or proficiencies presented challenges in mixed groups, especially with students who speak Castilian Spanish, and Hebrew, respectively. Students as well as inexperienced teachers may feel insecure about speaking Ladino; for the teachers, this was true not only among new speakers, but also to some extent among mother tongue

speakers of Ladino, due to years of not using the language actively. Engaging learners in online conversations with mother tongue speakers was mentioned as a fruitful way forward for developing oral skills, and for developing a sense of belonging to the Ladino speaking community.

Questions about language standardisation, language testing and how to reflect language diversity in classes proved somewhat controversial. These were issues where the interviewed teachers disagreed most with each other. Some of them adhered more closely to ideologies of authenticity, wanting to safeguard the language from foreign (especially Castilian Spanish) elements, and/or emphasising the need to include all dialects in classes. Others, rather, expressed views closer to ideologies of anonymity (for both concepts, cf. Dołowy-Rybińska and Hornsby, 2021), stating a need to use a standardised language form in classes, generally based upon the Istanbul variety of Ladino.

Depending on how they are enacted in language revitalisation activities, discrepancies in views on language variation may be valuable for preserving Ladino's multi-faceted nature, but, one could argue, may also prove counter-productive if they risk depreciating the teaching of some variety/varieties at the expense of others, or if they hinder necessary neologisms and other changes typical of a living language.

Discussions about language normativity also touched upon the desire of certain teachers to establish an official Ladino proficiency test and certificate. An official certificate of Ladino proficiency was seen by some participants as a means to raise the language's status, and possibly to enhance chances of finding a teaching position within academia. To others, a certificate was incompatible with Ladino's diverse nature.

Regardless of stances on language diversity or normativity, one may wonder what will happen with Ladino's dialectal variation in the future. Many Ladino learners already participate in classes of more than one teacher and encounter different language varieties. The learners themselves come with different linguistic backgrounds, which may influence their spoken Ladino. It is not implausible that Ladino learners will mix traits of several dialects, and eventually create a new type of Ladino (cf. Zuckermann, 2020, about language change in revitalisation processes.) This does not in itself necessarily constitute a problem, but Ladino teachers and (other) activists may need to be aware of it. If they wish to promote or preserve any specific dialectal variety of the language, more dialectal specific courses and textbooks may be needed in the future.

Many Ladino revitalisation activities are, today, performed on a non-profit, grassroots level. Even if this was not an issue to some teachers, others emphasised the need for secure, paid teacher positions at universities or within other institutions. A few teachers mentioned the need to open preschools or schools for children. For this to happen, a long-term, financial

support will surely also be needed. Considering the diasporic nature of the language, and of the world-wide Sephardic community, online solutions will surely play an important role for this to take place. Ideally, programmes to support families who want to reclaim Ladino as a heritage language would also be beneficial (cf. Hinton, 2010).

To facilitate further teaching and learning, the teachers, almost unanimously, wished for new and/or updated textbooks, grammars, and other resources for teaching, adapted to learners' different mother tongues and to today's students' preferences. Some of the teachers also called for an updated Ladino vocabulary, reflecting the modern world. This was closely related to the expressed need to give learners opportunities to use the language in contexts outside classes, to show them that the language is usable for contemporary purposes.

Ladino is currently being taught both by individuals trained as teachers (in foreign languages as well as in other subjects), and by persons with no teacher training. Hinton (2010) talks about the necessity of training persons involved in language revitalisation in language teaching theories and methods. Establishing a Ladino teacher training programme would, perhaps, be ideal for the future supply of teachers, but it is not very plausible, given the small number of Ladino speakers. Since there is no official Ladino teacher training programme, a more viable solution, mentioned by a few of the interviewees, would be providing online teacher development courses or symposia focusing on language education methodologies and theories. Such initiatives may already exist, but the study shows that they are not known by or available to all the teachers. As an outcome of the present study, the researcher proposes to work for the establishment of a series of such symposia together with members of the Sephardic community.

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# Spanish and Ladino Versions of The Song of Songs

## Las versiones del Cantar de los Cantares en español y en ladino

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#### Abstract

The biblical Song of Songs has undergone numerous translations into Spanish and Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) since the Middle Ages. While some translations exclusively feature the original biblical text, others also incorporate translations of the Aramaic interpretations found in *Midrash Shir Hashirim*. A comparison of these translations highlights a distinction in orthography between medieval and post-medieval renditions. The former are exclusively rendered in Latin letters, whereas the latter are presented in either Hebrew or Latin script. Medieval, and pre-17th century Ladino translations, encompass solely the biblical renderings, whereas post-medieval translations, dating from the 17th century onwards, encompass the translations of both the biblical text and the Aramaic interpretations. This paper specifically examines and contrasts the first three verses of the initial chapter, analyzing translations from three medieval sources and six post-medieval sources. The observed variations in these translations can be attributed to factors such as orthographic conventions, chronological influences, and the geographical locations of publication. Through these comparative analyses, it becomes evident that Ladino translations of biblical texts tend to adhere more closely to the original Hebrew source and maintain a stricter fidelity to established norms when compared to translations of the Aramaic texts.

**Keywords:** The Song of Songs; Ladino; Spanish; Hebrew; Aramaic; translations.

#### Resumen

El Cantar de los Cantares bíblico ha sido traducido al español y al judeoespañol (ladino) en numerosas ocasiones desde la Edad Media. Mientras que algunas traducciones presentan exclusivamente el texto bíblico original, otras también incluyen traducciones de las interpretaciones arameas del *Midrash Shir Hashirim*. La comparación de estas traducciones revela que la ortografía distingue entre las traducciones medievales y las posteriores a la Edad Media: las primeras están escritas exclusivamente en letras latinas; las segundas se imprimen en letra hebrea o latina. Las traducciones medievales y las sefardíes realizadas antes del siglo XVII incluyen únicamente las traducciones bíblicas, mientras que las traducciones posteriores a la Edad Media, a partir del siglo XVII en adelante, abarcan tanto el texto bíblico como las traducciones de las interpretaciones arameas. Este artículo examina y contrasta específicamente los tres primeros versículos del primer capítulo, analizando traducciones de tres fuentes medievales y seis fuentes posteriores a la Edad Media. Las variaciones observadas en estas traducciones pueden atribuirse a factores como las convenciones ortográficas, las influencias cronológicas y las ubicaciones geográficas de publicación. A través de estos análisis comparativos, queda claro que las traducciones ladinas de textos bíblicos tienden a adherirse más fielmente al texto hebreo original y mantienen una fidelidad más estricta a las normas establecidas en comparación con las traducciones de los textos arameos.

**Palabras clave:** El Cantar de los Cantares; ladino; español; hebreo; arameo; traducción.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Song of Songs (*Shir Hashirim*) is one of the five scrolls (*megilot*) traditionally read during Passover (Pesach) to demonstrate the connection between the people of Israel and God after the Exodus from Egypt. In Sephardic Ladino-speaking communities, it is read immediately after completing the Haggadah. However, in various Jewish communities it is read at different times. Ashkenazi communities read it on Shabbat during Pesach, while Italian and Yemenite read it on the seventh day of Passover after *Mincha*. In many cases, Jews read it on the eve of Shabbat or in the *Arvit* prayer of the Shabbat during counting the *Omer* between Pesach and Shavuot.

The *peshat* interpretation of the Song of Songs, which reads the text as presented, portrays the affection between a man and a woman. However, the *derash* interpretation, as seen by Jewish sages, views it as an allegorical composition symbolizing the deep bond between God and the people of Israel. This significant consideration led to the inclusion of the Song of Songs in the biblical canon. The allegoric interpretation was formulated in Aramaic during the era of the Geonim (roughly the 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century) and was subsequently incorporated into the established traditional text<sup>1</sup>.

The Song of Songs has been published numerous times in Hebrew with the Aramaic interpretation. It has also been translated into many Jewish and non-Jewish languages. In this paper I will focus on the Spanish and Ladino translations of the biblical Hebrew text and its Aramaic interpretation, exploring the linguistic variations and their sources, such as the time, location, and the linguistic background of the publishers. The Aramaic translation into Ladino was added to the biblical texts only during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, so my research is based on medieval and post-medieval translations of the biblical text, and on the later translations of the Aramaic text.

*Biblias romanceadas* is the term used to describe Bible translations from the Middle Ages in Spain<sup>2</sup>. These translations were primarily preserved in manuscripts, many of which were found in monasteries and other locations starting from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Numerous manuscripts were incomplete and did not always contain all the books and chapters of the Bible. Some of these translations were directly derived from the Hebrew Bible, giving them a more “Jewish” character. In contrast, others, often referred to as “Christian” translations, were based on the Latin Vulgate, which was itself partially influenced by the Greek

<sup>1</sup> See for instance Jerusalmi, 1993: vii-xl; Kimelman, 1980; Stern 2013; Shinan and Zakovich, 2020:7-30; Schoenfeld, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Good surveys and descriptions of the medieval biblical translations appear in Morreale, 1960; Lazar, 2000: iv-xvii; Pueyo Mena, 2008: 194-211; Pueyo Mena, 2023, and the bibliographies there.

Septuagint. Moreover, these translations exhibited variations regarding the inclusion of the New Testament alongside the Old Testament. Even among those based on the Hebrew Bible, the order of the books did not always adhere to the traditional Hebrew sequence.

Ladino translations of the Bible began to appear in print after the Expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, and most of these early publications used Hebrew letters. Initially, individual books were printed, such as Daniel around 1515, Psalms around 1545, the complete Pentateuch in 1547, which included both Ladino and Judeo-Greek translations, and various single books with Ladino translations. However, it wasn't until 1739-1745 that the entire Bible, with a comprehensive Ladino translation, was published by Rabbi Abraham Asa in Hebrew letters. Prior to this publication, earlier editions of the whole Hebrew Bible also included Ladino translations of specific words in Ladino<sup>3</sup>. Notably, the Song of Songs, being a beloved text, was published multiple times with Ladino translations during this period<sup>4</sup>.

The entire Bible was fully translated into Ladino in Latin letters in Ferrara in 1553 and later in Amsterdam, based on the Ferrara Bible, albeit with minor modifications. The Ferrara Bible was published without the Hebrew text, aligning with the medieval tradition of Bible translation. In fact, many discussions concerning the translations of the aforementioned Bible translations regarded the Ferrara Bible as a follower of this medieval tradition. This translation was made available in both Jewish and Christian versions<sup>5</sup>, with some slight variations among them<sup>6</sup>. The Jewish version was dedicated to Doña Gracia and signed by Yom Tov Atias and Abraham Usque, while the Christian version was dedicated to Don Hércule da Este al duque and signed by Jerónimo de Vargas and Duarte Pinel (the Christian names of the former translators). The Ferrara Bible in both versions is believed to have been authored by *anusim* (*ex-conversos*) who returned to Judaism. The ensuing discussion pertains to the Jewish version.

For my analysis, I have selected three medieval and six post-medieval biblical translations. The medieval Bible translations that have their roots in the Hebrew Bible include E3 and E4, both of which are preserved in the library of the Escorial Monastery. These two manuscripts are widely recognized as the most closely related versions to the post-medieval Ladino translations. In addition, I have incorporated the Alba Bible, which

<sup>3</sup> See Bunis, 1994; Alfonso, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> An exhaustive descriptive list of all the Ladino biblical translations can be found in Cohen, 2021: 37-58.

<sup>5</sup> See Hassán and Berenguer Amador, 1995; Pueyo Mena, 2008, 2023; Fellous-Rozenblat, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> One of the differences stems from the interpretation of the Hebrew word *álmā* in Jesaias 7:14, translated in the Jewish version as *moça* [mosa] 'young woman', and as *virgen* 'virgin' in the Christian one. See Orfali, 1995: 232.

was translated by Rabbi Moshe Arragel (AR)<sup>7</sup>. All three of these manuscripts are written in Latin characters and were sourced from the *Medieval Biblical Corpus*<sup>8</sup>. These three medieval manuscripts present the biblical text without the Aramaic interpretation<sup>9</sup>.

In this study, the post-medieval examples of the Song of Songs comprise two translations into Ladino written in Latin letters and four written in Hebrew letters. The Ferrara Bible from 1553 (F) is written in Latin letters and does not include the Aramaic interpretation. Conversely, the Amsterdam translation from 1664 (A), also in Latin letters, incorporates Ladino translations for both the biblical verses and their accompanying Aramaic interpretations<sup>10</sup>.

The remaining Ladino translations, which are written using Hebrew letters, include both the translation of biblical verses and the Aramaic translations. These translations are from Constantinople in 1774 (C), Venice in 1778 (V), Salonika in 1876 (S), and Livorno in 1926 (L)<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. LADINO TRANSLATIONS OF BIBLICAL HEBREW

For this discussion, I have chosen to analyze the first three verses of the Song of Songs. The Hebrew and English translations are presented here for all three biblical verses<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> See Lazar, 1995: ix-xxxvii, Pueyo Mena, 2008: 197-206.

<sup>8</sup> See *Corpus Biblia Medieval*, 2008-, retrieved during March-May 2023.

<sup>9</sup> After conducting this research, it was brought to my attention, that Pueyo Mena (2008; 2023: 227-229, 233-235, 239), and Pueyo Mena (2023: 215, 224, 226) included some Ladino variations of the first chapter of the Song of Songs from various sources. His findings only partly overlap with mine.

<sup>10</sup> Pueyo Mena (2008: 210-215) describes the texts and brings the translations of the biblical verses of the first chapter of the Song of Songs in Ferrara 1553 the variations in Amsterdam 1646, 1726, and 1762; and Amsterdam 1712, and the Ladino translation of the Aramaic interpretation from Amsterdam, 1712.

<sup>11</sup> See details of the texts in the Reference list below. Earlier versions from Salonika included Ladino *Cantar de los Cantares* between 1568-1572, but without the Aramaic interpretation, see Pueyo Mena, 2023: 218, 228; Cohen, 2021: 39-40.

