

Los judíos españoles según las fuentes hebreas

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LADINO IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Ladino as a Jewish language

Ladino belongs to the group of Jewish languages because it contains certain characteristics common to all of them. From a historical point of view it is a dialect of medieval Spanish, as it evolved from Spanish Romance languages that the Jews took with them when exiled from Spain in 1492.

Already during the Second Temple Hebrew, the pre-eminent language of the Jewish people, had been substituted by Aramaic, and as a result there are even parts of the bible which were originally written in Aramaic (Daniel). A significant part of post-biblical literature was also written in Aramaic. From the second century BC, under Hellenistic rule, the Jews of Erets Israel as well as those of the whole Mediterranean Diaspora were culturally Hellenized and spoke and wrote in Greek. Outside of Babylon, Hebrew or Aramaic would in future be used more by the intellectual classes than by the rest of the Jewish people.

Knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic is the basis of Jewish religious education.

After the destruction of the Second Temple (70 AD), Jews who were settled in countries of the old world adopted other languages when their new historical situation demanded, as they had previously adopted Greek during the period of Hellenic rule.

The Jews who arrived in the Iberian Peninsula, probably mostly during the 1st century AD, spoke Greek and continued to do so for several centuries until it was gradually replaced by Latin, around the 4th century. With the Moorish conquest of the Peninsula in 711, Arabisation began. The use of Arabic continued practically until the 13th century, a time when we can be certain that the Jewish population was Hispanicised - except for the kingdom of Granada, the only kingdom which would remain in the hands of the Muslims until 1492.

The Jews' constant adoption of other languages did not by any means imply the abandoning of Hebrew and Aramaic on the part of the communities' spiritual leaders, but rather what it gave rise to was a situation of permanent diglossia in the heart of the community. It also resulted in the creation of a Jewish language every time a group of Jews adopted a gentile language, because of the influence exercised by Jewish tradition which included the use of Hebrew and Aramaic not only in religious but also in legal matters and in all types of traditional cultural display.

The concept *Jewish language* has certain limits. When I speak of Jewish language I do not mean that the Jews spoke a different language than the gentiles, but rather that in the Jews' adoption of

other languages we can see certain characteristics specific to the group which meant that the same language, when spoken by Jews was slightly different. Generally, we can say that there are three characteristics common to all Jewish languages:

The presence of lexical elements in the ethical-religious field taken from Hebrew and Aramaic which interfere in both oral and written texts of the Jewish language in question. These generally appear in their original form. They can also be integrated in the morphological system of the Jewish language in question, to fill semantic gaps. This register is not necessarily the same in all Jewish languages nor do all the terms necessarily retain the original Hebrew meaning, although many are common to all Jewish languages.

The almost general use of the Hebrew alphabet in all type of texts, given that general education coincided with religious education. The first thing taught at school was the Hebrew alphabet. This is not a specifically Jewish practice, but was previously common in the geographic area of the three monotheistic cultures: not only did the Muslim Semites use the Arabic alphabet, as in the Koran, but also non-Semite peoples who accepted that religion such as the Turks. Medieval German literature was written in the Latin alphabet in keeping with Christian tradition.

For the two factors mentioned above to come into play, there must be a situation of diglossia in the group. The use of Hebrew-Aramaic remains constant. Furthermore, in certain fields (religion, education, legal) this language is always used. The second language is that which can be substituted by the co-territorial language. If the latter is less prestigious than the language spoken by the group up to that time, the process of substitution will be slower, or may not occur, as was the case for centuries during which Greek continued to prevail over Latin, Yiddish over Slavic languages or Ladino over Turkish.

In other words, we can say that what really separates the group of Jewish languages from other languages is the presence of Hebrew and Aramaic terms in their lexical system, caused by a situation of diglossia in the group, in which Hebrew-Aramaic is always present. The extent to which these terms appear in each of the Jewish languages, or the substrates that left their mark in each language should be studied from the historical and linguistic point of view of each of them.

Ladino, which naturally reunites these characteristics is included in the group of Jewish languages just as Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Greek, Judeo-Persian or Yiddish. Of all the Jewish languages Ottoman-Ladino was, together with Yiddish and Judeo-Greek, the only one to be spoken in areas where the gentiles spoke a different local language.

