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# The Adaptation of Sephardic Life Cycle Songs for Use in the Reform Movement

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I would like to express my profound gratitude to Rabbi Martin A. Cohen for sharing with me his kindness, enthusiasm, and vast wealth of knowledge in the field of Sephardica. I will always treasure this experience and all that I have learned.

A great deal can be learned about a culture through its music and literature. These media ineluctably reveal the culture's regalia and symbolisms and their role in societal life.

The texts of the Sephardic world and their musical counterparts provide an opportune lens through which an outsider can view their cultures. While modern scholarship disclaims as a myth the contention that most of the extant songs came from the Iberian Peninsula, [1] these texts trace the journey of a people as they migrated through the Diaspora. The texts and the music tell the story of the people who created them or borrowed them, shaped them along the way, and who presently claim them as their own. They bear the imprint of all of the lands and cultures through which the people have traveled; they form a narrative of their collective cultural experiences.

The following paper will examine the life cycle celebrations and commemorations of birth, marriage, and death in the lives of the various Sephardic communities. The purpose of this project is to peer into the lives of the people who are often hidden behind the music they perform; it presents the outcome of an analysis that gives insight into the world view and cultural patterns of the participants.

Rather than present an exhaustive study of all of the Sephardic communities, this paper will introduce individual elements of the various cultures. By juxtaposing all of these elements, the project's aim is twofold; first, to illustrate the various similarities and differences of each community, and second, through a detailed analysis of the various pan-Sephardic communities and an occasional re-casting of the symbols that they present, to weave the pieces into something that is meaningful for Reform congregations.

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[1] Kaye Kauffman Shelemay. "Mythologies and Realities in the Study of Jewish Music" in *the World of Jewish Music—Past and Present* 37, no. 1 (1995): 24.

The entrance of the life cycle music and customs of the various Sephardic communities into our synagogues presents an opportunity for the enrichment of contemporary life cycle commemorations; it also ensures another context for the survival of a magnificent living tradition.

# CHAPTER ONE

The myth of a single Jewish race is one which many scholars including Professor Paul Wexler and Rabbi Martin Cohen have dispelled in their studies. By this logic, it is possible to say the Sephardic Jewish population is also not composed of a single race. [2] From the beginning of their presence in the Iberian Peninsula the Jews have always comprised a mixture of races. The early Jewish communities of Iberia during "Roman days had continually swelled with people of indigenous stock and periodically with immigrants from Asia and Africa." [3] To this mix of races would eventually be added the races of the conquerors from the north, notably the Visigoths. The Arab conquest of the Iberian Peninsula resulted in the addition of Arab and Berber peoples to the blend of races. With the rise of the Reconquista, Christian Iberians, themselves racially composite, were largely indistinguishable from their racially composite Jewish neighbors.

Jews had always been attracted to the Iberian Peninsula because of its location at the westernmost point of the Mediterranean.[4] It is even possible that there were Jews in the area during the 3rd Century BCE or earlier. They likely came as prospectors, soldiers or even prisoners of Rome.[5] Rabbi Martin Cohen points out that the Apostle Paul's trip to the Iberian Peninsula, as documented in Romans 16, gives proof to the likelihood of a Jewish presence there. According to his Epistle to the Romans, Paul traveled to distant

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[2] This concept is present throughout Rabbi Martin A. Cohen's work "The Sephardic Phenomenon: A Reappraisal"

[3] Rabbi A. Martin Cohen, "The Sephardic Phenomenon: A Reappraisal" in *the Sephardim in the Americas* ed. Martin A Cohen (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1992; Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 3.

[4] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 9.

[5] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 9.

lands and spoke in their synagogues in order to proselytize the Jews present.[6] Other evidence of an early Jewish presence in the Iberian Peninsula is found on tombstones and in Christian consular canons and royal decrees.[7] The later examples demonstrate that the Jews were integrated into the surrounding society. These laws forbade interactions between Christians and Jews. Any time that there is a law decreed against an action, it is possible to deduce that the said action was a regular occurrence. Hence, the Jews and Christians during the early centuries of the Common Era were likely intermarrying with one another and contact between the groups was commonplace.

In 711 the Muslims invaded the Iberian Peninsula, thus inaugurating a new age. Within the first century of occupation, they gained control over a majority of the Peninsula. The first half century saw a great deal of chaos.[8] In 756, the Muslims established an emirate, which lasted until 929. The next stage of Muslim domination saw the induction of a more powerful and independent government, the caliphate. The caliphate lasted from 929 until 1031. The rise of the caliphate also launched the emergence of the Golden Age. Following the caliphate, the Muslim polity fragmented into city-state emirates. The downfall of Muslim Iberia began when a West African Arab tribe, the Almoravids, gained control in 1086. The decline continued through the period of Almohad control, between 1148 and 1238.[9] The Almohads were another African Arab group. In the final stages, the Muslims controlled only the region of Nasrid Granada. On January 2nd, 1492, the Christians captured Granada, ending Muslim control of Iberia.[10]

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[6] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 9.
[7] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 9.
[8] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 14.
[9] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 15.
[10] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 15.