<sup>12</sup> For ease of comparison, I have transcribed into Latin letters the Ladino translations using Hebrew characters. In the discussion I will use the standard spelling of Spanish. I have ignored minor differences such as adjuncts of preposition like *de los ~ delos*, *de su ~ desu*, and differences in spellings such as *s~z*, *b~v*, *i~j* and *u~v* which are common in these texts. The letter *gimel* with a diacritic represents Spanish *ch*, *g* or *j*. To indicate the last ones, I use *ğ* or *ĵ* respectively. The letter *š* represents Hebrew *shin*, *x* in medieval texts.

## 2.1. שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לְשֹׁלֹמֹה

(Šīr ha-ššīrīm 'āšer li-Šəloṃo)

"The song of songs, which is Solomon's".<sup>13</sup>

E3: Canto de los cantos de ssalamon

E4: Cantar de los cantares de salamon

AR: --- (Cantico de los canticos que a Salamon)<sup>14</sup>

F: Cantico de los canticos, que a Selomoh

A: Cantar de los cantares que á Selomoh

C: Cantar de los cantares que a Šelomo

V: Cantar de los cantares que a Šelomo

S: Cantar de los cantares que a Šelomo

L: Cantar de los cantares que a Šelomo

The name *Šalomo* is pronounced *salamón* in the medieval translations, as in Spanish, whereas all the post-medieval translations use the Hebrew form *Šelomo(h)*. The preposition *de* 'of' is used in the medieval translations before Solomon, except Arragel. All the post-medieval as well as Arragel translate literally *que a* 'that to' reflecting the Hebrew structure *āšer li-(Šalomo)*.

The word *cantar* 'song, sing' is used in the medieval E4 and in all the translations that include the Aramaic translation. E3 uses *canto*, whereas Ferrara and Arragel use *cántico*, all being synonymous.

This brief verse already shows the difference between medieval and post-medieval translations. Ferrara and Arragel deviate from the post-medieval translations with only one feature, the translation of 'song'. Arragel and the post-medieval translations translate the expression *āšer li-* literally in the same way.

## 2.2. יִשָּׂאֲנֵי מִי מִיְּיָיִן מִפִּי טוֹבִים דְּדִידָהּ מִיָּיִן

(Yiššāqenī mi-nnəšīqōt pīhū ki-ṭobīm dode<sup>e</sup>kā mi-yyāyin)

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for thy love is better than wine".

E3: Besase me de los besos de su boca que mejores son sus amores mas que vino

E4: Beseme de los besos de su boca ca mejores son tus amores que el vino

AR: Beseme de los besos de la su boca que mejores son las tus tetas que vino

<sup>13</sup> English translation by King James Version.

<sup>14</sup> The translation of this verse is missing in Arragel, however, before the actual translation, the following words are cited: "*Cántico de los cánticos que a Salamón*", *conviene a saber: que dize que Salamón, profeta seyendo, e faziéndolo en fin de sus días, que este es el mejor de los libros que él fizo* "'Song of the songs that of Salomon", it is convenient to know that it says that Salomon, being a prophet and doing it at the end of his days, that this is the best of the books that he made'. I am grateful to Javier Pueyo Mena for adding this information to me.

- F: Besaseme de besos de su boca, por que mejores tus querencias mas que vino  
 A: Bezaseme de bezos de su boca que mejores tus querencias mas que vino  
 C: Bezaseme de bezos de su boca, que mijores tus querencias mas que vino  
 V: Bezaseme de bezos de su boca que mijor tu querencia mas que vino  
 S: Bezaseme de bezos de su boca, que mijores tus querencias mas que vino  
 L: Besaseme de bezos de su boca, que mehores tus querencias mas que vino

Only E4 and Arragel differ from the rest of the texts in the translation of *yiššāqenī* 'let him kiss me' (*beseme* vs. *besaseme*-*bezaseme*).

The preposition *mi-* in *minnāšīqōt* 'with/ from kisses' is translated in the medieval translations as *de los* 'from the', and it is grammatically correct because it occurs in a definite construct state construction. The post-medieval editions translate the structure literally as *de* 'from', without the definite article.

The Hebrew word *kī* 'that; because' is only interpreted as 'because' in two translations: E4 (*ca*) and F (*por que*). All other translations translate it rigidly as 'that' (*que*).

The Hebrew word *dodeyka* is translated by all the post-medieval translations as *tu(s) querencia(s)* 'your haunts, favorite loves' from the verb *querer* 'love'<sup>15</sup>. The first medieval translations E3 and E4 use *sus/tus amores* 'your loves' in the plural form, and only Arragel interprets this as *tus tetas* 'your breasts', following the Greek Septuagint that reads "μαστοί σου" (*mastoi sou*), and the Vulgate: *ubera tua* both meaning 'your breasts'<sup>16</sup>. This might be a misreading of *dodeyka* 'your.m love' as *dādeyka* 'your.m breasts', although the meaning does not fit in this context, because it is addressed to a male.

E3 uses *mas que* 'more than' for the translation of the second occurrence of Hebrew *mi-*, like all the post-medieval translations, whereas E4 uses *que el* and Arragel *que* without the word *mas* indicating 'more'.

### 2.3. לְיַחַ שְׁמֵינֶיךָ טוֹבִים שְׁמֵן תּוֹרֵךְ שְׁמֵךְ עַל־כֵּן עֲלָמוֹת אֶהְבֹּךָ

(Ləreʿaḥ šəmāneykā ṭōbīm šemen tūraq šəmeḵkā 'al-ken 'ālāmōt 'āhebūkā)

'Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee'.

E3: Al loor de.los azeytes los buenos azeyte fue vaziado en.tu nonbre por ende las moças te amaron

<sup>15</sup> Only Venice deviates from the other translations in using the singular form *tu querencia* rather than *tus querencias*.

<sup>16</sup> Among the other medieval translations, E6/E8 and GE also translate *las tus tetas*, close to the Greek and Latin translations. See *Corpus Biblia Medieval*, 2008-.

E4: El olor de tus vnguentos buenos vnguento vaziadizo es el tu nonbre por eso las donzellas te amaron

AR: del olor de los tus suaues vnguentos olio es vaziado el tu nonbre por tanto las mançebas te amaron

F: Por olor de tus olios buenos, {como} olio vaziado tu nombre, por tanto moças te amaron

A: A olor de tus azeytes buenos, azeyte fue vaziado tu nombre, por tanto moças te amaron

C: A guezmo de tus azeites buenos, azeite fue vaziaada tu nombre, por tanto mancevas te amaron

V: A olor de tus azeites buenos como azeite fue vaziaada tu fama, por tanto mancebas te amaron

S: A guezmo de tus azeites buenas, azeite fue vaziaada tu nombre, por tanto mancebas te amaron

L: A olor de tus azeites buenos, como azeite que fue vaziado tu fama por tanto mosas te amaron

The preposition *la-* 'to, for' is translated into *a-* 'to' by the post-medieval translations except for Ferrara which chooses *por* 'for', while the medieval translations vary: *al* 'to the' in E3, *el* 'the' in F4, and *del* 'of the' in Arragel.

The Hebrew word *reʿaḥ* 'fragrance, smell' is translated as *güezmo* only in Constantinople and Salonica; all the other translations use *olor* (which is misspelled in E3).

The word *šəməneʿkā* 'your ointments' is translated as *tus azeites* 'your oils' by the post-medieval translations, except for Ferrara which uses *tus olios* 'your oils'<sup>17</sup>; E3 uses *azeites* as well, but instead of *tus* 'your' it has *los* 'the'. Two medieval translations use *ungüentos* 'ointment', E4 and Arragel.

The Hebrew adjective *ṭōbīm* 'good.pl' is typically translated as the adjective *bueno* in all the translations except for Arragel, who uses *suaves* 'smooth'. However, most of the translations follow the Hebrew word order, placing the adjective after the noun. Arragel, on the other hand, places it before the noun: *suaves unguentos*.

Among the post-medieval translations, Salonica is the only one that uses the feminine form *buenas* instead of *buenos*. However, this does not represent a significant phenomenon compared to the other examples presented above.

The expression *šəmen tūraq* 'ointment poured forth' is translated in the following ways: *azeite fue vaziado* (E3, Amsterdam, Constantinople, Venice, Salonica), *ungüento vaciadizo* (E4), *olio es vaziado* (Arragel), *{como} olio vaziado* (Ferrara), *azeite que fue vaziado* (Livorno).

<sup>17</sup> *Olio* is a lesser used word in Spanish referring especially to olive oil, *óleo* in Modern Spanish.



Šamek̄ā ‘your name’ is translated as *tu nombre* by most versions, except for Livorno and Venice that use *tu fama* ‘your fame’. However, E3 adds *en* ‘in’ in front of *tu nombre*, E4 and Arragel have *el tu nombre*, and E4 also adds the copulative verb *es* in front of this expression.

The conjunct *‘al-ken* ‘therefore’ is translated as *por ende* in E3, by *por eso* in E4, and by *por tanto* in all the other translations (Arragel and all the post-medieval translations).

Finally, the word *‘ālāmōt* ‘maidens’ is translated in the following ways: *moças* (E3, Ferrara, Amsterdam, Livorno), *mancebas* (Arragel, Constantinople, Venice, Salonika), and *doncellas* (E4), all referring to ‘young girls, virgins’.

When summing up the varieties found in these three biblical verses, it is clear that the post-medieval translations resemble each other much more than the medieval ones, although the word *nombre* ‘name’ is common to both medieval and post-medieval translations other than for Venice and Livorno. Moreover, most of the variations exist in the medieval translations.

The medieval manuscript E4 departs in most of the linguistic aspects discussed so far. Only in the translation of *cantar* ‘song’ in 1, *olor* ‘smell’, *buenos* ‘good’, and *nombre* in 3 does it resemble most of the post-medieval translations.

Arragel deviates from the other translations in nine features, one common to all the medieval translations, *de los* in 2 instead of *de* in all the others. In the translation of *beseme* ‘kiss me’ in 2 and in *ungüentos* ‘ointments’ one time in 3 it resembles E4. In the translation of *olio* ‘oil’ it resembles Ferrara in 3. In the other cases it is unique: *tetas* ‘breasts’ in 2, and *es vaziado* ‘poured forth’ in 3. It resembles the post-medieval translations in the translation of *que* in 2, and *olor*, *por tanto* in 3, and in *mancebas* it resembles Constantinople, Venice, and Salonika.

E3 seems to be the closest translation to the post-medieval ones: in *besaseme* ‘kiss me’ and *que* ‘that’ in 2, in *olor* ‘smell’, in *aceite* ×2 ‘ointment’, in *fue vaziado* ‘poured’, *moças* ‘maidens’ and *nombre* ‘name’ in 3. It deviates from the others in *de* ‘of’ in 1 (=E4), in *de los* mentioned above (=E4, Arragel), and *amores* ‘love’ in 2 (=E4), and in *en* ‘in’ and *por ende* ‘therefore’ in 3.

Although Ferrara is a post-medieval translation, it is unique in the following cases: it uses *cántico* ‘song’ in 1 like Arragel but unlike the others, it interprets Hebrew *ki* as *por que* ‘because’ in 2, and it uses twice the noun *olio* ‘oil, ointment’ and *vaziado* ‘poured’ without the preceding *fue* ‘was’ in 3.

The medieval translations were clearly done by individuals who translated the texts quite freely. This is the reason for the many variations found in them. Ferrara was printed in 1553, very close to the time of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. The publishers Yom Tob Atias and Abraham Usque followed the Ladino calque oral tradition of translating

liturgical texts but being converted Jews (*anusim*), who had adopted standard Spanish to hide their Jewish origins they retained some of the Spanish vocabulary rather than the Judeo-Spanish one (e.g., *cántico*, *olio*).

The remaining post-medieval translations show similarities with three exceptions: Constantinople and Salonika translate the word *reʿaḥ* ‘smell’ in 3 as *güezmo*, a common Judeo-Spanish word, while all other translations use the more common Spanish word *olor*. Venice and Livorno interpret *šamekā* ‘your name’ as *tu fama* ‘your fame’ instead of *tu nombre* ‘your name’. In addition, Ferrara, Amsterdam, and Livorno translate ‘maidens’ as *moças*, like E3, instead of *mancebas*.

These deviations appear to be influenced by the translators’ locations. Constantinople and Salonika represent the eastern hemisphere of Judeo-Spanish speaking communities, while Ferrara, Amsterdam, Livorno, and Venice reflect the western type of translations, which is closer to Iberian Spanish<sup>18</sup>.

In Livorno’s translation, it is noteworthy that the letter *het* is used (מיחור <meḥor>) in the Spanish word *mejor* ‘better’. This choice reflects the standard pronunciation of the Spanish *jota*, which in medieval times was pronounced [ʒ]. All the other Hebrew script translations used *gimel* with a diacritic to represent the sound [ʒ], which was retained in the Judeo-Spanish speaking communities. The use of *het* in the Livorno’s translation indicates the influence of Modern Spanish on the translator’s choice (and see more examples below).

### 3. LADINO TRANSLATIONS OF ARAMAIC INTERPRETATION

The Ladino translations of the Aramaic interpretation exhibit a tendency to adhere to the traditional method of calque translation commonly used for liturgical texts. In the biblical texts, one could observe indications of an eastern and western division in certain instances. Are these distinctions also reflected in the Ladino translations of the Aramaic interpretations? Specifically, it will be investigated whether the translations from Amsterdam, Venice, and Livorno share similarities with each other, while the translations from Constantinople and Salonika demonstrate similarities between themselves. Furthermore, it is worth considering the potential influence of the use of Latin letters explicitly in the Amsterdam translation.

The complete Aramaic translated text into Ladino is provided for the second and third verses while for the first verse, I have included only the explanation of the first song due to

<sup>18</sup> The division between eastern and western Ladino translations is attested in the Bible and in other studies, see Benabu, 1985; Schwarzwald, 1989: 74-96; Schwarzwald, 2008: 17-30; Pueyo Mena, 2023: 213-214.

the extensive interpretation that covers all ten songs and their historical significance<sup>19</sup>. The Ladino of the Aramaic translations of these three verses are listed in the Appendix<sup>20</sup>. Because of the length of the texts, I will only discuss here the variations, as presented in Table. 1.