The Sephardim of the Ottoman Empire were defined as an

ethnic group as opposed to non-Jews because of their Jewish tradition, and because of Ladino were also defined as the Sephardim as opposed to the other Jewish groups (Byzantines, Ashkenazis), which meant accepting a different historical and cultural identity to the latter: the historical and cultural weight of 1,500 years in Sepharad. Any member of another community who wished to join the Sephardim had to accept Sephardic rites and of course their language.

The Sephardim never abandoned reading and writing in Hebrew. This was not only the language of religious worship, but also the language of all activities related to Judaism. To this respect we can mention in passing that from the 10th to 12th centuries the Jews of Andalusia, under Muslim rule, were authors of the most glorious writings in Hebrew of the Diaspora, outside of Babylon. In the Ottoman Empire Sephardic scholars continued to write and publish in Hebrew until the beginning of the 20th century. Immediately after the Expulsion works of the stature of *Sulhán Aruh* by Yosef Caro and other great rabbis of the day were written. There were also translations to Hebrew of even secular works such as the chivalresque novel *Amadis de Guala*.¹ From the beginning of the 18th century, writing in Hebrew decreased considerably in favour of writing in Ladino, which was the language of the Sephardic masses. Even still, there was always some writing in Hebrew and in the 19th century we still find works of the standard of *Pele Yoets* by Eliezer Papo,² to name one of the most successful both within the Sephardic world and elsewhere. In many works published in Ladino until the beginning of the 20th century the Sephardic scholars themselves are the first to lament that the work cannot be published in *Lason haqodes*, a language which the people did not understand, something the scholars considered to be a punishment from God. Around the middle of the 19th century Yisraela ben Jaim of Belgrade and somewhat later Yehuda Alkalay wrote methods aimed at the teaching of the Holy Language to young Sephardic Jews. At the beginning of the 20th century the Sephardim collaborated actively with Eliezer Ben Yehuda in the restoration of Hebrew as the national language of the Jewish people.

The term Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) and its historical development. In medieval romance the term Ladino was used to refer to the Latin language as opposed to Hebrew and Arabic. According to Roger Wright, the meaning of this term was affected as a consequence of "Internal reforms in the Spanish Christian church which began around 1080 and continued after 1228... [after which] the word [*Ladino*] was no longer used by the Christian community to refer to the written language. This may explain why the word Ladino, when used to refer to written language, came to be semantically restricted to the Romance written by non-Christians." In fact the written language of the Christians came to be known as *latino* while

the spoken language was referred to as *romance*. *Ladino* was thus limited to the *romance* written by non-Christians. However, *Ladino* in its original meaning must have remained in existence in spoken language for a long time, because we still find it in 13th century texts of the Escuela de Traductores de Toledo (School of translators), used precisely as a synonym of *romance*. The Jews, who were not affected by the linguistic policy of the church, continued to use it with its original meaning, that is, used to refer to the languages of Latin origin spoken or written in the Iberian Peninsula and Sephardic writers of the 16th century still used it with the same meaning. S.b.Y. Formon, who translated *Sefer hobot balebabot*, a work by Bahye Ibn Paquda into *Ladino*, called his target language *Ladino*.³ Rabbi Mose Almosnino in *Livro entitolado regimiento de la vida*, uses the terms *romance* and *ladino* to refer to his language.⁴ In case there should be any doubt that Rabbi Almosnino was referring to the written and spoken language of the day, we should remember that his literary style and language compare favourably with the most elegant writers in Spain at that time. Finally, the anonymous author of *Sefer Sulhan hapanim*, an advance on what would later become the Rabbinic style, also uses the terms *ladino* and *romance* as synonyms.⁵ Later on in Sephardic literature we will find the names *español* and *jidió* or *jidió*. Terms such as *judeoespañol*, *lengua sefardí* or *judeismo* are late 19th century creations introduced from outside the Sephardic community. Thus it should not surprise us that right up to this day the Sephardim refer to their language usually as *ladino* and also *ju-/jidió* or *español*.

In recent years the term *Ladino* has been used, following H.V. Sephiha, exclusively to refer to the language of the translations done from Hebrew and Aramaic. The language of the translations is also *Ladino*, and especially so because it represents one of the many linguistic styles of the language of the Sephardim. The three works dating from the 16th century mentioned above were written in very different styles but in all three the same language is used, that is, *Ladino*.

Ladino up until 1492

Ladino as we know it today did not exist before 1492. This *Ladino* (Hakitia of Northern Africa) evolved because of the Expulsion, as the Jews brought with them the languages and dialects that they had spoken in the Iberian Peninsula. These were slightly different from the languages used by the Christians in that they contained a series of elements, mainly lexical, which did not exist in the languages of the latter. To put it another way, Jews and Christians spoke varieties of the same language.