While the peninsula remained under Muslim jurisdiction, its cities were highly populated, organized and extremely clean.[11]The Muslims were exceedingly prosperous, especially during the periods of the emirate, the caliphate, and the emirate states. This period has been dubbed The Golden Age. Immense wealth allowed the Muslim upper classes free time to study as well as the means to sponsor artistic and cultural pursuits. They sponsored study in areas such as poetry and philosophy.[12] There was a great deal of creativity in these fields as well. The poetry was enhanced through the study of Arabic "grammar, philology, and lexicography."[13] The Muslim philosophers were profoundly influenced by Neoplatonic and Aristotelian streams of Greek philosophy. The intellectuals engaged in the "synthesis" of reason and revelation through the study of Greek philosophy.[14]

The Jewish community of Muslim Iberia included Jews already present during Visigothic times, Jews who entered Iberia with the Muslims and Jews who returned to the Peninsula with the change of tide initiated by the Muslim conquest. In addition, there were non-Jews who joined the Jewish community. By the 11th century, there were approximately 150,000 Jews living in the Iberian Peninsula under Muslim jurisdiction. Most Jewish communities were in the southern regions.[15]

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[11] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 15.
[12] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 15-16.
[13] Rabbi A. Martin Cohen 16.
[14] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 16.
[15] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 16-17.

The Muslims and Jews interacted with one another on business matters. Social mingling and shared intellectual pursuits were not uncommon for distinguished Jews and their Muslim counterparts.[16]

The Muslims allowed the Jews to control most of their own matters. In this way the Jews enjoyed a predominantly self-governing status. The members of the community were expected to abide by their own Jewish legal system.[17]

As a community they were responsible for paying the Muslim rulers a high tax for each person within the community.[18] Their predominantly autonomous status depended on the payment of the tax and effective self-government. The leaders of the Jewish communities, however, were chosen or authorized by the Muslims. Hasdai Ibn Shaprut is a famous example of an appointed leader. He was given jurisdiction over the entire Jewish community of Muslim Iberia in the early 10th Century.[19]

The highly sophisticated air of Muslim Iberia was contagious. The Jews' accomplishments during the Golden Age included refined religious and secular poetry, fueled by grammatical studies, and Biblical commentaries.[20] The Golden Age also generated legal codes and philosophical inquiries into the conflict of reason and revelation. [21] An outstanding example of a Jewish scholar who synthesized reason with revelation is that of Moses ben Maimon of Cordoba.[22]

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[16] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 17.
[17] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 17.
[18] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 17.
[19] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 17.
[20] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 19.
[21] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 19-20.
[22] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 21.

History never takes place in a vacuum. It is noteworthy that while the Golden Age of Muslim Iberia was unfolding northward across Iberia, the Reconquista was slowly edging southward. According to Rabbi Cohen, the traditional beginning of the Reconquista occurred in 722 when a Visigothic nobleman named Pelayo defeated a group of Muslims in the small northern village of Covadonga. The defeat took place only seven years after the chaotic early stages of the Muslim Conquest.[23]

Three centuries later, with the decline of Muslim control over Iberia, the Reconquista began to build force. In 1086, the Christians recaptured Toledo, in the heart of the Peninsula. In 1212 they gained Navas de Tolosa from under Almohad control. During the four decades that followed, the Christians advanced into the nucleus of Al-Andalus. Cordoba and Seville fell to the Reconquista in 1236 and 1248 respectively. A small area in the south remained under Muslim control until the 1300's and Granada fell in 1492.

At its height, Reconquista Iberia consisted of four polities. Portugal, the older of the two nations presently occupying the Iberian Peninsula, arose in the extreme west. To the east of Portugal lay Castile. Furthest east lay Aragon-Catalonia and in the middle Navarre. Castile grew out of Leon and both provinces existed until the 13th century when Castile began to overpower Leon. By the 16th century, Leon had become part of Castile. Of Catalonia and Aragon, Catalonia became the more powerful by the 13th century. The polity of Catalonia-Aragon came to be known as Aragon.[24]

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[23] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 22.
[24] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 23.

With the acceleration of the Reconquista, the Jews became extremely useful for the Christians. [25] The Christians were invested in conquering the Muslims present in the Iberian Peninsula. The Jews, who spoke Arabic as their primary language and knew the ways of the Muslim people very well, were in a position to be extraordinarily helpful to the Christians in their pursuits.[26] The Jewish Aristocracy which had emerged from Moslem Al-Andalus was extremely well educated and skilled. The Christians employed the Jews as diplomats and translators. The Jews also served in the royal courts as physicians and legal advisors as well as in the military.[27] They farmed and worked in commerce. They were scholars in fields of science, law, and language.[28] The Christians gave the Jews land so that they might help re-populate conquered areas.[29] Consequently, the Jews gained power by utilizing their skills and their attained knowledge.