Table 1: The variation in the Ladino translations of the Aramaic first three verses.

GLOSS	A	V	C	S	L
prophet	propheta	profeta	profeta	<b>porfeta</b>	profeta
spirit	espírito	espírito	<b>esprito</b>	<b>esprito</b>	espíritu
prophecy	propheta	profezia	profezia	<b>porfetizia</b>	profezia
before	delante	delante	<b>delantre</b>	<b>delantre</b>	delante
this world	<b>el mundo este</b>	el mundo el este	el mundo el este	el mundo el este	el mundo el este
at the time	<b>en tiempo que</b>	en ora que	en ora que	<b>en tiempo que</b>	en ora que
said	dixo	dišo	dišo	dišo	<b>diho</b>
Sabbath day	día del Sabat, día de Sabath	<b>el dia de šabat,</b> día del šabat	<b>el dia de šabat,</b> día del šabat	dia de el šabat, día de šabat	<b>el dia de šabat,</b> día del šabat
blessed	<b>bendito</b>	bendicho	bendicho	bindicho	<b>bendito</b>
six	<b>seys</b>	seš	seš	seš	<b>seis</b>
(and) affection	<b>avantajadamente</b>	---	---	<b>y avabtajada mente</b>	---
miracles	<b>milagros</b>	maravillas	maravillas	maravillas	maravillas
good signs	<b>señales buenas</b>	señales las buenas	señales las buenas	señales las buenas	<b>señales los buenos</b>
chosen	escogido	<b>escuchado</b> <sup>21</sup> 'heard'	escoğido	escojido	<b>escoñido</b>
anointment	<b>uncion</b>	untacion	untacion	untacion	untacion
kings' heads	<b>cabezas de los reyes</b>	cabeza de reyes	cabezas de reyes	cabeza de reyes	cabezas de reyes
priests	<b>sacerdotes</b>	kohanim	kohanim	kohanim	<b>sacerdotes</b>
pious people	justos	ğustos	ğustos	ğustos	<b>ħustos</b>
path	<b>de camino</b>	sinderos	senderos	sinderos	senderos
the coming world	el mundo que viene	el mundo que viene	el mundo que viene	el mundo <b>el</b> que viene	el mundo que viene

<sup>19</sup> The first song relates to Adam singing for the Sabbath. The second is about Moses and the Israelites singing while crossing the Red Sea; the third when the Israelites received the water well; the fourth when Moses died; the fifth when Joshua was in Gibeon; the seventh when Barak and Deborah won the war against Sisera; the eighth is from David's song; the ninth relates to King Solomon; the tenth is sung by the Jews who remained in exile.

<sup>20</sup> Pueyo Mena (2008: 215) cites some of the translations of verses 1 and 2 from Amsterdam 1712. See the comparison to the 1712 version in the Appendix.

<sup>21</sup> The word is written this way: *עֲשׂוּחָדוּ* with the vowel *u* after the *qof* and a *kamats* under the *gimel*, which must be read *escuchado*. It might be a typo in this version. In similar translation from Venice 1695 (Bragadin Printhouse), the word is *escoğido*, as in all the other versions.

Amsterdam is unique in the addition or deletion of the definite article in three cases (a, c, e) and in lexical varieties in three others (b, d, f):

- a. *el mundo este* ‘this world’ in 1; the definite article is not duplicated before *este*, unlike the other translation.
- b. *milagros* ‘miracles’ in 3; all the other translations use *maravillas*.
- c. *señales buenas* ‘good signs’ in 3, where all the other translations added the definite article *las* before *buenas* (*buenos* in Livorno)
- d. *unción* ‘anointment’ in 3; all the other translations use *untación*. Both are Spanish words.
- e. *cabezas de los reyes* ‘kings’ heads’ in 3: the definite article *los* is added before *reyes* ‘kings’; it is missing in the other translations.
- f. *de camino* ‘path’ in 3 translates the Aramaic word *’orħa*; Constantinople and Livorno translate *senderos*, whereas Salonica and Venecia translate *sinderos*.

In Salonica’s translation, there is a unique occurrence of *porfeta* ‘prophet’ and *porfetizía* ‘prophecy’ in 1. These forms are known in spoken Judeo-Spanish for the metathesis of the vowel next to *pr*<sup>22</sup>. The form *porfetizía* is derived from the verb *profetizar*, which is synonymous with *profetar*, from which all other translations derived *profecía*.

Livorno is exceptional in the use of the masculine forms in ‘good signs’: *señales los buenos*, while the others (except Amsterdam, see above) use the feminine forms (*señales [las] buenas*). It is also unique in the use of *het* reflecting Modern Spanish, rather than *gimel* with a diacritic or *šin* in all the Hebrew script versions, and *x* [=š] and *j* or *g* [=ž] in Amsterdam (*diħo* in 1, *escohido* and *ħustos* in 3; cf. discussion above).

In all the other cases certain versions share some translations:

Amsterdam and Salonica share two translations:

- a. *en tiempo que* ‘in time that’ in 1, while all the others use *en ora que* (lit: in hour that).
- b. The addition of the word *avantajadamente* ‘affection’ in 2, with the addition of *y* in Venice, which is missing in all the other translations.

Amsterdam and Livorno share three unique features which show the influence of Modern Spanish: *bendito* ‘blessed’ and *seys/seis* ‘six’ in 2, and *sacerdotes* ‘priests’ in 3. All other

<sup>22</sup> See Zamora Vicente, 1985: 358-359.

translations use the Judeo-Spanish forms: *bendicho*<sup>23</sup>, *seš* and the Judeo-Spanish Hebrew integrated word *kohanim*.

The Aramaic expression *yoma de-šabta* ‘day of Sabbath’ occurs twice in 1. Venice, Constantinople, and Livorno share the same translation: first *el dia de šabat* and then *dia del šabat*, while Amsterdam and Salonica translate them as *dia de el šabat* and *dia de šabat*. It looks like a stylistic variation.

Constantinople and Salonica share two features which are common to spoken Judeo-Spanish: *esprito* ‘spirit’ and *delantre* ‘before’ in 1. All the other translations use the Spanish equivalent *espíritu*<sup>24</sup> and *delante*.

Upon reviewing the comparisons made thus far, it becomes evident that the Amsterdam translation, written in the Latin script, stands out as exceptional in comparison to the others. It employs three special lexical items (*milagros*, *unción*, *camino*), exhibits a freer translation style compared to the others, particularly in the use of definite articles, and shows lexical resemblance to the later translation from Livorno using Spanish words (*seis*, *bendito*, *sacerdotes*) rather than the more commonly used Judeo-Spanish equivalents (*seš*, *bendicho*, *kohanim*). Like the case of Ferrara discussed earlier, the Amsterdam version was produced by ex-conversos, whose knowledge of Judeo-Spanish was limited, leading them to follow Spanish norms. This explains the significant divergence from the other translations in Hebrew script.

The late Livorno translation also shows variations from the other translations in the spelling of *het* and the choice of *bendito*, *seis*, and *sacerdotes* which reflect Modern Spanish. The target readers of the Livorno print house were the Spanish communities in North Africa, the former *Ḥeketia* speakers, who since the 19<sup>th</sup> century gradually adopted Modern Spanish. They kept the traditional text but with modifications that fit Modern Spanish. This explains the variations found in this translation.

The Salonica translation shows prominent features that reflect spoken Judeo-Spanish more than the other translations: metathesis in the words for ‘prophet’ and ‘prophecy’: *porfeta*, *porfetizía*. In the use of *esprito* and *delantre* it shares the Judeo-Spanish use as detected in Constantinople as well, the other eastern translation. Its free version appears in the use of *en tiempo de*, like Amsterdam, unlike the other translations that have *en hora de*.

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<sup>23</sup> *Bindicho* in Salonica.

<sup>24</sup> *Espiritu* in Livorno.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The comparison of the Ladino translations of the biblical Hebrew verses and the Aramaic interpretations reveals that there is greater variation among the latter compared to the former. It appears that the translators adopted a stricter approach when translating the biblical text, adhering more closely to its rigid structure. However, when it came to the Aramaic interpretation, the translators allowed themselves more flexibility, resulting in slight deviations from the strict biblical translations. This suggests a more lenient attitude towards the Aramaic interpretation in terms of translation choices.

The Ladino translations from Hebrew of the first three biblical verses demonstrate significant differences between medieval and post-medieval translations. It is important to consider the time in which these translations were written. Earlier translations retain old linguistic features, while more modern ones adapt to both modern Spanish and Judeo-Spanish developments.

Additionally, the location of the translator plays a significant role. Among the post-medieval translations, similarities can be observed between the western Amsterdam and Livorno, and the eastern translations from Constantinople and Salonica. Venice falls somewhere in the middle, displaying most of the Ladino eastern features, except for the translation of *fama* 'fame' instead of *nombre* 'name', which is like the Livorno translation<sup>25</sup>. It is known that Venice was populated with three Jewish communities: The Italian original inhabitants of the city, the ex-*Converso* community, and the Judeo-Spanish speaking community that emigrated from the east. Its translation reveals both Eastern and western features.

These findings highlight the significance of orthography in determining the nature of the translation. Both medieval translations and post-medieval translations from Ferrara and Amsterdam were written using Latin letters. This choice of orthography allows the translators to adhere to more Spanish-like standards in their translations. On the other hand, the use of Hebrew letters in the translation brought the translators closer to the oral word-for-word translation, as observed in both the Hebrew and Aramaic texts being rendered into Ladino.

The Ladino translations of the Aramaic interpretations of the same verses further support the significance of orthography, time of publication, and location. The Ladino translation in Latin script from Amsterdam is largely distinct from the Hebrew script

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<sup>25</sup> The Venice translation was printed in Pua's print shop. Pua's family originated in the Ottoman Empire, and although he published in Italian cities, most of its tradition was eastern despite the location. See Yaari, 1958: 323-419.



translations mentioned earlier. Despite being relatively old, it generally aligns with the western tradition seen in the late Livorno translation.

Constantinople and Salonica exhibit characteristics of later oral Judeo-Spanish tradition. The Venice Ladino version closely resemble the eastern translations of the Aramaic texts<sup>26</sup>.

The study of Ladino translations is inherently intricate, evident in the variations present in both the translations of biblical verses and the interpretation of Aramaic. Despite these variations, the Ladino essence in these translations is marked by several overarching features:

1. The translations adhere closely to a literal, word-for-word calque approach.
2. The divine name is consistently represented as » (YY) in Hebrew script texts and as *A* in Latin script texts, both pronounced as *adonay*.
3. Proper names maintain their Hebrew forms, such as *Šelomoh*, *Mošeh*, and *Adam*, as opposed to alternative renderings like *Salamon*, *Moisen* or *Moises*, *Adan*.
4. Jewish concepts remain untranslated, including *Šabat*, *Mišna*, *Talmud*, and even *Kohanim*.
5. Certain words unique to Judeo-Spanish, such as *meldadura*, *muchidumbre* (present in all translations), and *avantajadamente*, *bendicho*, *güezmo* (found in some), are incorporated. These words are exclusive to Sephardic texts.
6. The connective particle is consistently *y*, never *e*<sup>27</sup>.

An examination of the translations from the Song of Songs further underscores these general characteristics found in other Ladino translations.

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<sup>26</sup> I ignore the typo error in using *escuchado* 'heard' instead of *escogido* 'chosen', see note above.

<sup>27</sup> See Schwarzwald, 2010.

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## APPENDIX: LADINO TRANSLATIONS OF THE ARAMAIC TEXTS IN THE VARIOUS TRANSLATIONS

**Amsterdam 1664**<sup>28</sup>

1. Cantares y alabaciones, que **dixo** Selomoh el **Propheta**<sup>1</sup>, Rey de Israël<sup>2</sup> con **espírito**<sup>3</sup> de **profhecía**<sup>4</sup>, delante Señor de todo el mundo. **A.**

Diez cantares, fueron dichos en el mundo este<sup>5</sup>, cantar este, alabado mas que todos ellos, cantar<sup>6</sup> primero, dixo Adam, en tiẽpo que fue perdonado à el su peccado, y vino dia<sup>7</sup> del Sabath, y mamparò<sup>8</sup> sobre el, abriò su boca **y dixo, Psalmo**<sup>9</sup> cantar<sup>10</sup>, para dia de Sabath.

2. Dixo Selomoh el Propheta<sup>11</sup>, **Bendito** su nombre de. **A.** que dió à<sup>12</sup> nos ley<sup>13</sup>, por mano de **Mosseh**<sup>14</sup> **escrivano** grande, escrita sobre dos tablas de piedra, y **seys** ordenes de Misná y Talmud<sup>15</sup> con meldadura, y era hablan con nos<sup>16</sup> fazes con fazes como varon<sup>17</sup> que beza à<sup>18</sup> su compañero, de muchedumbre de querencia, que amó á<sup>18</sup> nos **avantajadamente**, mas que à setenta pueblos.

3. A boz de tus **milagros**, y tus barraganias, q' hiziste à pueblo **de** casa de Israël, se estremecieron todos los pueblos, que oyeron à oyda de tus barraganias, y tus señales buenas, y tu nombre Santo fue oydo en toda la tierra, q' era escogido mas que azeyte de la **vncion**, que era vntanse sobre **cabeças** de **los Reyes** y **Sacerdotes**, y por tanto amaron los justos por andar detras **de camino de** tu bien, por que hereden el mundo el este, y el mundo **que viene**.

**Constantinople 1744**

1. Cantares y alavaciones que dišo Šelomoh el profeta, rey de Yiśrā'el con **esprito** de **profezia delante** Senyor de todo el mundo YY.

Diez cantares fueron dichos en el mundo **el** este; canrar este alavado más que todos ellos.

Cantar primero dišo Adam en **ora** que fue perdonado a el su pecado; vino **el** día de Šabat y mamparó sovre el avrió su boca y dišo salmo cantar para dia **del** Šabat.