The divergences which existed between the varieties were caused by the situation of diglossia in each group, due to cultural and ethical-religious differences between the groups and because behind each group with their particular variety of the language lay a different linguistic history.

1. Linguistic differences caused by the situation of diglossia of each group

Since what we know to be the first Jewish arrival to the Iberian Peninsula in the 1st century AD, the Jews never stopped using Hebrew and Aramaic in all types of religious, educational or legal display. Thus from the point of view of the social functions fulfilled by the languages they used, they lived in a situation of permanent diglossia because the function of language for everyday use was not covered by Hebrew, rather usually by the corresponding local language which varied as political power changed hands. Thus after speaking Greek for the first few centuries, the Jews finally felt obliged to adopt Latin, the language of the dominant Roman group; later Arabic and finally, as the Christians recovered territories from the Moors in the famous Reconquista, the Jews gradually adopted the Romances of the Christians. The social function of the language of culture was of course filled by Hebrew parallel to the social function of classical Latin among Christians, until this began to be replaced in written language by the Romances. For the majority of Arabs, classic Arabic, as opposed to spoken Arabic, was and continues to be the language of culture.

All Jewish works of *Halakha*, or legal content, were written in Hebrew. Religious services were celebrated in Hebrew and it was also the language of prayer. This explains the presence of Hebrew and Aramaic terms in the Hispanic variations of the Jews, just as occurs with all Jewish languages. As was mentioned above, the majority of these terms form part of the ethical-religious field:

- As Hebrew forms: *sabat* (Saturday), *Tora* (Pentateuch), *Tanaj* (Bible), *brit milá* (circumcision), *dayán* (judge), *jajám* (wise one, usually rabbi)...

- As Hispanised forms: *enjeremar* from the Hebrew *herem* (anathema), or *malsinar* from the Hebrew *malsin* (one who reports a crime)...

- As new uses of some words: *qal* "synagogue" from the Hebrew *kahal* "congregation"...

These terms and many others are still used in *Ladino* and in *Hakitia* and more have been added.

The Christians wrote religious works in Latin, even when their day to day language was *Romance* (*Ladino*). But furthermore Latin was not only the language of the Christian church, it was also a language of culture, practically the only language in which anything was written until Alfonso X raised the spoken language (*Romance* or *Ladino*) to language of the state and the language of culture in the 13th century. Throughout the centuries new voices were always formed from Latin roots, and this continued after the Romances became written languages. Christian terminology in the ethical-religious field was taken from the so called "Latin of the church", a variety of Latin that was never spoken, but was used by the Ecclesiastical authorities to write books of prayer to be used by

Christians during religious services. This ecclesiastical Latin led to the introduction of a considerable number of new Latin forms belonging to diverse linguistic fields into the spoken and written language of the Christians which today make up a long list of semi-cultisms in the ethical-religious field. One such term is "latino" (Spanish term for Latin) which substituted the vulgar Latin form "ladino". The same must have occurred with the term *Dios* (God), as opposed to *Dio* which is the form derived from the original Latin accusative *deu(m)*. The regular result is *Dio*, in keeping with other regular forms of Iberian-romance languages, such as *numeru(m)* which evolved to *número* (number), *vinu(m)* became *vino* (wine), *manu(m)* became *mano* (hand), etc.

In later Christian texts the term *Dios* appears. The Jews who were not obliged to follow the canons of the representatives of the Christian church, continued to use the form *Dio* derived from the vulgar spoken language. However there are some Jewish texts dating from before the Expulsion in which we also find the term *Dios*. In the *Biblias romanceadas hebreas* (Romance Hebrew Bibles) we find *Dios* on some occasions. It is also found in Judeo-Aragonese texts dating from the 15th century. In any case, we can see that this form had dialectal differences within the Iberian Peninsula, a fact which demonstrates that the innovation introduced by the church did not reach all languages or dialects, thus we find that in Catalan, as in *Ladino*, the more archaic form was maintained: *Déu* which was also used in Judeo-Catalan and which is the form corresponding to *Dió* in Judeo-Castilian texts and which precisely represents the Latin form *Deu(m)* Castilianised. On the other hand, in Portuguese, like Castilian Spanish, the later form was adopted: *Deus*.