The Christians granted the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula "quasi-autonomous" political status under Talmudic Law.[30] The Royal Court appointed a "favorite" who would either choose a Chief Rabbi or take the position himself.[31]

The aristocracy, who was supported by the established governing power, enjoyed relative wealth, stability, and leisure time. With leisure time often follows cultural activity such as the study and composition of literature and philosophy.

In the world of philosophy and literature, the Golden Age gave way to the Silver Age of Literature with the rise of Christian Iberia.[32] The Silver Age continued the study

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[25] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 27-28.
[26] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 28.
[27] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 27-28.
[28] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 27.
[29] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 27.
[30] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 25.
[31] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 25.

of grammar that had dominated the Golden Age. Its literary scholars and writers introduced a stylized Biblical Hebrew which had not been present during the Golden Age. Silver Age literary Hebrew was composed of a mixture of Biblical, Rabbinic, and medieval Hebrew.[33] The Silver Age poets also introduced the Arabic Maqama. They employed the form of the maqama, which is a "dramatic dialogue in poetry and prose," while composing their works in Hebrew.[34] The Silver Age also saw a continued intensity in the study of philosophy and the creation of philosophical works inspired by Neoplatonic and Aristotelian thought.[35]

In addition, a war of philosophical and political dimensions erupted between Pro- and Anti Maimonidian groups. [36] At stake was the control of the Jewish world. Intellectual mysticism developed in Gerona as a polemic against the philosophies of Maimonides and his followers.[37] The intellectual mystics, such as Moses ben Shem Tov who created the Zohar, were well steeped in Neo-platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. [38] Through their philosophical knowledge, they created works which used the philosophical language of their enemies as a weapon against them. Other Anti-Maimonidean groups may have instigated the burning of Maimonides' works in Paris in 1233/4 by the Dominicans.[39]

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[32] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 25.
[33] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 25.
[34] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 25.
[35] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 26.
[36] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 26.
[37] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 27.
[38] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 27.
[39] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 26.

The political situation during the 13th Century was quite grave. Of the four polities aforementioned, Castile and Aragon suffered the most devastating inner struggles.[40] Rabbi Martin Cohen's theory of Old and New Guard orders can be applied to explain the dire political situation in Aragon and Castile during the period of the 13th century through the end of the 15th century.[41] Every organization gives rise to a political spectrum and, within it, an Old Guard. This is the group which, establishing itself, has attained power and defends the societal status quo. Other groups who wish to gain power and establish themselves are by definition the New Guard. They inevitably include the fringes of the societal spectrum.

In Castile and Aragon, the Old Guard was established in the feudal order.[42] The New Guard had two options for wresting power from the Old Guard. Power was attainable through revolutionary force or the conquest of land. During the Reconquista, the New Guard gained power through its conquests and expansion within the Peninsula. With no appreciable land to conquer, the conclusion of the Reconquista compelled the New Guard to search for conquerable lands outside of the Peninsula. Though involving considerable risk, this option appealed to the New Guard more than forceful conquest of the Old Guard.[43]

A third position developed on the political spectrum during the fourteenth century, namely the Modern Old Guard.[44] The Modern Old Guard, according to Rabbi Cohen, develops when the more central units of the Old Guard recognize the value of

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[40] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 33.
[41] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 30-41.
[42] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 33.
[43] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 30-31.
[44] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 31.

New Guard activity and realize the potential advantages of such activity for the moderate Old Guard itself. This moderate conglomerate therefore encourages New Guard creativity while concurrently generating structures for the subordination of the New Guard. This Modern Old Guard reaps the power created by the New Guard thus ensuring their continued control over the polity.[45]

The power play between Old, New, and Modern Old Guards in Aragon and Castile led to civil war within both polities. There were only short periods of political stability within each during the 14th and 15th centuries. The civil war was the most devastating in Castile, with her extremely powerful feudal Old Guard and her zealous New Guard.[46]

The Jews were strongly affected by the surrounding politics.[47] The Old Guard protected the Jews because it depended on their skills and services. The New Guard was threatened by the Jews and their protected status in relation to the established Old Guard. The Old Guard strove to help the Jews remain Jews. The New Guard benefited from the conversion of Jews into Christianity. While the Jews were protected by the Old Guard, they were active in New Guard activities.[48] If the Jews became Christian, theoretically, they would be equal to the Old Guard. They would, however, be likely to join the ranks of the New Guard because of their already present involvement within New Guard activities. The New Guard would increase significantly in number with the addition of New Christian Jews. This would be a threat to the Old Guard and a positive political move for the New Guard. Therefore, the New Guard, unlike the Old Guard, pushed a