2. Dišo Šelomoh el **profeta: bendicho** su nombre de YY que dio a.nos ley por mano de Mošeh el escrivano grande escrita sovre dos tavlas de piedra y seš ordenes de Mišnah y

<sup>28</sup> These are the variations from Amsterdam 1712 according to Pueyo Mena, 2008: 215: 1. profeta; 2. Israel; 3. espíritu; 4. profecía; 5. el este; 6. ellos. Cantar; 7. el día; 8. amparó; 9. dixo psalmo; 10. de cántico; 11. propheta; 12. dio a; 13. Ley; 14. Mosseh,; 15. Gemra; 16. Nos,; 17. Varón; 18. a. The variations are minor and pertain mostly to orthography, stress assignments, and punctuation marks. Definite articles are also marked differently. The only lexical difference is the use of *Gemara* in 1712 instead of *Talmud* in 1664.

Talmud con meldadura y era avlán con nos fases con fases, como varón que beza a su companyero de muchidumbre de querensia, que amó a nos mas que a setenta puevlos.

3. A boz de tus maravilyas, y tus barraganias que **izistes** a puevlo de caza de Yiśrā'el se estremesieron todos los puevlos que olyeron a oída de tus barraganias; y tus senyales **las** buenas, y tu nombre el santo fue oído en toda la tierra que era escoğido, mas que azeite de la untasion que era untánse sovre **cavesas** de reyes y *kohanīm*; y por tanto amaron los ĵustos por andar detras **senderos** de tu bien por que ereden el mundo el este y el mundo que viene.

### Venecia 1778

1. Cantares y alabaciones que dišo Šelomo el profeta rey de Israel con esprito de profezia **delante** Senyor de todo el mundo YY.

Diez cantares fueron dichos enel mundo **el** este cantar este alabado mas que todos ellos.

Cantar primero dišo Adam en **ora** que fue perdonado a el su pecado vino el día de šabat y mamparo sobre el abrió su boca y dišo salmo cantar para dia de šabat.

2. Dišo Šelomo el profeta, **bendicho** su nombre de YY, que dio a nos ley por mano de Moše el escribano grande escrita sobre dos tablas de piedra y seš ordenes de Mišna y Talmud **con** meldadura y era hablan con nos faces con faces, como varon que beza a su companyero, de muchidumbre de querencia, que **amo** a nos, mas que a setenta puevlos.

3. A boz de tus **marabilyas** y tus barraganias que hiziste a pueblo de caza de Israel, se estremesieron todos los puevlos que oyeron a oida de tus barraganias, y tus **senyales las** buenas, y tu nombre el santo, fue oido en toda la tierra que era **escuchado** más que azeite de la untacion que era untanse, sobre cabeça de reyes y **kohanim** por tanto amaron los ĵustos por andar detras **sinderos** de tu bien por que ereden el mundo el este y el mundo que viene.

### Saloniki 1876

1. Cantares y alabaciones que dišo Šelomo el porfeta rey de Israel con esprito de **porfeztizia delante** Sinyor de todo el mundo YY.

Diez cantares, fueron dichos en el mundo **el** este, canrar este alabado mas que todos elyos.

Cantar primero, dišo Adam, en tiempo que fue perdonado a.el su pecado, **bino** dia de el šabat y mamparo **sobre** el, **abrió** su boca i dišo, salmo cantar para dia de šabat.

2. Dišo Šelomo el porfeta, bindicho su nombre de YY, que dio anos ley, por mano de Moše el escrivano grande, escrita sobre dos tablas de piedra, y seš ordenes de Mišna, y Talmud con meldadura, y era ablan con nos faces con faces, como varón que beza a su companyero, de muchidumbre de querencia, que aquerencio anos, y **avantaĵada** mente mas que a setenta pueblos.

3. A boz de tus maraviyas, y tus barraganias, que izites a pueblo caza de Israel, se estremecieron todos los pueblos, que oyeron a oída de tus barraganias, y tus señales **las** buenas, y tu nombre el santo, fue oído en toda la tierra, que era escoĵido, más que aceite de la untacion, que era untanse, sobre **cabesa** de reyes y **kohanim**, y por tanto amaron los ĝustos, por andar detras **sinderos** de tu bien, porque ereden el mundo el este y el mundo **el** que viene.

### Livorno 1929

1. Cantares y alavaciones que **diĥo** Šelomo el **profeta** rey de Israel con **espíritu** de porfezia **delante** Senyor de todo el mundo YY.

Dies cantares fueron dichos en el mundo **el este**. **Canrar** este alabado mas que todos ellos.

Cantar primero, **diĥo** Adam en **ora** que fue perdonado a el su pecado, vino **el** día de šabat y mamparo sobre el abrio su boca y **diĥo** salmo cantar para día **del** šabat.

2. Diĥo Šelomo el **profeta**, bendito su nombre de YY, que dio a nos ley, por mano de Moše el escribano grande, escrita sobre dos tablas de piedra, y **seis** ordenes de Mišna y Talmud, con meldadura, y era ablan con nos faces con faces, como varón que beza a su companyero, de muchidumbre de querencia, **que amo** a nos, mas que a setenta pueblos.

3. A boz de tus marabilyas, y tus barraganias, que izites a pueblo de caza de Israel se estremecieron todos los pueblos que oyeron a oida de tus barraganias, y tus senyales **los** buenos, y tu nombre el santo fue oido en toda la tierra que era **escoĥido** mas que azeite de la untacion que era untanse sobre **cabesas** de reyes y **saserdotes** y por tanto amaron los **ĥustos** por andar detras **senderos** de tu bien por que ereden el mundo el este y el mundo que viene.







# La «Nation Ponentina» de Venecia. Rastros de la presencia de la comunidad sefardí en el Antiguo Cementerio Judío del Lido

The Venice «Nation Ponentina». Marks of the Presence of the Sephardic Community in the Ancient Jewish Cemetery of the Lido

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### Resumen

La comunidad sefardí de Venecia dejó rastros en la cultura, la literatura y las tradiciones del pueblo judío de la Laguna. Esta herencia se encuentra también en el Antiguo Cementerio Judío del Lido: las lápidas sefardíes destacan no solo por su estilo arquitectónico, sino también por la escritura sefardí, los epitafios bilingües y los escudos de armas grabados sobre la piedra. Los sefardíes, que representaron un importante recurso en la economía y en el comercio de la ciudad, instituyeron también una cofradía de caridad, cuyo estatuto bilingüe (portugués-italiano) fue publicado en 1712. El estudio de las lápidas y de las fuentes documentales nos permite reconstruir la vida y los acontecimientos de los miembros de la comunidad y también comprender aspectos importantes de la cultura literaria, artística y lingüística de los judíos sefardíes en la diáspora.

**Palabras clave:** Venecia; Epigrafía judía; Heráldica sefardí; Poesía sepulcral.

### Abstract

The Sephardic community of Venice left its mark on the culture, literature, and traditions of the Jewish people of the Lagoon. This heritage can also be found in the Ancient Jewish Cemetery of the Lido. Sephardic tombstones are notable not only for their architectural style but also for the Sephardi script, the bilingual epitaphs, and the coats of arms engraved on the stone. The Sephardim were a valuable resource in the Venetian economy and commerce. They also founded a charity fraternity, whose statute was published in 1712 in both Portuguese and Italian. The study of tombstones and historical sources helps us reconstruct the lives and events of the community members as well as understand important aspects of the literary, artistic, and linguistic culture of the Sephardic Jews in the diaspora.

**Key words:** Venice, Jewish epigraphy; Jewish heraldry; Funerary poetry.

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## 1. LA GÉNESIS DE LA COMUNIDAD SEFARDÍ EN VENECIA

Los primeros judíos en establecerse en Venecia fueron los de origen italiano y askenazí. Se encuentran testimonios de su presencia a partir del siglo X, pero esta fue esporádica hasta el siglo XIV, cuando, gracias a una concesión de la Serenísima República, un grupo de judíos instaló en la Laguna unas casas de empeño (Luzzatto, 2000: 12). Los bancos judíos eran necesarios para la República para sufragar los gastos de guerra que creaban una presión financiera considerable. Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo, el gobierno trató de limitar su actividad por temor a que los judíos pudieran adquirir demasiado poder económico. Por ello, se alternaban *condotte* a veces favorables y a veces desfavorables con respecto a su residencia en el territorio<sup>1</sup>. A lo largo de los siglos, el número de judíos askenazíes e italianos se incrementó, y se consolidó también la presencia de judíos sefardíes, como consecuencia de la expulsión de 1492. Antes de esta fecha, la presencia de judíos o *conversos* ibéricos era esporádica: generalmente los sefardíes transitaban por la Laguna para sus negocios y después se dirigían hacia el Imperio otomano donde el sultán había facilitado su llegada y su integración, consciente del aporte económico y cultural que podían traer al Imperio (Scazzocchio Sestieri, 1992: 17). La cohesión como comunidad ocurrió con la creación del gueto en 1516. En el área del *Ghetto Nuovo* («Gueto Nuevo»), que se estableció primero, fueron confinados los judíos italo-askenazíes. Más tarde, con un edicto del 2 de junio de 1541, se les concedió también a los levantinos un espacio residencial: el del *Ghetto Vecchio* («Gueto Viejo»), o sea, la antigua fundición (Ravid, 1973: 162-165). A medida que los judíos ponentinos llegaban a la Laguna, las autoridades los incorporaban en el Gueto Viejo junto a los levantinos, con motivo de sus afinidades culturales<sup>2</sup>.

La fecha clave que dio impulso a la primera y masiva inmigración es 1492, el año de la expulsión, cuando numerosas familias de judíos se marcharon de la península ibérica y llegaron a Italia con intención de establecerse allí o detenerse temporalmente en vista de una salida inminente hacia el este (Ravid, 1993: 281). Las ciudades que les dieron refugio fueron principalmente las del centro y del norte como Pisa, Liorna, Roma, Ancona, Ferrara y Venecia (Minervini, 2006: 21). En particular, Ferrara fue un centro importante de acogida de judíos sefardíes gracias a la política de acogida de los ilustrados duques de Este (Roth, 2003: 170). En la ciudad emiliana los sefardíes constituyeron una próspera comunidad, muy

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<sup>1</sup> Las «condotte» eran acuerdos que las autoridades de Venecia estipulaban con los banqueros judíos y que servían para reglamentar sus actividades y su presencia en la Laguna. Según las necesidades de la Serenissima, cada *condotta* podía favorecer o desfavorecer a los judíos y sus negocios. Esta inestabilidad entre las instituciones venecianas y la comunidad judía continuará presente a lo largo de los siglos y caracterizará la presencia de los judíos (tanto askenazíes como sefardíes) en Venecia (Maifreda, 2021: 24-25).

<sup>2</sup> Al contrario, las dos comunidades se diferenciaban bastante a nivel social y económico (Kaplan, 2011: 322).

activa en cuanto al comercio, la artesanía y la cultura (Di Leone Leoni, 1992: 37-38)<sup>3</sup>. Con la devolución de Ferrara al Papa en 1598, los Este se retiraron a sus ducados en el centro de la región. Muchos judíos demostraron fidelidad y agradecimiento a sus señores y los siguieron a Módena y Reggio Emilia, otros se quedaron en Ferrara bajo los Estados Pontificios, y otros buscaron refugio en otras ciudades italianas, entre las cuales cabe destacar Venecia (Perani, 2016: 70).

Sin duda, otra fecha clave es 1497, cuando el rey Manuel I impuso el bautismo y la conversión forzada en Portugal, promoviendo así la emigración de muchos judíos del país. El establecimiento de la Inquisición incrementó las salidas desde Portugal y muchos conversos desembarcaron en la Laguna con el objetivo de volver a abrazar la fe de los padres y revivir los prósperos negocios con los que se habían distinguido en su tierra natal (Kaplan, 2011: 318-319). Este mismo propósito fue lo que persuadió también a los nuevos cristianos que se mudaron a Venecia entre los siglos XVI y XVII desde las ciudades del norte como Hamburgo, Ámsterdam y Amberes, donde se habían instalado después de la expulsión (Roth, 2003: 171; Ruspio, 2007: 65-105).

Durante los siglos XVI y XVII, la población sefardí aumentó exponencialmente. Muchas familias de judíos y de conversos de segunda generación procedentes de España y, sobre todo, de Portugal se dirigieron a Venecia, donde establecieron sus negocios y su residencia. Gracias a la *condotta* de 1589, el gobierno les otorgó ciertos privilegios como la libertad de movimiento, la protección de sus bienes y de sus comercios, y la inmunidad de persecuciones religiosas (Ruspio, 2007: 65; Maifreda, 2021: 25). Por otra parte, puesto que por toda Europa se habían formado comunidades de ponentinos, se constituyó entre ellas una importante y próspera red de relaciones sociales y comerciales. Por lo tanto, a la Serenissima le interesaba que ellos eligiesen Venecia como sede para sus negocios, puesto que esto le serviría para imponer su hegemonía en el Adriático contra los puertos concurrentes de Ancona y Ragusa (Ravid, 1991: 153-155; Ravid, 2018: 127-128)<sup>4</sup>.

La ambigüedad religiosa y los diferentes usos y costumbres de los recién llegados alertaron a cristianos y judíos a la vez, mientras las autoridades oscilaban entre el mantenimiento de una línea de prudente aceptación y la actuación de políticas más severas (Ruspio, 2007: 76). Muchos fueron los conversos implicados en los procesos del tribunal del

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<sup>3</sup> La máxima expresión de la producción cultural de los judíos sefardíes en Ferrara fue la publicación en 1553 de la Biblia española, impresa por el tipógrafo Duarte Pinel (alias Yom-Tov Attias) y traducida por el portugués Jerónimo de Vargas (alias Avraham Usque). Para una bibliografía adicional sobre los sefardíes en Ferrara se recomiendan las publicaciones de Aron di Leone Leoni y Laura Graziani Secchieri (Di Leone Leoni, 2011; Graziani Secchieri, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Ravid habla de *raison d'état* comercial, o sea la puesta en práctica de conductas de tolerancia hacia los mercantes judíos para favorecer sus negocios y, en consecuencia, la economía de la República.