2. Differences based on factors of linguistic contact

Furthermore, linguistic contact with other languages and the intensity of this contact varies from one group to another. As a result the adstrates and substrates are not equally present in each variety. Greek, which affects the lexical, and to a lesser extent, the morphological fields of Spanish, is not a substrate of the Iberian-Romance languages, but rather should be considered a cultural adstrate of Latin, given that its influence on the Hispanic-romance languages came via Latin.

In the language variety of the Jews we find terms of Greek origin which were maintained in the language of the Jews in Spain from the time of Greek dominance. It is therefore the remains of a Greek or Judeo-Greek substrate. The Jews spoke Greek on the Peninsula from the time of their arrival en masse in the 1st century AD and they continued to do so under Roman rule until the 4th century. Proof of this can be seen in the Greek inscriptions in the synagogue in Elche and the *tumbra trilingüe* (Hebrew, Greek, Latin) in Tolosa (Navarre). Greek borrowings which are still preserved in *Ladino* and *Hakitia* to this day are not found in any language of the Iberian

Peninsula, except for some medieval texts in which the terms appear coming from the mouths of Jews:

- *Ayifto* appears in Sephardic texts from the 14th century onwards as well as *Misraim*, instead of *Egipto* (Egypt).

- *Esnoga* or *sinoga*, instead of the Christian form *sinagoga* (synagogue).

- *Meldar*, from the Greek root "meletao" instead of the verbs *rezar* or *orar* (pray).

With the Moorish conquest, the Iberian Peninsula became part of the zone of vast Islamic domain in the Mediterranean and in the East. The Latin language spoken by the Jews would quickly be replaced by Arabic, except for those zones in which the Muslim presence was brief (Catalonia, areas near the Pyrenees, the coastal regions of the north of the Peninsula). It seems that Hebrew was only used by a highly educated Jewish elite. The common people spoke only Arabic. The adoption of the Arab language took place as part of a deeper process of acculturation, in which many Moorish customs and traditions were also acquired by the Jews.

In general, Jewish authors used Arabic in all areas of their literature: not only in secular literature, but also in responses, resolutions of jurisprudence and even in commentaries on the Bible and the Talmud, themes generally reserved for the Holy Language, although that is not to say that they did not continue to write in Hebrew too. Arabic was the language spoken and understood by the whole Jewish community and was also, according to Ibn Tibbon "... an extensive language brimming over in all subjects which met any need of any speaker or writer. In Arabic eloquence is honest, elucidating and fitting for the complete perfection of any subject matter, which met the needs of any speaker or writer." It was also the language of communication used by Jews in the extensive Muslim world, of which Islamic Sepharad was a part. The Jewish Golden Era (11th and 12th centuries) developed within this cultural framework, totally removed from the Christian world, where it would most probably not have been possible.

Despite the prestige and the trend for the Arabic language, there was also a considerable production of literature in Hebrew during the Jewish Golden Era. The most important work of jurisprudence of the period was written in Hebrew in keeping with tradition: *Misné Torá* by Maimonides.

In the work of the poets of Al-Andalus, religious poetry reached its highpoint in the history of Judaism in the Diaspora. Linguistic studies of Hebrew were developed in the schools of Lucena, which shows the extent to which the Hebrew language was present in the minds and consideration of the Jewish leaders of the period.

There are abundant traces of the Arab cultural substrata in the various Judeo-Romance languages, especially in the lexis but such traces are also plentiful in Christian Romance languages where they are considered an Arabic cultural adstrate given that their

presence in Iberian-Romance languages responds to a contact of linguistic proximity or they were transmitted by Arabic speaking groups who repopulated Christian territories. Arabic terms and their forms are often the same in the two variants- Jewish and Christian, because the Jews probably took them from the Christians during their Hispanisation period, basically from the 13th century on. Or possibly because they themselves transmitted them to the Romance languages. However, there are also cases in which the Jewish-Arabisms preserve a form closer to the corresponding root than the Christian term. This could explain that many of these Arabisms are substrates of the Jewish language. To illustrate this we shall cite a few examples in which these differences can be seen:

- *alkunya* [al-kunya], *alcurnia* in ancient Spanish. (surname)

- *Tarexa* [tariha], *tarea* in Spanish (task)

In the Jews' medieval language we also see some Judeo-Arabic terms, something even more interesting. Some of them were passed on to Ladino and to Hakitia.