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[45] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 31.
[46] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 32-34.
[47] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 34.
[48] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 34.

strong conversionist policy.[49] The Modern Old Guard, when in power, also enforced a conversionist policy. It siphoned some of the Jews into the conservative Old Guard and sent the majority into the New Guard sector which they controlled with tight reigns.[50]

The Iberian environment of the 13th- 15th Centuries was filled with a myriad of conversion -driven activities. In Aragon, the Disputation of Barcelona occurred in 1263 under the rule of a modern old guard.[51] The dispute, between Nahmanides and a New Christian with a great knowledge of Judaism, was used to bolster Christianity's Messianic claims against the beliefs of Judaism. It was also meant to lead many Jews to conversion. Raymund Martí, who was present at the Disputation of Barcelona, authored *The Dagger of Faith,* which was replete with information to aid forceful conversions.[52] In Castile, Martínez de Oviedo unsuccessfully tried to instigate an expulsion of Castile's Jews in the mid-14th century. In Seville, where there was a large concentration of Jews and a modern old guard was in power, Ferrán Martínez began preaching vehemently against the Jews in 1378.[53] Soon thereafter, the Dominican preacher Vincent Ferrer was busily preaching against the Jews in Aragon.[54]

In 1391, violence erupted against the Jews in Castile and spread throughout Castile, Aragon and the Balearic Islands before it came to a close.[55] One theory, as posited by Rabbi Martin Cohen, suggests that the established governing power instigated the violence and then came to the rescue when enough damage had been done without

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[49] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 34.
[50] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 34.
[51] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 35.
[52] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 35.
[53] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 36.
[54] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 36.
[55] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 36.

causing complete destruction. The establishment was able to gain the favor of the public, who had fostered rage against the Jews due to New Guard propaganda , while also controlling the violence and ensuring that the Jewish communities were not utterly destroyed. The goal was mass conversion, not destruction. In 1415, more conversions were influenced by the Disputation of Tortosa.[56]

The Jews who chose to convert were allowed jobs in political offices otherwise denied Jews and they acquired the right to marry Old Christians. These privileges along with the violence and conversionist preaching campaigns against the Jews served as major incentives towards mass conversions.[57] As a result of the mass conversions there developed what is now referred to as a New Christian population. These are the Jews who converted to Christianity and who received the rights of the Old Christians but who were of Jewish descent.

The privileges of the New Christians did not last long. By 1449, the policy of *Sentencia Estatuto* was enacted.[58] This policy held that all New Christians were to be removed from positions within political offices. This included anyone who was a convert to Christianity from Judaism and any of their descendents. The official policy noted that the New Christians were not trustworthy Christians and that their tendency to revert to Jewish practices was strong. An outgrowth of this policy was the ideal of *Limpieza de Sangre,* or blood purity.[59] This ideal played on the myth that the Jews were one race and that the mixture of their blood, in even the smallest quantity, with that of the Christians

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[56] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 37.
[57] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 39.
[58] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 39.
[59] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 40.

would taint the pure blood of the Christians. A person with any amount of Jewish blood was considered a potential Judaizer.

The Inquisition began in 1480.[60] Its official purpose was to punish heretics. Its political component, however, cannot be overlooked. The inquisition served as a way to threaten New Christians along with their fellow New Guard members. In reality, it was nearly impossible to distinguish a New Christian from a New Guard member, due to the high rate of intermarriage and the similarity of their activities. If a New Christian or other New Guard member became too powerful they represented a threat to the establishment.[61]

The practice of the establishment under the Inquisition was to charge targeted threats with the crime of Judaizing. A great fear overtook members of the New Guard. In fact, the Inquisition in reality caused more fear and humiliation than it did deaths at the stake. The power of the inquisition lay in its ability to generate constant fear.[62]

New Christians also intermarried with Old Guard members. This fact, however, was often conveniently overlooked by the established power. King Ferdinand of Castile represents this phenomenon, as his grandmother was of Jewish descent.[63]

The protocol of an arrest under the Inquisition included the issuance of an Edict of Grace, which prompted indicted persons to confess their Judaizing crimes.[64] The commonly ensuing Edict of Faith enumerated all of the actions which were considered punishable heresies. Arrests were frequently carried out at night in secret and were often

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[60] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 40.
[61] Conversations with Rabbi Martin A. Cohen
[62] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 48.
[63] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 43.
[64] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 50-51.

based on information gathered under the pain of torture from other arrested Judaiszers. Those arrested did not learn the identity of their accusers and they themselves were subjected to torture once arrested. Upon confession a prisoner would be given over to the church with various penalties inflicted upon them.[65] Those who refused to admit their crime and repent were sentenced to being burned at the stake. Judaizers arrested a second time received the same sentence. A person who repented at the end had the right to be garroted.[66]

Two aspects of the Inquisition, in particular, insured its victims and their family humiliation; these are the Autos-da-fe and the displaying of the *sambenito* in the local church cathedral indefinitely. The Autos-da-fe were the parade -like processions of the indicted persons. At the end of the Auto-da-fe, the indicted people would receive their sentence publicly and those sentenced to death would be burned at the stake. The first auto-de-fe occurred in 1481 in Seville. The *sambiento* was a sleeveless, bright colored, knee-length shirt that an indicted person would wear during the Auto-da-fe.[67]

In 1492, King Ferdinand of Castile and Queen Isabelle of Aragon enacted the Expulsion from Castile and Aragon of all of the Jews. In 1497 an expulsion was declared in Portugal. Only *conversos* could remain in the Peninsula.