Santo Oficio veneciano, el cual, sin embargo, siempre demostró clemencia y casi nunca dictó penas capitales (Ioly Zorattini, 1992: 118)<sup>5</sup>.

A pesar del recelo con el que eran tratados (Toaff, 1992), los ponentinos desempeñaron un papel fundamental tanto para la Serenissima en términos de comercio y disponibilidad de dinero, como para la comunidad judía misma, porque la llegada de eruditos, filósofos e intelectuales (entre otros, Isaac Abrabanel) hicieron florecer la cultura y las artes dentro del gueto. Expresión de esta opulencia económica y cultural es la sinagoga de rito sefardí, la así llamada *Scola Ponentina*, que es la más grande e imponente de las cinco sinagogas venecianas y que despertaba admiración también entre los coetáneos (Kaplan, 2019: IX-X). Pronto, la Nación Ponentina alcanzó una clara supremacía sobre las otras dos (Roth, 1933: 72-81; Ravid, 1993: 285; Roth, 2003: 172-174).

## 2. LAS LÁPIDAS SEFARDÍES DEL CEMENTERIO JUDÍO DEL LIDO

Uno de los testimonios de esta nueva ola de cambio cultural que interesó al gueto de Venecia con la llegada de los sefardíes se encuentra en el Antiguo Cementerio judío del Lido.

El Antiguo Cementerio judío fue construido en 1386, pero se usó regularmente solo a partir de 1516, el año del establecimiento del gueto. Dentro del muro perimetral hay 1240 lápidas que datan desde el siglo XV hasta mediados del siglo XVIII. A estas, hay que añadir las casi 4000 del cementerio llamado «Nuevo», establecido en 1774, donde se conservan las lápidas más recientes (Soprintendenza, 1999: 35-36; Luzzatto, 2000: 49-59).

Mientras que en otras partes de Italia y Europa los judíos tenían cementerios para uso exclusivo de la comunidad a la que pertenecían<sup>6</sup>, en Venecia los askenazíes, los italianos, los ponentinos y levantinos sefardíes enterraban a sus muertos en el mismo espacio del cementerio, superponiendo las lápidas y colocándolas una al lado de la otra. Por lo tanto, la composición del cementerio refleja la del gueto, donde las comunidades compartían un lugar común y donde eran inevitables intercambios e influencias recíprocas. Sin embargo, las tradiciones sepulcrales eran distintas: las lápidas sefardíes destacan no solo por su estilo

<sup>5</sup> El profesor Ioly Zorattini realizó un importante trabajo de consulta, transcripción y estudio de los procesos del Santo Oficio de Venecia entre los siglos XVI y XVIII. Los resultados fueron publicados entre 1980 y 1999 en una obra en 14 volúmenes (Ioly Zorattini, 1980-1999).

<sup>6</sup> En Italia, los cementerios sefardíes más importantes son los de Ferrara, Liorna y Pisa (Ioly Zorattini, 1986; Spagnuolo, 2021; Luzzatti, 1980; Vivian, 1980, 1981). En Europa se recuerdan los de Ámsterdam y de Altona en Hamburgo (Carsten, 2008).

arquitectónico, sino también por la escritura en caracteres sefardíes, los epitafios bilingües y las armas grabadas sobre las piedras.

Desde un punto de vista arquitectónico, si en la tradición askenazí la lápida tenía que colocarse verticalmente sobre las tumbas, en la tradición sefardí esta tenía que ser tan grande como la sepultura para poder cubrirla. Su forma es rectangular y emula la tapa de un sarcófago (Arnold, 2006: 116)<sup>7</sup>. Las lápidas son colocadas en el suelo<sup>8</sup> y la mayoría de ellas pertenecen a judíos sefardíes, aunque muchas están dedicadas a judíos askenazíes o italianos, que probablemente asimilaron esta tradición, así como las estelas verticales no son inhabituales incluso para los judíos sefardíes. En el cementerio veneciano, que se caracteriza por esta mezcla de diferentes tradiciones funerarias, las lápidas rectangulares aparecen desde mediados del siglo XVII y hoy representan alrededor del 63 % de todas las lápidas existentes. Muchas tienen los bordes decorados con motivos vegetales y sus elementos textuales y decorativos ocupan casi toda la superficie.

La escritura utilizada para grabar los epitafios es la sefardí. Esta escritura se caracteriza por letras con un cuerpo alargado y regular, y trazos sencillos sin elementos decorativos (Yardeni, 2002: 140). En algunos casos los trazos de las letras son más finos y largos, en otros casos son espesos y profundos. La llegada de los sefardíes en Venecia dio lugar a un paso gradual del predominio de la escritura de tipo askenazí a la sefardí, de modo que, desde comienzos del siglo XVII, ya no encontramos ningún epitafio en la escritura askenazí.

## 2.1. Los epitafios

El epitafio hebreo está generalmente grabado en la parte central y es dividido en una parte en prosa, donde se indican los principales datos del difunto y la fecha de la muerte, y una parte en poesía. En la parte inferior de la piedra suele haber un breve texto en portugués o español y, hacia fines del siglo XVII, también en italiano (Arnold, 2006: 119). Esta

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<sup>7</sup> Las excavaciones arqueológicas en el Cerro de la Horca en Toledo han sacado a la luz un cementerio medieval judío compuesto de 107 tumbas fechadas entre los siglos XII y XIII. Más de la mitad de ellas presentan una estructura de «lucillo», mientras que la otra mitad son simples hoyos. En el cementerio de Venecia, al igual que en los otros cementerios judíos de la Edad Moderna, no se encuentran sepulturas tan complejas como los lucillos. Todas ellas son fosas excavadas en la tierra y cerradas con una tapa de sarcófago grabada, más similar a las que se conservan en el Museo Sefardí. Además, en Venecia las sepulturas se dirigen todas hacia Jerusalén, mientras que en Toledo carecen de una orientación precisa (Ruiz Taboada, 2015: 58-61).

<sup>8</sup> A lo largo de los siglos, el cementerio sufrió muchas modificaciones y expropiaciones. Muchas lápidas fueron destruidas, reutilizadas en las construcciones o trasladadas en otros lugares. Más de 400 lápidas, que estaban colocadas al suelo, fueron recuperadas en el curso de las obras de restauración impulsadas por la Dirección General de Bellas Artes de Venecia y fueron fijadas verticalmente a la pared perimetral del cementerio (Luzzatto, 2000: 83-84).



inscripción, en caracteres latinos y números arábigos, muestra el nombre y la fecha de la muerte del difunto. Es una indicación rápida de la persona enterrada, dirigida a todos los que no sabían leer hebreo. En algunos casos, esta segunda parte en la lengua vernácula es muy larga, se encuentra escrita incluso en verso, y a veces, actúa como una traducción (no exactamente fiel) de la parte en hebreo y a veces como su conclusión. Los epitafios bilingües se encuentran principalmente en lápidas de difuntos sefardíes o italianos. Los sefardíes serán los primeros en abandonar el uso del hebreo, el portugués y el español a finales del siglo XVIII a favor de epitafios enteramente en italiano, cosa que los askenazíes harán solo un siglo después.

En el cementerio veneciano tenemos variedades de géneros y estilos, con soluciones estilísticas provenientes de la literatura italiana (como el uso de rimas continuas, cruzadas y abrazadas, del verso endecasílabo y de las formas poéticas de la sextina y de la octava) e integraciones propias de la literatura judía (Malkiel, 2013: 18-37).

En los epitafios de los judíos sefardíes, en particular, es posible identificar un elemento poético propio de la poesía clásica andaluza de los siglos XI-XII. O sea, la subdivisión del texto en versos dobles compuestos por un primer hemistiquio que se denomina *delet* («puerta, entrada») y un segundo dicho *soger* («el que cierra»). Normalmente, solo riman los *sogerim*, pero no es raro encontrar epitafios donde los *deletot* también riman entre sí (Sárraga y Sárraga, 2005: 338). Los versos dobles se distinguen gracias a un recurso gráfico en el que los dos hemistiquios están escritos uno debajo del otro y el segundo tiene una sangría. Estas características textuales no son exclusivas de los epitafios venecianos, también se encuentran en los epitafios de los cementerios sefardíes de Hamburgo y Ámsterdam (Sárraga y Sárraga, 2000, 2002, 2005). Examinando los epitafios de los epígrafes judíos medievales hallados en España y la antología de epitafios publicada por Samuel David Luzzatto en 1841<sup>9</sup>, podemos intentar hacer unas comparaciones. En los epitafios ibéricos, al igual que en las inscripciones venecianas, encontramos estructuras poéticas bastante complejas y versos en rima (principalmente continua). Sin embargo, mientras que las composiciones venecianas rara vez superan los 6/8 versos, en los textos españoles se pueden encontrar hasta 20/30 versos escritos horizontalmente sobre cada lado de la pirámide truncada (Cantera Burgos y Millás Vallicrosa, 1956: 36-167). Es evidente, por lo tanto, una evolución de la poesía funeraria en la diáspora, que se caracteriza por la influencia de la literatura del país de acogida.

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<sup>9</sup> Se trata de los epitafios de 76 epígrafes toledanos hoy perdidos que un anónimo viajero en Toledo copió en el siglo XVI. Su manuscrito llegó a la Biblioteca de Turín, pero poco después fue destruido en un incendio. Afortunadamente, el intelectual Joseph Almanzi lo había precedentemente copiado y había donado sus transcripciones a Luzzatto, que las publicó en 1841 bajo el título *Abné Zikkarón* (Cantera Burgos y Millás Vallicrosa, 1956: 36-37).

A continuación, se proponen algunos ejemplos de lápidas sefardíes del cementerio del Lido a los que se añade la trascripción y la traducción de los epitafios.

### 2.1.1. *Ḥezeqiyah Gavri'el Nunes Carvaglio*

El primer ejemplo de epitafio sefardí es el de Ḥezeqiyah Gavri'el Nunes Carvaglio (Fig. 1). Se nota claramente la división del epitafio en tres partes: una primera parte en prosa con el nombre del difunto y su patronímico; una segunda parte en verso; y la tercera parte, en portugués, que cita la misma información que la primera parte. La poesía es una cuarteta en rima abrazada con versos dobles, o sea partidos en *sogerim* y en *deletot*. Solo los *sogerim* riman entre sí con versos que terminan en *-mim* y *-taf*.

Fig. 1: Lápida de Ḥezeqiyah Gavri'el Nunes Carvaglio (m. 1720).



מצ"ק  
כמה"ר חזקיה  
גבריאל בכ"ר יעקב נונים  
קארבאלינו נב"ת

פה נקבר איש  
ישר תמים  
יום ט' ניסן  
בשנת הת"ף  
מלאך מות  
גופו חטף  
אך רוחו ע'  
לה למרומים

AQUI YAZ HIQUIYA  
GABRIEL DE YACOB NUNES  
CARVALHO FALECEO  
EN 9 NISAN 5480

Traducción del epitafio hebreo:

Piedra sepulcral / del honrado señor Ḥezeqiyah / Gavri'el hijo del honrado señor Ya'aqov Nunes / Carvaglio, que su alma descanse en el jardín de las delicias. / Aquí fue enterrado un hombre / recto e íntegro. / El día 9 de Nisan / en el año 5480 / el ángel de la muerte / raptó su cuerpo, / pero su alma / ascendió al cielo.

### 2.1.2. Gloria y Baruk Alfarin

Entre las lápidas bilingües más importantes se encuentran las de los cónyuges Gloria y Baruk Alfarin, que murieron respectivamente en 1685 y 1681. La lápida de la mujer ha llegado intacta (Fig. 2), mientras que la del marido carece de la parte inferior (Fig. 3), de la que queda un pequeño fragmento (Fig. 4). La primera parte en prosa es diferente para los dos fallecidos, mientras que la parte en poesía hebrea y portuguesa es idéntica. En este caso, se releva que tanto el texto hebreo como el texto portugués se componen de cinco versos con el mismo esquema de rimas (ABBAB). Los versos del texto hebreo terminan en *-ni* y *-mah*, los del texto portugués en *-da* y *-í*.

En lo que concierne al significado, el texto portugués se configura como una traducción del texto hebreo reajustada ligeramente para mantener el esquema de rimas. En ambos casos, es el difunto quien nos cuenta en primera persona su destino: se trata de un módulo narrativo utilizado frecuentemente en los epitafios hebreos, con el cual el difunto intenta alentar a sus familiares, para que no estén tristes por su muerte (Andreatta, 2008: 14-15). El gusto por las descripciones macabras del proceso de descomposición del cuerpo, que en este epitafio se imagina enterrado en un hoyo lleno de gusanos y es contrapuesto a la pureza del alma que ya alcanzado Dios en el mundo eterno, se debe a la influencia de la cultura barroca (Andreatta, 2007: 41).

Figs. 2-4: Lápidas de Gloria (m. 1685) y Baruk (m. 1681) Alfarin.



מצבת  
קבורת אשה זקני וחשוב'  
כבודה וצנועי' מי' גלורייאה  
אלפארין תנצב"ה נפטר'  
בשלישי בשבת ט"ו תמוז  
שנת התמ"ה

עבר יומי כלו שני  
נשמתי שבה למקומה  
אם גוי פה במקום רמה  
רוחי עם אל לפנים לפני  
עד שובי מזאת האדמה

ACCUMPLI CON MI IORNADA  
I HE BUELTO A DONDE SALI  
L'ALMA ME DEXO AQUI  
DIOS LA TENGA EN SU MORADA  
QUE ELLA BOLVERA POR MI

Traducción del texto hebreo<sup>10</sup>:

Piedra / sepulcral de la mujer anciana, importante / honrada, humilde, señora Gloria / Alfarin. *Sea su alma ligada en el haz de los vivientes* (Cfr. 1 Samuel, 25:29). Muerta / el tercer día, el 15 de Tammuz / del año 5445.

Mi día pasó, mis años desvanecieron, / mi alma volvió a su lugar. / Si mi cuerpo muerto está aquí, en un lugar de gusanos, / mi espíritu está con Dios, santo de los santos / hasta que volverá de esta tierra.