- *alxad* [formed by the Arabic article *al-* and the Aramic numeral *had* "one"], instead of *domingo* (Sunday).

- *Albedino* [formed by the Arabic article *al-*, the Hebrew noun in construct state *bet din* and finally the masculine Romance morpheme *-o* with which the form was Hispanicised], "special Jewish judge". This form is undoubtedly of Judeo-Arabic origin, **albedin*.

This type of composition based on elements from different languages can later be found in the Ladino of the Ottoman Empire where Ladino-Hebrew, Hebrew-Ladino, Hebrew-Turkish, Turkish-Hebrew and Ladino-Turkish and Turkish-Ladino compositions appear, and also in Moroccan Hakitia.

Moreover the Jew's Romance language also contained other forms of Arabic origin which we only find in Christian texts when put in the mouths of Jews, they include:

- *adafina* [dafina "setting"], (Sabbath stew, hamim), does not exist in Iberian-Romance languages.

- *Aladma* [damam], (sort of punishment), in Spanish *censura*.

In the 13th century, with the re-conquest of southern cities such as Cordoba, Jaen, Seville, Cadiz, the Moors' power was definitively limited to the Kingdom of Granada. Knowledge of Arabic gradually became restricted to some learned Jews, natives of or descendants of families of southern Jewish Quarters. Now the Judeo-Arabs were Hispanicised through contact with Christians and with Jews previously settled in Christian areas. However from Jewish documents of the day we gather that for intellectual Jews knowledge of Arabic was still necessary in the 13th century to be able to access sources of widespread use among intellectuals and scholars in all of Castile.

In Christian Medieval Spain the Jews wrote their religious texts in Hebrew and for some of them, as was customary, they used

Aramaic, e.g. in letters of betrothal. This was permitted by the Christian kings. Even in legal documents which needed to be in Romance because one of the signing parties was a Christian, apart from the Romance version there was also a version in Hebrew. There were numerous contracts of sale written in two languages or translated. There are also notarial texts written in Latin to which one of the parties was Jewish, but which are accompanied by the corresponding summary in Hebrew signed by the Jewish party. This does not prove that the Jewish people knew Hebrew, but it was a part of Jewish tradition that it be done in that way. Jewish judges did of course know Hebrew.

Among non-literary Jewish texts written in Romance we find some community regulations, medical documents, certain fragments of *responsas*, Hebrew grammar notes, sentences and single words. Community regulations or statutes also come under the category of legal documents. It is common to find whole paragraphs in them written in Hebrew, which is in keeping with the style of this type of document.

Jewish translations of the Bible in Romance were common from the 13th century on - as is also true of the Christian translations - and manuscripts of several of them have been preserved. But not only the Bible was translated, there were also translations of *sidurim* (books with prayers for the Sabbath and week days) and *majzorim* (books of prayer for special holidays). These medieval Bible translations served as models for later translations done by the Sephardim after the Expulsion. Common in all Jewish translations of the Bible is the transmission of Hebrew grammatical structures, following the style of transmitting word by word.

1 [1] *be-resit bara elojim et ha-samayim ve-et ha-arets.*

[2] *ve-ha-arets hayta toju va-boju ve-hosej al-pane tejom ve-ru'aj elojim merajefet al-pene ha-mayim.*

[3] *va-yomer elojim yehi or va-yehi or.*

[4] *va-yare elojim et-ha-or qui-tov va-yab'del elojim ben ha-or u-ben ha-hosej.*

(Transcription of the Hebrew Bible. Gen. 1, 1-4)

1 [1] *En prencipio crio el Dio a los cielos y a la tierra. (In the beginning created the God the heavens and the earth)*

[2] *Y la tierra era vagua y vazia y escuridad sobre façes de abismo y viento de el Dio esmoviese sobre façes de las aguas. (And the earth was vacant and empty and darkness on the sides of abyss and wind of the God moved on sides of the waters.)*

[3] *y diso el Dio: sea luz y fue luz. (and said the God be light and was light)*

[4] *y vido el Dio a la luz que buena y aparto el Dio entre la luz y entre la escuridad. (and saw the God the light which good and separated the God between the light and between the darkness.)⁶*

Some learned Jews wrote poems in Castilian Spanish which occupy a privileged place in Castilian literature, such as *Proverbios*