The wake of the Inquisition and the Expulsions of 1492 and 1497 generated various phenomena. There were Old Christians in the New Guard who were never Jewish and

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[65] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 50.
[66] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 50-51.
[67] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen, "The Martyr" Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973; Reprint Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 9

who were indicted for Judaizing.[68] There were Old Christians who moved from the Iberian Peninsula to lands where Christianity was unsafe to practice. These Iberians took on false Jewish identities and a history of secret Judaizing; they did this in order to live in such lands. Lastly, there were Jews who had begun to practice their Judaism due to the Inquisition itself.[69] Before the Inquisition, these Jews were not practicing their religion. Many were practicing Christianity. After being indicted for Judaizing or subjected to the fear under the Inquisition, many Jews began to join groups of other secret Judaizers for the sake of security. At this time they were drawn to their brethren and their own faith. The Judaism that they practiced, however, differed greatly from the traditional Judaism practiced in openly Jewish lands. It was based on the information available to them. Sources included the Latin Vulgate and the Edicts of Faith.[70] From the Vulgate, the secret Jews gleaned the practices of Biblical Judaism as represented by the Latin translation. The heretical acts enumerated in the Edicts of Faith were, in reality, an enumeration of Jewish practice as viewed by the Christians.

There eventually developed a phenomenon of the existence of certain Christians of Iberian ancestry whose practices include certain Jewish customs without recognition of their Jewish source.

There were three exoduses of Jews and New Christians from the Iberia Peninsula. The first massive group left due to the massacres of 1391.[71] This group comprised mostly Jews who wished to live as Jews in a safer environment. The next group left due to the expulsion of 1492 and then in 1497. They chose to remain Jews. The third group was

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[68] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen "The Sephardic Phenomenon" 53.
[69] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 52.
[70] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 53.
[71] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 55.

comprised of New Christians. They emigrated for various reasons; there were periods of renewed violence towards the New Christians in both Spain and Portugal. Some New Christians left because of the indictments of members of their family or close friends increased their danger. Other New Christians may have wished to start anew in places where their Jewish descent was unknown. In addition, New Christians frequently emigrated because of new opportunities in foreign lands.[72]

The first wave of Jewish emigrants had the option to go to Portugal, to varied Italian states in small numbers as well as to Morocco, Egypt, and Algeria.[73] The second group went to numerous Italian cities, Portugal, Algeria, Morocco, and the extremely powerful and highly receptive Ottoman Empire.[74] The third wave went to the Muslim World, to Italy, and to England, France, Germany, and the Low Countries.[75]

The Iberian Jews who transferred their lives to the Ottoman Empire met four other groups of Jews already living there; the Greek speaking *Romaniot* Jews and the Arabic speaking Jews who had lived under various Muslim caliphates had been present the longest. The Karaites had come to the area in the 11th Century and Europeans from outside of the Iberian Peninsula had come from Italy, Franco-Germany, Central Europe, and Provence.[76] They had come to seek better conditions during the 15th Century. The Iberian Jews themselves had come in two waves. The first wave came as Jews and the second as New Christians. There was much discord amongst the various Jewish groups

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[72] Rabbi Martin A Cohen, "Marrano Diaspora," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 11. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971) 1020.

[73] Rabbi Martin Cohen, "The Sephardic Phenomenon" 55.
[74] Rabbi Martin Cohen 55.
[75] Rabbi Martin Cohen 55-56.
[76] Rabbi Martin Cohen 56.

and unity was not a characteristic of the time. The Iberian, or Sephardic Jews, rose to be the most prestigious community and the New Christian population proved to be more so than the Jewish population due to their extended education and money-making opportunities in the Iberian Peninsula.[77]

While the Ottoman rulers viewed the Jews as one quasi-autonomous entity, the Jews themselves were divided into a myriad of self-contained congregations, each answering to its own rabbi [78]

The Sephardic Jews gained prominence once again through their skills and usefulness to the establishment. They worked in commerce, manufacturing, medicine, and governmental administration. They thrived during the height of the Ottoman Empire. [79] With the gradual fall of the Empire, the Jews suffered both financially and through the usual scapegoat phenomenon that accompanies troubled times.[80]

The Sephardic community, along with the others, kept very little contact with the surrounding Muslim community. The little contact they had lay in the realm of their professions and matters of commerce. "Largely obstructed from significant exposure to the contemporary world, the Sephardim of the Ottoman Empire were compelled to look inwardly to their own traditions for their ineluctably difficult adjustment to exile and immigration."[81] They grasped the main elements of their Iberian culture; these were an Iberian psychology, the culture itself and the 15th Century Castilian language.