### 2.1.3. *Ya'aqov Vega*

La lápida que se describe a continuación perteneció a Ya'aqov Vega, que murió en 1673. Inicialmente colocada en el Cementerio Viejo, ahora se conserva en el Cementerio Nuevo. En este caso no es una lápida rectangular, sino de tipo piramidal. Esta forma arquitectónica también es típica de las sepulturas sefardíes<sup>11</sup> y a menudo se encuentra, por ejemplo, en los cementerios de Pisa y Liorna (Malkiel, 2013: 132-133). En el cementerio veneciano no es frecuente, solo se encuentran unos pocos ejemplares. El epitafio hebreo (Fig. 5), grabado en un lado, se compone de dos estrofas de seis versos colocadas horizontalmente. La primera estrofa presenta el esquema ABABCB (los versos terminan en *-tov*; *-qam*; *-niu*) y la segunda estrofa el esquema CECED (los versos terminan en *-niu*; *-el*; *-ko*). El epitafio en portugués (Fig. 6), grabado en el lado opuesto, aparentemente se compone de una sola estrofa. En realidad, se puede identificar una rima interna que forma así dos estrofas con el esquema de rimas ABBA CDDC. Esta vez el contenido no es una traducción del texto hebreo, pero comparte su concepto básico, o sea un elogio de la generosidad y la humanidad del difunto. En particular, la frase «de orfans pobres e cativos foi pai» nos lleva a suponer que el difunto pertenecía a la Cofradía de Rescate de los Esclavos, una asociación instituida en Venecia en el siglo XVII para rescatar a los judíos secuestrados y detenidos en cárceles de toda Europa, sobre todo mercantes sefardíes capturados durante sus navegaciones (Roth, 1928-31: 218-223; Roth, 1949)<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Se propone solamente la traducción de la lápida de la mujer, Gloria Alfarin.

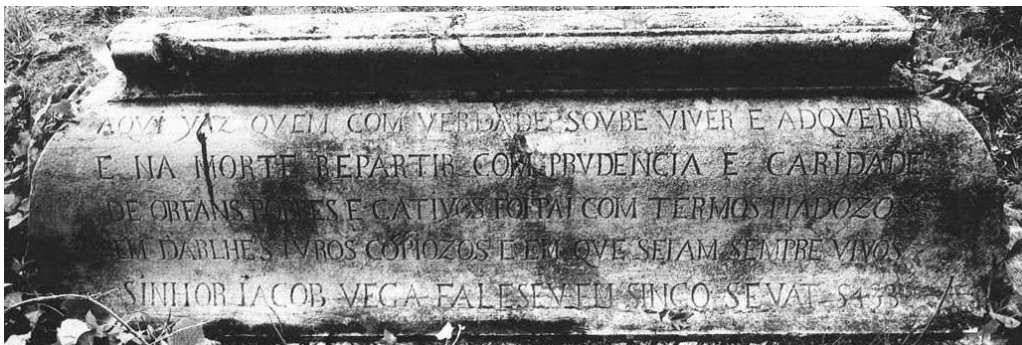
<sup>11</sup> La forma piramidal o trapezoidal, aunque más regular y sencilla que la veneciana, se encuentra también en las sepulturas judías de la España medieval. El ejemplo más importante es lo de las lápidas del cementerio judío de Toledo, ahora conservadas en el Museo Sefardí. (Schwab, 1907: 284-364; Cantera Burgos y Millás Vallicrosa, 1956: 36-167).

<sup>12</sup> La cofradía se ocupaba de recoger el dinero destinado al rescate entre las familias judías de Venecia, y, en caso de situaciones urgentes, también entre las otras comunidades de Europa. El dinero era depositado en dos *caixetas*, una para los prisioneros levantinos y la otra para los prisioneros ponentinos. La gestión del fondo quedaba en las manos de cinco hombres autorizados, los «Deputados dos cautivos» o «Parnassim dos cautivos», constituidos por tres ponentinos y dos levantinos (Roth, 1928-31: 219-222). Roth publicó una lista de los parnassim dos cautivos de Venecia desde 1671 hasta 1711, pero el nombre de Ya'aqov Vega no aparece (Roth, 1949: 32-33). Como murió en 1673, quizás fue Parnassim en los años anteriores a 1671 o quizás fue un simple benefactor.



En el texto se encuentran unas citas bíblicas tiradas de Levítico, Job y Génesis, y un juego de palabras con el apellido del difunto «Vega», que en el epitafio tiene el significado de «y resplandecerá».

Figs. 5-6: Lápida de Ya'aqov Vega (m. 1673)



יום ה' שבט חשך מאור עיניו  
אך עם זכות נפשו כמו בית אל  
זכה וְלִגְלָה אור שביב פניו  
הן עוד לבניו יהיה גואל  
כן יעקב הלך לדרכו  
ויפגעו בו מלאכי האל

ישיש אשר שש לעשות כל טוב  
נדיב אשר על הנדיבות קם  
שוע ושר ישר בלי קטוב  
לא שב אנוש מנו ביד ריקם  
כי הוא אל איש מלא חפניו  
יתן במו לחם ופה נקם

AQUI YAZ QUEM COM VERDADE SOUBE VIVER E ADQUERIR  
E NA MORTE REPARTIR COM PRUDENCIA E CARIDADE  
DE ORFANS POBRES E CATIVOS FOI PAI COM TERMOS PIADOZOS  
EM DARHLES IUROS COPIOZOS E EM QUEM SEIAM SEMPRE VIVOS

SINHOR IACOB VEGA FALECEU EM SINCO SEVAT 5433

Traducción del texto hebreo:

Era un hombre anciano que se alegraba al hacer el bien, / un caritativo que perseveraba en generosidad. / Un hombre importante y un príncipe recto sin derrota. / No volvió a nosotros un hombre mortal con las manos vacías, / porque él dará a todos *sus puños llenos* (Levítico, 16:12) / de su propio pan y aquí se despertará.

El 5 de Shevat se oscureció la luz de sus ojos, / pero con la virtud de su alma, como Ya'aqov en Bet-El, / fue digno y así resplandecerá (Vega) *la centella del fuego* (Job, 18:5) de su cara. / Y entonces para sus hijos llegará el Redentor. / Y mientras *seguía su camino, le salieron al encuentro los ángeles de Dios* (Génesis, 32:2).

#### 2.1.4. Šelomoh Franco d'Almeda<sup>13</sup>

Entre las lápidas con epitafios bilingües es importante mencionar también la que pertenece a Šelomoh Franco d'Almeda, fechada en 1679 (Fig. 7). La lápida de Šelomoh presenta una refinada decoración. Es la única lápida en el cementerio con esculturas antropomórficas en altorrelieve: en la parte superior se encuentra el escudo acompañado por un yelmo y los lambrequines, en el centro y en la parte inferior, cuatro amorcillos abren una cortina que revela el epitafio. La suntuosa decoración de las lápidas es una novedad introducida por los judíos sefardíes. Inicialmente contrastaba con la sobriedad y el rigor de las lápidas italo-askenazíes, pero a fines del siglo XVII será imitada por ellos. El epitafio en hebreo está compuesto por cuatro dísticos en versos pareados que terminan en *-bar*, *-ša'*, *-mo* y *-mim*. El apellido del difunto, Almeda, en este epitafio es descompuesto en un juego de palabras para significar «a su muerte» (v. 6). Lamentablemente, el texto en portugués es hoy casi ilegible.

<sup>13</sup> En las fuentes bibliográficas italianas, como por ejemplo las actas de muerte de los registros de la comunidad judía, este apellido es casi siempre escrito «d'Almeda» con apóstrofo. En la parte en portugués de algunos epitafios se encuentra también «dalmeida», escrito todo junto y con una «i» adicional, o «de Almeida» con la preposición «de» y una «i» adicional. En este artículo se ha preferido utilizar la forma italiana de este apellido, con excepción de algunos nombres que se encuentran en otras fuentes citadas por varios autores (Ruspio, 2007).



Fig. 7: Lápida de Šelomoh Franco d'Almeda (m. 1679)



זה שר ישראל איש בר  
 או"י יר"ח פור נקבר  
 בשנת גלו"ת יצא  
 חפשי מכל נמצא  
 ושלמו לשלמה  
 בא אל מיתתה כשמו  
 היה איש חי תמים  
 זקן בא בימים

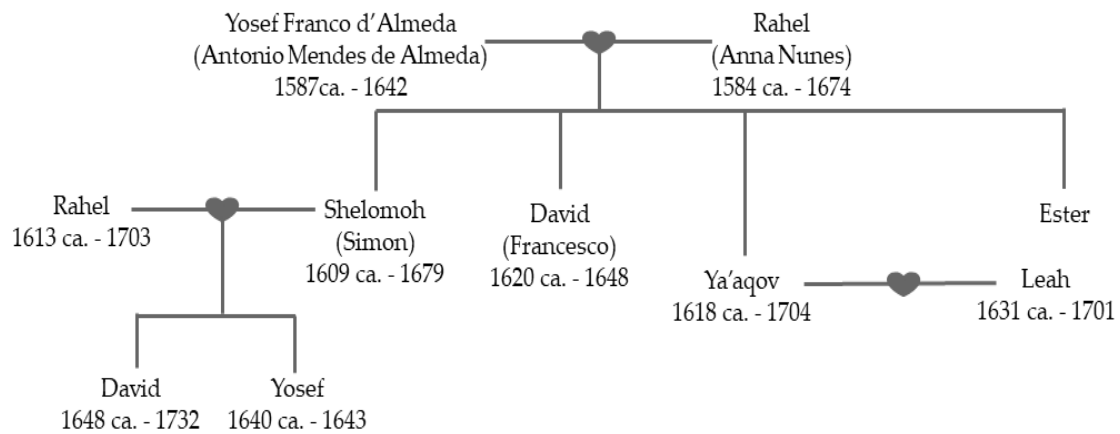
EN ESTA SEPULTURA DESCANSA EL CUERPO  
 DE SALAMON FRANCO DALMEIDA DESPUES  
 DE [AVER CAMINADO LA IORNADA] DE[...]  
 [...] SU VIDA [...]

Traducción del texto hebreo:

Este es un príncipe de Israel, un hombre puro, / fue sepultado el 17 del mes de las suertes, / en el año de su exilio (5439) él se marchó. / Finalmente libre de todo, fue encontrado / y hubo paz para Šelomoh. / Llegó a su muerte (Almeda, como su nombre indica), / un hombre honesto en vida / pero que *era ya viejo, y bien avanzado en años* (Génesis, 24:1; 1 Reyes, 1:1 et al.).

En el Antiguo Cementerio de Venecia se encuentran veinte lápidas dedicadas a los miembros de la familia Franco d'Almeda, y muchas otras se guardan en el Cementerio Nuevo. Los Franco d'Almeda eran originarios de Trancoso, Portugal. En los años veinte del siglo XVII, Yosef Franco d'Almeda (conocido también con el nombre cristiano de Antonio Mendes de Almeida) se mudó con su familia a Madrid y después a Venecia donde se convirtió al judaísmo y donde constituyó una compañía comercial que se impuso en el emporio veneciano por todas las décadas siguientes. Mantuvieron relaciones comerciales con el Magreb, con el Imperio Otomano y con otras compañías de judíos ponentinos y nuevos cristianos diseminadas por toda Europa (Ruspio, 2007: 303-307). El prestigio de esta familia y su riqueza se refleja también en las lápidas, ejemplos excepcionales de opulencia arquitectural y decorativa. A través de una comparación entre los documentos bibliográficos y las lápidas fue posible reconstruir parte del árbol genealógico de la familia (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8: Árbol genealógico de la familia Franco d'Almeda



### 2.1.5. Ester Pappo

En este breve epitafio en prosa fechado en 1578 (Fig. 9), se encuentra una peculiaridad lingüística exclusiva de los epitafios de los judíos sefardíes, o sea la declinación femenina del apellido si la difunta es una mujer. Como se puede apreciar al final del segundo verso, el apellido de la difunta «פאפּו» es escrito «פאפה» con una *he* final que indica el femenino en hebreo. Además, este es el único epitafio del cementerio en el que el día y el mes son expresados según el cómputo cristiano (5 octubre en lugar de 24 Tišrí).

En muchos epitafios de mujeres sefardíes, antes del nombre se encuentra la palabra דונה, que es la transliteración del español «doña».

Fig. 9: Lápida de Ester Pappo (m. 1578)



פה נקברה איש יקרה מרת  
אסתר אשת הנגיד משה פאפה  
ביום א' ה' אוטובר שנת של"ט

Traducción del texto hebreo:

Una mujer querida está enterrada aquí, señora / Ester, esposa del importante Mošeh Pappo / el primer día, el 5 de octubre del año [5]339.

## 2.2. Los escudos heráldicos

Con respecto al aspecto artístico de las lápidas, se exponen a continuación los escudos heráldicos grabados en las piedras. En el cementerio judío de Venecia, los símbolos grabados en las piedras no son solo los de la tradición judía, como las manos de bendición de los Kohen o la jarra con la jofaina de los Levi. Cada familia llevaba su propio escudo de armas, cuyo significado está estrechamente relacionado con el origen y el nombre de la familia. Los judíos sefardíes no entendían el escudo heráldico solo como un medio no verbal de identificación (Malkiel, 2013: 91), sino también como un símbolo de riqueza y nobleza. Por esta razón, el escudo sefardí está decorado con un yelmo, con lambrequines y, a menudo, los emblemas representados no tienen ninguna referencia a la iconografía judía.