Morales (Moral Proverbs) by rabbi Sem Tob Arduziel ben Isaac or Don Santob de Carrion, which dates from the first half of the 14th century. This was the only work by that author written in Castilian Romance, and its existence should not surprise us because it was directed at and dedicated to the Christian king Pedro I, at a time when the Jewish communities in Castile were beginning to have problems with their neighbours. The acceptance of *Proverbios* by the Christian community can be seen in the fact that three manuscripts in Latin characters have been preserved, as opposed to only one in Hebrew script. We should also note here that among the surviving published texts and works written by the Jews in Spain before the Expulsion, there are texts in Hebrew and Arabic, of course, but also in Castilian, Catalan, Aragonese, Navarro and Portuguese, which bears witness once again to the fact that they spoke the same language as their neighbours, even if this was a Jewish variety and as such contained the characteristics common to Jewish languages mentioned at the beginning of this article. One particular feature of the Jews of Sepharad during the centuries immediately preceding the Expulsion which we can mention was the use of a manuscript writing later referred to by the Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire as *soletreo*, as well as what was known as rabbinical writing, the same as Rashí used in his Biblical commentaries and which was also used later in Sephardic printing presses in texts published in Ladino until the third decade of the 20th century. Besides these two forms of writing, the works of Hebrew *Halakhá* were published in the square characters used in modern Hebrew publications. Some Sephardic texts of religious content and with didactic objectives were published only in punctuated square Hebrew print.

Ladino after 1492

The decentralised authority of the Sultan, which offered the advantage that the minorities could maintain institutional and cultural autonomy, allowed the Sephardim, like other minorities, to conserve their Jewish religion and their Hispanic language as a mark of identity during that period of history. However, when circumstances changed, Ladino also began to lose that function because within an obligatorily assimilationist society Ladino could not substitute Hebrew in the functions reserved for the Holy Language, but it could be replaced by another language. The numerous Sephardic rabbis who had written part of their work in Ladino, had never intended Ladino to be a substitute for the *Holy Language* either. Above all, they made it clear that the ultimate Jewish language was the *Lason haqodes*. The punishment of exile, of not possessing *Erets Israel*, was precisely expressed by the divine shame of speaking a foreign language. This is a constant in rabbinical texts from the first decades of the 16th century until the late 19th century with very few exceptions. It is enough to look at

one instance and here we have an example from the most liberal rabbi of the 16th century writing to his nephew, arrived from Spain: "although it would be easier for me to write to you in our rich and holy language as it is a more familiar friend I do not wish to excuse myself from the work of writing to you in Romance as you ask me to, since for our sins all our conversations are in a language foreign to us."⁷

The most outstanding peculiarity of the language of the Sephardim, could be its polyformism (variations of the same form) which can be seen in the work of the rabbis and even more so in the sections of Ladino (*laz*) interspersed in the responses written in Hebrew and of course in the spoken language. In Thessalonica today for example, the same person may say *jueves* or *jugüeves*, *fue* or *hue*. This polyformism has remained constant right up to the present time. The linguistic base of Ottoman-Ladino is the Jewish variety of southern Spanish of 1492. But forms and expressions from other languages and dialects of the Iberian Peninsula and of varying linguistic levels were also assimilated into the language during its period of formation which began when the Sephardim settled in various cities of the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, right from the start they added lexical borrowings from the local language, especially from Ottoman-Turkish. The Ladino spoken by groups of lower social standing was full of Turkisms just like the Ladino spoken today in Istanbul, where it has practically been replaced by Turkish.

At the beginning of the 18th century Ladino was completely formed and the differences between it and Castilian or any other language of the Iberian Peninsula were obvious.

"...and there are some who say that the angels were created on the first day and after them the heavens and the earth and there are some who say that first the seat of honour was ordered and then the angels were created and the earth and paradise and the first man. And the *ta'am* [rhythm of the verses when Jews read the bible] which remembers in the bible the creation of the heavens and the earth in the beginning, the warning of punishment. That people not think of occult things because nobody has authority to tell of the secrets of the Holy Law and should anyone seek to know mysteries and ask that they be explained, they will be told: open your eyes and you shall see the skies and you will understand that your mind is not sufficient to know anything, so do not think about it. Just use your time to read the books of Moses to know what you must do and accept them and avoid sin, all that is important in reading the books of Moses are the laws of Judaism..."⁸