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[77] Rabbi Martin Cohen 56.
[78] Rabbi Martin Cohen 57-58.
[79] Rabbi A. Martin Cohen 56-57.
[80] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 57.
[81] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 59.

The Sephardic groups who immigrated to the Western Europe had left the Iberian Peninsula "for three reasons, in varying degrees of intensity: religious zeal, economic opportunity, and fear of persecution."[82] They made their choices of settlement based on matters of "economic opportunity, social acceptance, and physical security."[83] The governments that allowed the entrance of New Christians or Iberian Jews did so because of potential benefits from New Christian activities.

A number of New Christians in the third wave of emigration from Spain immigrated to an economically thriving Portugal whose trade industry was booming.[84] As usual, the New Christians were useful to the establishment. Meanwhile, they constantly lived "under the shadow of the Inquisition."[85] Others moved to Spain and Portugal's foreign territories and colonies. "...the colonies beckoned with visions of untapped riches and replications of the society of the Iberian Peninsula."[86] In these areas, however, their lives were affected by the Inquisition as well. If they practiced Judaism at all, they practiced it covertly.

The Sephardim who immigrated to Italy were able to choose between living openly as Jews or as Christians, depending or where they went. Many chose to live as Christians. Samuel Usque wrote *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel* in 1552 in order to inspire this population to embrace their Jewish tradition.[87] Iberian New Christians or "*Marranos*" living in Rome were treated well during the period between 1523 and 1555. In 1555, under the influence of Pope Paul IV, they were subjected to great persecution. In

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[82] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 68.
[83] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 69.
[84] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 70.
[85] Cohen "Marrano Diaspora" in *EJ*, vol. 11. 1023.
[86] Rabbi Martin Cohen "The Sephardic Phenomenon" 69.
[87] Rabbi Martin Cohen 75.

Florence and other Italian cities there are records indicating a *Marrano* presence in the business of trade.[88] Excluding periods of maltreatment such as expulsions in 1497 and 1550, *Marranos* were treated well in Venice. This was due to their coveted trading skills and connections. The *Marranos* also thrived in Tuscany and in Leghorn. With the financial support of Gracia Mendes Nasi, the Marrano Press was launched in Ferrara. This press published Spanish translations of the prayer book and the Hebrew Bible, among other works. The various Italian regions were a good example of the following pattern; the degree of their utility to the establishment in conjunction with the strength and stability of the establishment, led to an increased security for the *Marranos* under any government. During such periods, the host cultures appear to be more welcoming of the Iberian New Christians, and less apt to persecute them.[89]

The New Christians who immigrated to England in the late 15th Century arrived as Christians and eventually were swallowed by the English Christian population.[90] Under the regime of Henry VIII, the effects of the Reformation led to increased opportunity for New Christians to openly practice Judaism.[91] The rise in religious toleration affected by Cromwell's government in the 16th Century and the Glorious Revolution of 1688 had a similar effect.[92] Furthermore, the Jews had been expelled from England in 1290 and to the present they have not been welcomed back officially.

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[88] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen "Marrano Diaspora" in *EJ*, vol. 11. 1022.
[89] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen. "The Sephardic Phenomenon"
[90] Rabbi Martin Cohen "The Sephardic Phenomenon" 75-76.
[91] Rabbi Martin Cohen 75-76.
[92] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 76.

The *Marranos* who immigrated to France had to live as Catholics until the beginning of the eighteenth century. They however lived in secluded communities.[93] In communities such as Bordeaux, the isolation led to the New Christians' slowly increasing rejection of their Catholic practices. While living as Catholics, they were generally left alone, even when they were secretly practicing Judaism. They even had their own schools, "communal institutions," and "burial grounds." [94] In 1730 France recognized the Jewish community officially.[95]

The New Christians who immigrated to Hamburg lived as Catholics and they thrived there. In the German city, where the Marrano population contributed greatly to commerce, they were not allowed to practice Judaism openly until 1612.[96]

Holland welcomed the New Christians. One reason for the warmer reception in Holland was its bitter anger towards Spain. With the Union of Utrecht in 1579, the Dutch Republic formed after a separation from the Low Countries.[97] It became a Protestant nation. Jews became "subjects of the state" in 1657.[98] Many New Christians immigrated to Amsterdam in the late 16th Century and by 1603 Jews began to practice overtly.[99] "Under Spanish speaking teachers from Italy and the Muslim world, the Amsterdam Sephardim confirmed their link to the Iberian heritage of learning, custom, and liturgy (the Minhag *Sepharad),* and have preserved this heritage with nuances derived from the

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[93] Rabbi Martin Cohen 75.
[94] Rabbi Martin Cohen "Marrano Diaspora," in *EJ*, 1023.
[95] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen "Marrano Diaspora" 1020-1023
[96] Rabbi Martin Cohen 1020.
[97] Rabbi Martin Cohen. "Marrano Diaspora" 1021.
[98] Rabbi Martin Cohen
[99] Rabbi Martin Cohen "A Reappraisal" 75.

context of the Western World."[100] The environment of Amsterdam was alive with Jewish study and other Iberian scholarly activity. The works were dispersed by its printing press.