Aunque tanto los askenazíes como los italianos inicialmente preferían una iconografía más simple y rigurosa, a partir del siglo XVIII imitarán las prácticas sefardíes. Entre los símbolos más comunes encontramos al león, siempre rampante, a solas o sosteniendo un *lulav*, un lirio, una media luna o un *magen David*. Además de ser un símbolo de fuerza y coraje, también es el emblema de la tribu de Yehudah. Para los judíos sefardíes, sin embargo, adquirió una connotación adicional, o sea un homenaje a las armas del reino de Castilla. Llevar el arma castellana significaba tener un alto estatus social (Friedenberg, 1987: 32). Las familias que adoptaron este símbolo son los Franco, Franco d'Almeda y Naḥman. La familia Uziel tenía también como emblema un león rampante, que sostiene una espada y un libro. El león rampante es un símbolo que esta familia ya llevaba en la Edad Media y esto se evidencia por una matriz de sello cuadrilobulada que ahora se conserva en el Instituto Valencia de Don Juan en Madrid (VDJ 4427) y que data de 1260-1370. El sello representa en el centro un león rampante y cuatro lirios, uno en cada lóbulo. La inscripción alrededor del león indica el nombre del propietario: S MENAHEN O/SILLO, cuyo apellido es una variante de Uziel (Menéndez Pidal y Gómez Pérez, 1987: 112; Friedenberg, 1992: 106)<sup>14</sup>.

Otro símbolo que se refiere al escudo de armas castellano es el de la torre. Las familias que llevaron este escudo de armas fueron los Benšušān, Altaras, Castiel y De Medina. En estos dos últimos casos hablamos de «armas parlantes», es decir, un símbolo cuyo nombre se refiere al apellido del difunto.

Las armas parlantes son en realidad típicas de los emblemas askenazí e italianos, pero a veces encontramos armas parlantes también en el contexto sefardí. Un ejemplo es el escudo con una corona de la familia sefardí Abenatar, que en los epitafios hebreos se escribe  $\gamma$  עטר con el verbo *'atar* que significa precisamente «coronar». Jugar con palabras, imágenes y significados era típico de la mentalidad judía, y, en heráldica, esto se realizó con la creación

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<sup>14</sup> Según Friedenberg (1992: 106), este sello no pertenecería a un judío sino a un converso.

de escudos de armas que, a veces, se configuran como verdaderos enigmas para descifrar (Garel, 1999).

En este sentido, un caso particular es el arpa representada en las lápidas de los miembros de la familia Mugnon. De hecho, es posible que la razón de esta conexión se deba a la asonancia entre el apellido «Mugnon» y la palabra hebrea מנגן (*menagen*), que significa «músico». También es posible que el apellido derive de este término si los miembros habían practicado la profesión de músicos. Otro caso similar es el de la familia Calvo, cuyas lápidas presentan el grabado de la escena bíblica de Números, 13:23, en el que se narra la visita de la tierra de Canaán por los representantes de las tribus de Israel. Como ya había sugerido Luisella Mortara Ottolenghi, es posible que los miembros de esta familia hubieran elegido esta imagen por el nombre de uno de los exploradores del valle, Caleb, que hace asonancia con «Calvo» (Luzzatto, 2000: 305).

Sin embargo, en general, con respecto a los emblemas de los judíos sefardíes, tenemos una multiplicidad de símbolos que no están relacionados con sus nombres y apellidos. De hecho, los judíos de España y Portugal a menudo llevaban los escudos de armas heredados de los padrinos hidalgos que los apadrinaron durante los bautismos y las conversiones forzadas (Roth, 1955; Buonafalce, 2000: 411). Para determinar esta persistencia a lo largo del tiempo, fue fundamental la consulta de dos armoriales guardados en el Archivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo en Lisboa. El primero es el *Livro do Armeiro-Mor*, redactado en 1509 por João do Cró, el heraldo de la corte del rey Manuel I. El segundo es el *Livro da Nobreza y Perfeçam das Armas*, producido entre 1521 y 1541 por el funcionario del rey João III, António Godinho. Entre las familias portuguesas más nobles incluidas en los dos volúmenes, algunas también están presentes en el cementerio de Venecia. Claramente, no se trata de las mismas familias, sino de judíos que adoptaron esos apellidos después de la conversión y que, además del nombre, también conservaron el escudo heráldico correspondiente. Esta comparación es muy interesante porque nos permite saber cuáles fueron los colores originales de las armas, ya que no es posible deducirlos de las lápidas.

El ejemplo más significativo es el de la familia Carvaglio<sup>15</sup>. El escudo de la familia cristiana homónima se encuentra no solo en los dos armoriales antes mencionados, sino incluso en la Sala dos Brasões del Palacio Nacional de Sintra, un hecho que atestigua la importancia de esta casa en la corte real (Braamcamp Freire, 1921: 36). El término portugués *carvalho* significa «roble». Por ende, uno de los escudos tiene un árbol, mientras que otro escudo representa una estrella inscrita en un cuadrilóbulo. La familia judía que lleva este

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<sup>15</sup> Este apellido se encuentra en las fuentes italianas como «Carvaglio» o «Caravaglio». En los textos en portugués de los epitafios se encuentra «Carvalho». También en este caso se prefiere utilizar la forma italiana.

apellido conserva los antiguos escudos de armas heredados en el momento de la conversión. Hay que precisar que, en el Antiguo Cementerio de Lido, los fallecidos de esta familia a menudo aparecen con un doble apellido: Baruk Carvaglio o Nunes Carvaglio. A la primera línea corresponde más frecuentemente el símbolo del árbol desarraigado y a la segunda línea normalmente corresponde el de la estrella inscrita en un cuadrilóbulo (Figs. 10-11). Solo en dos lápidas ambos símbolos están representados en un solo escudo de armas, sin partición, pero con una simple yuxtaposición de las dos imágenes.

Figs. 10-11: El escudo de la familia Nunes Carvaglio grabado sobre la lápida de uno de sus miembros (Yiṣḥaq Nunes Carvaglio) y el mismo escudo representado en el *Livro do Armeiro-Mor*.



(Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Casa Real, Cartório da Nobreza, liv. 19, f. 123r)

Un escudo de armas especialmente llamativo es el relacionado con la Cofradía de Caridad del Talmud Torah, que se encuentra grabado en las lápidas de algunos judíos sefardíes. En el siglo XVIII, dentro de la comunidad judía de Venecia, se establecieron dos cofradías de mutuo socorro, los así llamados «Sovegni» Askenazí y Sefardí. El Sovegno sefardí se estableció en 1712 con la edición del estatuto bilingüe italiano-portugués *Regulação e ordens pella quais se haverà de Governar a חברה עזרת אחים Istituida no anno 5472 no K. K. De Talmud Torah*. El estatuto ilustra las actividades de la cofradía, que tenía la tarea de ayudar a cada miembro en caso de necesidad: aseguraba apoyo moral, espiritual y económico en caso de enfermedad y, en caso de muerte, se encargaba de organizar los procedimientos de preparación del cuerpo y del entierro conforme a los dictados de la ceremonia fúnebre judía. Un mes después de la muerte, el Sovegno comisionaba la piedra sepulcral en la que se grababa el símbolo de la cofradía. En la página 23 del estatuto se puede ver una ilustración del símbolo del Sovegno que debía grabarse sobre las lápidas de los cofrades. El emblema adoptado por la cofradía sefardí es el Nudo de Salomón acompañado por la sigla HEAKKTT (Ḥevrat Ezrat Aḥim Qehillah Qedošah Talmud Torah) (*Regulação*, 1712) (Fig. 12). Este símbolo, que representa un entrelazamiento de líneas diseñadas de tal manera que no se encuentran su principio ni fin, no tiene orígenes judíos, pero fue adoptado por los judíos



sefardíes en el siglo XVIII porque había adquirido un valor mágico (Leite de Vasconcelos, 1918: 265-266; Luzzatto, 2000: 405-406).

Fig. 12: El símbolo de la cofradía de caridad Talmud Torah de la Nación ponentina



Se encuentran también rastros de la actividad de esta cofradía en los registros de los muertos de la comunidad judía de Venecia. En las actas de muerte de sus miembros encontramos al final la expresión «Fa sepelir il Sovegno della nation ponentina», o sea «Hace enterrar la cofradía de la comunidad sefardí». Las actas de muerte de los registros comunitarios de Venecia representan, además, una interesante fuente lingüística. Todas las actas están escritas en italiano, pero en las de los difuntos sefardíes se encuentran a menudo interferencias léxicas y ortográficas con el portugués y el español (Arnold, 2010: 504-505)<sup>16</sup>. Para citar unos ejemplos, en el acta de Yudita Ḥabib (m. 1619) se encuentra el lusismo *molhe* en lugar de *moglie* («mujer») (Registro 1617-1627: 26) y en algunas actas la palabra *circa* («alrededor de») se expresa con *serca* (Registro 1617-1627: 33 et al.), *sercha* (Registro 1627-1653: 14) o *serqua* (Registro 1601-1617: 123 y 131), que imitan la pronunciación portuguesa de «cerca».

### 3. CONCLUSIONES

Los cementerios judíos y sus lápidas son fuentes históricas muy significativas porque nos brindan mucha información sobre la comunidad a la que pertenecen. En Venecia, la cuestión es aún más importante, ya que durante muchos siglos en el gueto coexistieron grupos de judíos con distintos orígenes, cultura y usos lingüísticos. Estas «comunidades dentro de la comunidad» tenían sus propias tradiciones, pero al mismo tiempo se influenciaban mutuamente. Con respecto a la comunidad sefardí en particular, la

<sup>16</sup> Rafael Arnold encuentra las mismas interferencias lingüísticas en muchos testamentos de judíos venecianos (Arnold, 2010: 504-505).



investigación es interesante porque nos permite observar las tradiciones funerarias de los sefardíes en Italia y compararlas con las costumbres de otras comunidades sefardíes en la diáspora, así como con los rituales que se practicaban en la península ibérica antes de la expulsión.

Desde un punto de vista literario, se puede observar cómo la complejidad textual de los epitafios es una característica que permanece en el tiempo. Sin embargo, en Venecia la literatura italiana influyó sobre las estructuras poéticas e introdujo nuevas maneras de tratar el tema de la muerte. Sería interesante ahondar en este tema y comparar los epitafios de los cementerios sefardíes de otros países para determinar si cada comunidad desarrolló sus propios estilos o si persisten características comunes. En cuanto a la arquitectura de las lápidas, se nota cómo la forma originaria de la pirámide truncada que se encuentra en Toledo no es frecuente en Venecia, mientras que en otros cementerios como los del norte Europa o de Toscana se encuentra una forma similar pero más elaborada. Por último, los escudos heráldicos grabados sobre las piedras, que se presentan como verdaderos símbolos identitarios, demuestran el vínculo que los judíos sefardíes deseaban mantener con su pasado.

La Nación ponentina de Venecia, por lo tanto, marcó profundamente la historia del gueto, tanto desde el punto de vista social y económico, como desde el cultural y lingüístico, dejando rastros de su presencia incluso dentro de las paredes del gueto y de su antiguo cementerio.

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# RESEÑAS







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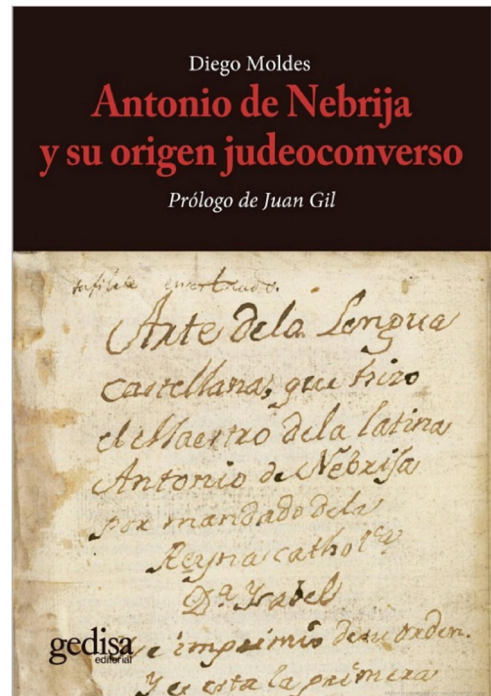
Moldes, Diego. (2023). *Antonio de Nebrija y su origen judeoconverso*. Barcelona: Gedisa [171 pp. ISBN: 978-84-19406-19-4].

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«La tradición es la transmisión del fuego, no la adoración de las cenizas». Esta cita del político, filósofo e historiador Jean Jaurès, con la que Diego Moldes (Doctor en Ciencias de la Información, historiador de cine, escritor y Director de Relaciones Institucionales de la Fundación Nebrija) comienza la obra, no puede resultar metafóricamente más apropiada para el propósito que persigue, y que queda claro ya desde el propio título: demostrar el origen judeoconverso del gramático nacido en Lebrija (desechando, por tanto, su condición de cristiano viejo).

La obra cuenta con un certero prólogo del latinista, presidente de la comisión científica «V Centenario del fallecimiento de Antonio de Nebrija» y académico de la RAE Juan Gil, quien, partidario asimismo del origen judeoconverso de Nebrija, señala que Moldes propone una obra polémica pero al tiempo con tono humilde, «cortés y moderado» (p. 13). No le falta razón al respecto.

El hilo conductor de Moldes, en realidad, podría considerarse (una crítica a) la obra de Pedro Martín Baños –*La pasión de saber. Vida de Antonio de Nebrija*–, una de las máximas autoridades en los estudios nebrisenses, que no comparte la hipótesis del autor que reseñamos. Ha de aclararse que autor y obra son elogiados en muchos otros aspectos por Moldes (por ejemplo, en la relación de Nebrija con la imprenta, en su labor como editor y en cómo fue pionero en los derechos de autor), salvo, y sobre todo, en su origen genealógico,



en el que discrepa de Martín Baños y se alinea con Américo Castro en la hipótesis judeoconversa, aunque Moldes la defiende de forma más documentada, refinada y menos exaltada.

En efecto, Moldes procura demostrar la probable ascendencia familiar judeoconversa de Nebrija basándose en siete aspectos: factores demográficos sociológicos y de alfabetización; la genealogía oculta o inventada: Lebrija; educación y hebraísmo; la relación con la imprenta; la Inquisición; factores psicológicos y culturales de la personalidad y, en último lugar, relaciones con judeoconvertos y con judíos.