Given that relations with Spain and Portugal were practically non-existent, the language of the Sephardim followed an independent evolutionary process. If on the one hand it was not affected by the changes suffered by Castilian during the 16th and 17th centuries - which is why it seems an archaic language - it is also true that some of its linguistic peculiarities dating from the 18th century are a consequence of its own linguistic changes or the

result of innovations which had already begun in the Iberian Peninsula before the Expulsion and which in the language of the Sephardic communities followed a different final development. As a result of the Hebrewised and archaised style of Bible translations some Ladinisms spread into the language of the Sephardim in the lexical field (*castiguerio* [punishment], *hambarrera* [hunger], *salidura* [exit], *fayadura* [action of finding], *pezgadura* [heavy, difficult], etc.), but also some semantic calques from Hebrew (*pezgado* [heavy but also difficult, as in Hebrew], *engrandecer* [raise], *engrandecerse* [to grow up in personal or physical sense but also socially], *muchiguar* [increase], etc.). Some syntagmatic structures found in Hebrew can also be seen: *el libro el este* [ha-sefer ha-ze] (this book), *cada uno y uno* [col ehad ve-ehad] (each and every one). And even morphological interference (*vidas* [life], *sielos* [sky, heaven], etc.) also influenced by Hebrew.

If at times the 18th century is mentioned as marking the beginning of the decline of Sephardic culture, this is only true in so far as there was a decrease in creation in the Hebrew language, especially after the great failure of the Shabbetai Tzevi movement (false Messiah). In contrast, the fact that the people could not understand Hebrew even in the synagogue, allowed for a rise in Ladino. During the early decades of the 18th century once again there were new translations of religious Hebrew texts to Ottoman-Ladino, including the Bible.⁹ People started to write religious type texts in this rich expressive language. The first of these was one started by Jacob Juli *Me'am Lo'ez*, a work which was continued by almost a dozen other writers over more than 150 years. *Me'am Lo'ez* is an encyclopaedic compendium of Biblical commentaries and Jewish translations in which *agadá*, homiletic material, is also included. It follows the so called rabbinical style which was to dominate Ladino literature until the late 19th century. This great work begun by Jacob Juli, opened a period to which some specialists in Ladino language and literature refer as the Golden Era because of the consecration to Judaism of a significant number of works in Ladino, published in editorial centres of Istanbul, Smyrna (Izmir), Thessalonica and Venice and from the beginning of the 19th century also in inland communities (Sarajevo, Belgrade, Vienna) and Jerusalem.

"... love of friends, we know how great it is, and the wise ones said about the verse which says *ve-ahab'ta lereaja comoja*. And you shall love your neighbour as yourself, this is an important moral principle which sums up the entire law, and the wise ones declared that what it means is that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. And it means that the law is divided in two parts, precepts between man and the Creator, and precepts between man and his neighbour. And what does the whole law say? The part of the law that is between man and his neighbour. and the more the law between man and his neighbour will be taken as general and will thus confirm the precepts of the Holy One

[Hallowed be His name] And more just as one man and another call themselves friends, the Holy One gave us the honour of the *Umá Israelit* [nation of Israel], and called himself friend of ours, according to the verse *reaja vereá abija al ta'azov*, that your friend and your father's friend, do not say ..."¹⁰

After the defeat of Turkey by the Western forces, the Ottoman government saw an opening up to the west as its only way out of the political, economical and social crisis. In 1839 they published the Tanzimat reform, according to which minorities were conceded equal rights with the Muslims. The result was the emergence of nationalism which brought about the creation of national states demanded by nationalist minorities at the end of the century. The Jews were integrated into the newly created national states and were thus subject to the obligation of attending their schools and linguistic and cultural assimilation, which resulted in Ladino gradually becoming confined to domestic use and eventually being substituted by the local language.

Furthermore Westernisation brought about a decline in religious power and a weakening in the traditional way of life in the Empire. The power of the rabbi also gradually decreased and after an initial resistance by the more conservative groups, the Sephardim began to send their children to western schools – Italian, English, French, German – which had now opened up. One decisive event was the opening of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in 1865 which brought about the conclusive westernisation and secularisation of the Sephardic society and parallel to this the definitive decline of Ladino which would be substituted by French as the language of culture and even became the language used in the homes of the educated classes. There had been a division at the heart of Sephardic society and new concepts (religious-secular opposition, for example) and new ideas were incorporated into it. Ideas reflected in the linguistic and literary tendencies: the development of the secular press and the writing and publication of secular works in all cultural fields. Until 1942 more than 300 periodical publications of all possible political tendencies appeared. They not only put emphasis on the corresponding ideology or published the latest news, but they also published novels, serials, theatre and poetry. In the majority of cases, except for poetry, these were translations or adaptations of western works, especially French, and to a lesser extent of the *Haskala*. Many of them were later edited by press publicists.