The Dutch Sephardim who immigrated to Brazil established a community in Recife Brazil in 1650. This was the first overtly Jewish community in the Western Hemisphere.[101] In 1654, twenty-three Dutch Sephardim landed in New Amsterdam and established *Shearith Israel.*[102] Other congregations of the same name followed in Newport, Philadelphia, Savannah, and Charleston.[103]

The Jews and New Christians who immigrated to the Eastern Mediterranean spoke Judeo-Spanish which they referred to as *Espanyol* or *Judezmo*. The language is often referred to as Ladino as well. Judeo-Spanish is 15th Century Castilian Spanish; it is the language that the exiled peoples carried with them as part of their deeply rooted Iberian culture. Jews who immigrated to Western Europe spoke Spanish and Portuguese.[104] According to Rabbi Cohen, the Portuguese speaking New Christians in Western Europe recorded their religious material in Spanish; they considered Spanish to be the Holy Language of the two.

The Jews and New Christians who fled from the Iberian Peninsula embodied the Iberian culture; this was the culture of their homeland, a culture which they had shared with the people who forced them into exile. While in exile, they continued the Iberian custom of *tertulia*; this involved poetry and literary readings as well as philosophical and political discussions in local coffee houses.

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[100] Rabbi Martin Cohen 76.
[101] Rabbi Martin Cohen 77.
[102] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 77.
[103] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 78.
[104] Rabbi Martin Cohen 65.

During the late 16th Century, a notable example of Ladino literary culture existed in Ferrara, Italy. The literary activity was propelled by the Marrano Press which was established there. Abraham Usque, who was an émigré from Portugal, was exceedingly active in the pursuits of the press. Between 1552 and 1555 he published a handsome number of original works and translations in Spanish.[105] The work *Consolations for the Tribulations of Israel* by Samuel Usque was published in 1553. Usque intended through this work to reach out to the general New Christian/*Marrano* population; his concern lay in is observation that they were "vacillating in their faith"[106]. Usque felt that his fellow émigrés from Portugal needed literary guidance to inspire their interest in Judaism. Within the literary circle of Ferrara, there was a woman named Doña Gracia Mendes Nasi. Mendes Nasi was a great patron of the press in Ferrara and of Jewish literature and the arts [107] as well as of Jewish religious education. [108] Samuel Usque dedicated his great work to Doña Gracia Mendes Nasi.[109]

Another embodiment of Iberian culture which was created in the Iberian Diaspora is that of the *Me-Am Loez*. The *Me-Am Loez* is "an 18th-century ethico –homiletical Bible commentary in Ladino, the outstanding work of Judeo-Spanish literature."[110] Jacob Culi envisioned and created the *Me-Am Loez*. He died, however, after he had published the

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[105] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen "Abraham Usque" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 16. 21

[106] Samuel Usque. *Consolations for the Tribulations of Israel*. Translated by Martin A. Cohen. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1965, 39.

[107] Rabbi Martin Cohen "The Marrano Diaspora" 1022.
[108] Rabbi Martin Cohen "The Sephardic Phenomenon" 64
[109] Samuel Usque 37.
[110] Henry Guttel and David Derovan 2nd ed. "Me-Am Lo'Ez," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Second Edition vol. 13. 710.

first complete volume in Constantinople in 1730; it was a commentary on Genesis. He had also finished the beginning of the commentary on Exodus. Other scholars used his unpublished notes to continue his work on the remaining three biblical books as well as other books of the Tanach.[111] Culi composed his work in popular Ladino. His project was guided by the intent to reach out to the general public in the Ottoman Empire; Jewish education had greatly declined due to poverty and inability to read Hebrew.[112] The Ottoman Empire had been in decline since the late 16th Century.[113] Culi's project was incredibly successful. The Me-Am Loez was widely studied in the Ottoman Empire and it was immensely popular on all social levels. [114]

In Western Europe, the New Christian communities also brought their Iberian culture with them to the lands of their resettlement. In referring to the Western European Sephardim, Rabbi Cohen noted "in the arts their names are to be found among the leading figures in music, painting, and literature in almost every country of their sojourn."[115]