No se trata de desmenuzar todos los argumentos esgrimidos (perdería en tal caso buena parte de su sentido la lectura del libro), pero sí resultan reveladoras ciertas ideas: por ejemplo, que los padres de Nebrija eran pequeños terratenientes, es decir, no campesinos de clase baja absoluta ni extremadamente adinerados, hecho que pudo tener consecuencias positivas para la educación de Nebrija (estudiar en Salamanca); o enigmas de especial interés como que Nebrija no explicitara (o, mejor dicho, «ocultara», que, como señala Moldes, es otra forma de mentir) su fecha de nacimiento, que sabemos poco de su educación, lo que se aviene mal con el postulado de un hombre que «consagró su vida a la búsqueda de la verdad» (p. 49); o que ocultaría su ascendencia para poder optar a una beca en Bolonia. Moldes recuerda al respecto la obsesión cristiana por la pureza de sangre en el tiempo que le tocó vivir a Nebrija por el miedo judaizante de los conversos (p. 94) –de hecho, no es casual que a uno de los hijos de Nebrija, Sancho, le exigieran documentos probatorios para poder estudiar en Bolonia–. Moldes aclara al respecto, por un lado, que la Inquisición no nació contra los judíos, sino contra los conversos y, por otro, que tampoco era difícil falsear la genealogía (para lograr el ascenso social). Moldes aporta más pruebas y datos para sustentar su hipótesis: entre ellas, que no hay hebraístas cristianos viejos casados en el XV, que Nebrija sería un judeoconverso temprano (antes de 1449), y, de modo revelador, investiga el interrogante de cómo Nebrija habría aprendido el hebreo. Moldes apunta que tal vez lo hiciera por su cuenta y por tener contacto con personas conocedoras de esta lengua, quizá incluso en su propia casa; una lengua que no llegaría a dominar plenamente, pero que sí conocería de forma oral. Sus padres podrían ser judíos cultos (la cultura, recuerda el autor, aparte de a los judíos, estaba muy limitada en los cristianos, salvo a la aristocracia y al clero). A ello añade que en Lebrija convivirían cristianos, mudéjares, moriscos, judíos y judeoconvertos.

Moldes apunta que el perfil de Nebrija responde a un «converso de manual», que no negó nunca su fe cristiana. Además: «leía la biblia en latín, griego, hebreo y posiblemente en arameo o caldeo, ya en su etapa estudiantil: estaba orientado para un alta carrera eclesiástica, tanto por su formación salmantina como, especialmente, boloñesa» (p. 123);

carrera que abandonaría para formar una familia y tener una extensa prole: entre 7 y 9 hijos (al menos, 5 varones), según las fuentes consultadas. Y muestra, junto a sus luces y méritos académicos (además de los apuntados por Martín Baños, el hecho, por ejemplo de que tras salir absuelto del proceso inquisitorial, reivindicaba la libertad de expresión, algunas sombras o aspectos más controvertidos: su «obsesión» por pasar a la historia, su personalidad altanera, algo prepotente, orgullosa, aduladora de Cisneros, soberbia, insolente, atrevida o audaz. Cualidades que lo vincularían con el concepto hebraico de *ḥuṣpāh* (חֹצְפָה) (p. 114). Con todo, en cuanto a estas similitudes en personalidad con eruditos de origen judío, es consciente Moldes de que solo tienen un relativo valor probatorio.

El autor ameniza con cierto tono de investigación *detectivesca*, formulándose preguntas y llegando a deducciones, por ejemplo, respecto a las dudas sobre las fechas de su nacimiento o de su llegada a Italia. Por razones como esta, la obra, de corta extensión (así lo reconoce el autor), se acerca a un carácter divulgativo. Con frecuencia, Moldes muestra cercanía y simpatía al lector introduciendo un estilo coloquial, a menudo con preguntas a modo de *captatio benevolentiae* para suscitar su interés; aspectos que en absoluto (antes al contrario) son incompatibles con el rigor, como muestra la gran extensión, en su caso, de las citas textuales o notas a pie de página; o la abundante documentación bibliográfica. En este sentido, menciona 73 referencias al final de la obra, pero a las que habría que sumar algunas citadas a pie de página o en el cuerpo del texto (trabajos de especialistas como Norman Roth, Lola Pons, Antonio Villao Frago, Antonio Castillo Gómez, Josiah C. Russell, Isabel Montes Romero-Camacho, H. S. May, Isabel Moyano Andrés, Yitzhak Baer o Antonio Battistella) y webgrafía sobre el Año Nebrija, celebrado en 2022, con diferentes actividades en toda España que conmemoraron el 500 aniversario de su fallecimiento, en las que encuentra todo su sentido la publicación de esta misma monografía.

Destacan en la obra, además, sus catorce exquisitas ilustraciones, que incluyen mapas, tablas de demografía, páginas de algunas de sus obras, la célebre ilustración de su clase de gramática o incluso un curioso estudio anatómico psicológico de su rostro (p. 111). Además, se incorporan cuatro anexos: «¿Quién fue Antonio de Nebrija?», «Lecturas esenciales sobre Nebrija», «Primeras ediciones conocidas de obras de Antonio de Nebrija» (un total de 62 más el *Corpus Biblicum Nebrissense*, según Víctor Pastor) y «Nebrija en Salamanca», anexo este en el que, además de la dedicatoria póstuma al reconocido profesor de la Universidad de Salamanca José Jesús Gómez Asencio, y en el seno de las actividades del V Centenario, comenta el profundo afecto de Nebrija a esta ciudad, donde vivió al menos 23 años. Precisamente en este último anexo, recuerda una idea quizás aún desconocida para el gran público: su *Gramática de la lengua castellana* no tuvo éxito en su momento (no se empezó a reivindicar hasta el siglo XVIII), frente a sus obras para la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del latín, como *Introductiones Latinae*.

Quizá la conclusión de la obra resulte algo breve (apenas dos párrafos), pero queda compensada con un *postscriptum* que se hace eco de la publicación de una obra del propio prologuista, Juan Gil, que ratifica las conexiones judaicas de Nebrija; además de los cuatro anexos a los que ya se ha hecho referencia en el párrafo anterior y que, en conjunto, suponen también un contundente cierre de la monografía.

De igual modo, acaso se eche de menos que hubiera mencionado (siquiera en los anexos) el vínculo de Nebrija, o, mejor, de sus hijos, con América, o un aspecto que el propio Moldes admite no poder abordar en un libro de corta extensión: «organizar mediante una cronología a doble columna los hitos de la imprenta en Europa y contrastarlos con los de las publicaciones impresas en vida de Nebrija y en las décadas más cercanas posteriores a su muerte. Se comprobaría un curioso paralelismo en ambos sentidos» (pp. 92-93), si bien, viéndolo desde otra perspectiva, puede ser un acicate para futuras investigaciones sobre una figura fascinante y enigmática: pongamos por caso, por qué Nebrija no estudió en Sevilla o por qué recurre al hebreo y al arameo para su exégesis bíblica del Antiguo Testamento. Sea como fuere, el libro de Moldes, más allá de su posible origen judeoconverso, ayuda a conocer nuevas facetas de una personalidad del gramático compleja y fascinante a partes iguales.

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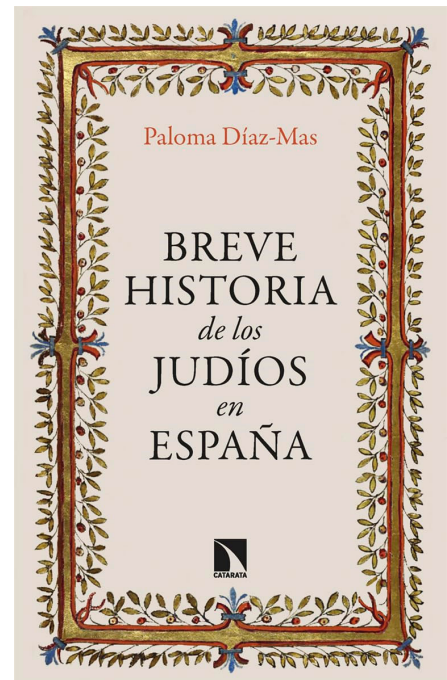


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Díaz-Mas, Paloma. (2023). *Breve historia de los judíos en España*. Madrid: Catarata [221 pp. ISBN 978-84-1352-803-8].

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Responde esta nueva monografía de Paloma Díaz-Mas, catedrática de la Universidad del País Vasco, investigadora del CSIC y académica de la Real Academia Española, a la necesidad de cubrir un vacío dentro de la extensa e inabarcable literatura científica sobre la historia de los judíos en España. Es por esta palpable paradoja por la que era necesario una obra de estas características: una síntesis bien expuesta, ordenada y argumentada, de los principales hitos y contribuciones culturales de la historia de los judíos en la península ibérica, desde sus comienzos hasta la actualidad. La autora pretende así ofrecer al lector interesado un instrumento de referencia básico para saciar su curiosidad o cubrir el desconocimiento de quienes desean profundizar en la cultura judía y en la historia de España. El tono expositivo de la obra, a modo de «ensayo divulgativo» (p. 10), entronca con el espíritu didáctico de otras obras de referencia que se enmarcan dentro de «géneros» tales como la *historia mínima*, *historia global*, *breve relación* o lo que, en el ámbito francófono, responde a colecciones de muy diverso tipo encabezadas por la pregunta *Qu'est-ce-que (c'est)?* y que bien pudiera aplicarse al conjunto de acontecimientos históricos, azarosos y complejos, siempre atrayentes, que conforman la historia de los judíos en nuestro país.



Ninguna de las obras de referencia hasta ahora publicadas alcanza la compleja tarea de síntesis realizada por Paloma Díaz-Mas. Contábamos, por ejemplo, con un paralelo ibérico, *Breve História dos Judeus em Portugal*, de Jorge Martins (2009), cuya perspectiva, a pesar del



título, se centra más bien en la historia contemporánea; o las contribuciones de Isabel Montes Romero-Camacho (2001), *Los judíos en la Edad Media Española*, y Juan Ignacio Pulido Serrano (2003), *Los conversos en España y Portugal*, que siguen una línea divulgativa similar, aunque mucho más acotada en el tiempo. Algo similar ocurre con otras aportaciones de igual interés, pero mucho más especializadas, como las de Joseph Pérez (2005) para la época medieval y moderna –*Los judíos en España*– o las de Danielle Rozenberg (2010) –*La España contemporánea: la cuestión judía*– y Davide Aliberti (2018) –*Sefarad: Una comunidad imaginada (1924-2015)*–, para el periodo más contemporáneo. Y es que una de las mayores cualidades del trabajo de Díaz-Mas consiste en ofrecer una panorámica histórica que alcanza hasta el siglo XXI, rompiendo con ello una práctica habitual entre los especialistas, como es la de sesgar la historia del judaísmo español tomando como eje referencial la fecha de la Expulsión general de los judíos en Castilla y Aragón, en 1492. Lejos de esta simplificación, metodológicamente asumible, Díaz-Mas ha preferido, siguiendo la estela de Joseph Pérez, dar continuidad en el tiempo a una historia que, aunque condicionada por la especificidad y mentalidades propias de cada momento, permite atisbar fenómenos similares de larga duración que permean conceptos y actitudes latentes en todas las épocas, como los contactos culturales, el antisemitismo o los procesos de integración, segregación y de identidad religiosa de esta minoría y que se reavivaron especialmente a partir de finales del siglo XIX.

Encabezado por una dedicatoria en recuerdo de «la primera mujer judía de la que tenemos noticia en España», el libro se estructura en cinco capítulos en los que se recogen cronológicamente –«ya que sin saber en qué orden se desarrollaron los acontecimientos no es posible entender la historia» (p. 11)– los principales hitos y acontecimientos de la historia judía peninsular: desde sus orígenes en época romana y visigoda (Capítulo 1: Los orígenes de la presencia judía, pp. 13-25), hasta su esplendor bajo dominio islámico (Capítulo 2: Los judíos en Al-Ándalus, pp. 27-49), pasando por su polifacética presencia en territorios cristianos (Capítulo 3: Los judíos en los reinos cristianos peninsulares, pp. 51-102), su proyección sefardí en los siglos XVI y XVII (Capítulo 4: Los exiliados y los perseguidos, pp. 103-127) y su progresiva reincorporación a la historia española más contemporánea (Capítulo 5: De la España sin judíos a la actualidad, pp. 129-187). Desfilan en cada una de estas páginas grandes nombres y acontecimientos, breves semblanzas e ilustrativas historias, descripciones de libros, tratados y traducciones, mapas, útiles explicaciones geográficas, culturales y de términos especialmente equívocos o desconocidos, con las que la autora va dando cuenta de las complejidades estructurales, de las luces y sombras que, en el fragor de los cambios políticos y sociales que se sucedieron a lo largo de los siglos, caracterizó la secular presencia de judíos, conversos y sefardíes, primeramente en los reinos hispanomedievales y, después, en el Estado español, tal y como se entiende en la actualidad,

sin olvidar la dimensión internacional que el judaísmo sefardí, en su vertiente más lingüística y literaria, alcanzó en el ámbito mediterráneo y europeo.

El libro incorpora una útil secuencia cronológica de hechos (pp. 189-203) de especial relevancia para entender el propósito de esta *breve historia* que se inicia en el siglo III d. C. y finaliza, hasta el momento, en 2018. Asimismo se acompaña de un minucioso índice onomástico –imprescindible en obras de consulta de este tipo–, así como una bibliografía recomendada, bibliografía *mínima*, pero que puede cumplir con creces las expectativas de todo aquel que desee conocer más sobre cualquier asunto aludido en él.

En tiempos en los que el exceso de información y la inmediatez de conocimiento desbordan al lector, cada vez más desacostumbrado a los placeres de una lectura atenta y silenciosa, esta obra de la escritora Paloma Díaz-Mas, magistralmente redactada –llena de certezas, pero también de interrogantes–, sin duda asegurará la transmisión rigurosa y documentada de la historia de los judíos hispánicos; una historia que, lejos de ser lineal y carente de matices, se nos antoja como una cuestión palpitante, «porque por remotos o remotísimos que parezcan cronológicamente los hechos que entran en ella, es, en realidad, historia referida siempre a la necesidad y a la situación presente» (Croce, 1938: 5).

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