The language of the Sephardim was re-romanticised by French and the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools: in the lexical field the tendency to avoid Hebrew terms and borrowings from Turkish or other local languages continued.

"It is still difficult if not impossible to say with confidence the exact date of the settling of Jews in Rusjuk [Ruse, Bulgaria], it was probably not before 1788 as we shall see later. There probably were Jews in the city

before that date, but just occasionally passing through, they did not settle there, Ruse not being an important commercial centre at that time. We have found the names of some of those visiting Jews in an old manuscript, undisputedly the oldest which must exist of our community, they are: Elia Primo, Jaim Eljalil, Yitsac Halevi and the son of the latter's wife Yosef Ben Aroyo. It is interesting to note that almost two centuries ago, Jews with names of families still in our community today died in Ruse; Eljalil and Ben Aroyo. However it is very difficult to say if they are direct descendants of the same..."¹¹

In the columns of some humorous newspapers we see reflected the conflict between those Sephardim who had been educated in the Alliance Israélite Universelle and other western schools and those more conservative groups, defenders of the Jewish tradition and opposed to Westernisation. The two groups differed in their way of speaking, as the latter used Hebrewisms and Turkisms. This way of speaking was satirised by the humorous newspapers and used by columnists in the more serious press to ridicule those groups.

"Our "Mamo" almost died and we were not aware of it. The poor thing was seconds away from throwing himself into the river for fear of his soul. But he was miraculously saved.

As soon as we heard about the incident, we sent telegrams asking for more information to find out what exactly had happened.

We learned that the whole Jewish population of Skopje was getting ready for a charity dance; it seems that at the last minute, when everything was ready and the guests were already en route, two fine women came out saying that so-and-so should not be at the ball, because she was very beautiful, good and dressed very elegantly. The ball could not take place, the poor things lost out because nobody could get it into the heads of the two women that their ridiculous petition was false. "Mamo" the poor thing, exasperated at this behaviour wanted to throw himself into the river..." [El Kirbach. No. 15, 8 April 1910, Salonica, ff. 2-3]

The socio-cultural collapse of the Sephardim occurred during the 1st World War. The Jewish classes had become poorer and Turkey had extended obligatory military service to include Jews also, with the result that many emigrated to the West, especially to America and during the 20s and 30s to Palestine. With the Nazi occupation of the Balkan states and Greece in 1943, the communities in Serbia, Bosnia and Greece were practically annihilated. Since then, Ladino, which had already begun to be written in Latin characters, has been spoken less and less as the Sephardim die.

Israel is the country with most Ladino speakers. The majority are elderly people. Ladino has been left with no social functions. The Sephardim live integrated in today's Israeli society. There is no political or ethnical group within the Sephardim which claims the identity of the group or anything like that. On the contrary, the Sephardim are divided among all possible ideological groups. There

is Sephardim representation in all social strata. There is no umbrella organisation which shields them, not even an attempt at one. Ladino, the only possible mark of identity of the Sephardim as opposed to other Jewish groups in the state of Israel, does not have this unifying function either.

NOTES

1. *Amadis de Guala* (Istanbul 1539)
2. Eliezer Papo, *Pele Yo'ets* (Istanbul 1824).
3. Bahye Ibn Paquda, *Sefer hobot halebabot* (Thessalonica 1567).
4. Mose Almosnino, *Livro entitolado regimiento de la vida* (Thessalonica 1564).
5. Anónimo, *Sefer Sulhan hapanim* (Thessalonica 1568).
6. Biblia ladina: *Pentatéuco*. (Constantinople 1547).
7. Mose Almosnino, *Regimiento de la vida*, f.13 of the Introduction.
8. Transcription: Jacob Juli, *Me'am Lo'ez*, *Bereshit* (Istanbul, 1730), chap. alef [1], p. zein-1 [7].
9. *Biblia de Asa* (Istanbul 1739).
10. Transcription: Eliezer Papo, *Pele Yoets* (Vienna, 1870); translation of the original Hebrew (Istanbul 1824) into Ladino by the son of Yehuda Eliezer Papo, the author.
11. Selomo Abraham Rosanes, *Estoria de la cominidad israelita de Russe* (Ruse, 1914), f. 12.