A notable center of Iberian culture arose in Amsterdam. According to Rabbi Martin Cohen In his article *The Sephardic Phenomenon*, "Amsterdam was astir with an intellectual ferment that amalgamated the Iberian heritage, the Jewish faith, and the contemporary context."[116] Due to the activity in printing, the community dispersed its works worldwide[117]. Influential writers abounded in many areas. In the genre of polemics

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[111] Guttel 710.
[112] Rabbi Martin Cohen "The Sephardic Phenomenon" 66
[113] Rabbi Martin Cohen 57.
[114] Guttel 710-711.
[115] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen "The Sephardic Phenomenon" 74.
[116] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 76.
[117] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 76.

arose such noted authors as Immanuel Aboab and Isaac (Fernando) Cardozo.[118] Writers steeped in mysticism included among them Abraham Cohen Herrera. Daniel Levi (Miguel) de Barrios composed impressive religious poetry and is known for his rich descriptions of Western Sephardic Culture.

Regardless of where the Iberian Jews and New Christians chose to immigrate, they brought their Christian Iberian culture with them. Like the Christians of the Peninsula, their cultural make-up included many characteristics from the Muslim Golden Age; they were however Christian Iberian in their cultural make-up and ethos.

[118] Rabbi Martin A. Cohen 76.

# Chapter Two

For the purpose of this project, the term Sephardic will refer to:

> "descendants of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula, most of whom were expelled from Spain and the Peninsula during the period 1492-7 or converted to Christianity (since the 14th century) and remained in the Peninsula as Crypto Jews;" [119] the term Sephardic will denote those Crypto Jews who left the Peninsula "as converted New Christians" and resumed Jewish practice in their new lands of settlement [120]

Following a common formula, the Pan-Sephardic communities are divided into three geographically defined groups; the division includes the Jews who settled in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Jews who settled in the Western Mediterranean, and those who immigrated to Western Europe. The Eastern Mediterranean areas of settlement include Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Jerusalem.[121] Western Mediterranean or North African refers to communities in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. The Western European communities settled in south-west France, Italy, Amsterdam, London, Paris, Hamburg, the Eastern United States of America, as well as the Caribbean.[122]

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[119] Edwin Seroussi, "Jewish Music" in *the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians.* Vol. 8. (London: Macmillan, 2001) 59.

[120] Judith Cohen, "Sephardic Song," *Mainstream* 49, no.5 (July/August 2003): 12.
[121] Susanna Weich-Shahak, "Social Functions of the Judeo-Spanish Romancero" in *Studies of Socio-Musical* Sciences, ed. Joachim Braum and Uri Sharvit (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1998) 245.
[122] Edwin Seroussi 59.
Note: While the article in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* refers to Italy as a fourth community, for the purposes of this project it is to be considered as part of the Western European community.

This paper will refer to the Hebrew liturgical music of the Sephardic Jews as well as to the Judeo-Spanish songs that are related to the life cycle. The two languages pertinent to this project are Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish, popularly referred to as Ladino.

Judeo-Spanish is a term used by scholars to refer to the language spoken by the Sephardic Jewish population until the middle of the 20th century in many places.[123] The language is also referred to as Ladino in popular usage. Within the different Sephardic communities the language has various names. Examples include *Judezmo, Djudyo, Djidyo, Spanyolit, Spanyol,* and in the case of North Africa, *Hakiti'a* or *Haketi'a.*[124]

The use of the word Ladino to refer to the spoken language is an error. "Ladino, strictly speaking, is the word for word translation from Hebrew, as if one were to render "*ha-laila ha-zeh*" into English as "*the night this is*, "*la noche la esta.*"[125] "Ladino renders a word for word juxtaposition of the Hebrew original with total disregard for Spanish syntax, the appearance and interpretation of phrases."[126] In addition, the translation in this manner occurred with texts that connect to Jewish ritual, such as the Bible or the *Siddur.*[127]

Judeo-Spanish is most closely related to the language that was spoken in 15th century Castile.[128] As Judith Cohen notes, "at the time of the Expulsions, Castilian was just emerging as the language of what was becoming Spain."[129] In addition, the Jews of

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[123] Judith R. Cohen, "Sephardic Song," *Mainstream* 49, no. 3 (July/August 2003): 12.
[124] George Jochnowitz, "Ladino Lives," *Mainstream* 49, no. 3 (July/August 2003): 7.
[125] Judith R. Cohen 12.
[126] Jochnowitz 7.
[127] Jochnowitz 7.
[128] This definition of Judeo-Spanish is taken from conversations with Rabbi Martin Cohen.
[129] Judith R. Cohen 12.

the Iberian Peninsula spoke Catalan and Galician as well as other Iberian Peninsula dialects, depending on which region they inhabited.

"All of this coalesced during the centuries of the Diaspora into a primarily written language, Ladino, and into many varieties of the vernacular..."[130] After the Expulsions from the Iberian Peninsula, the language of the emigrating Jews absorbed words from the surrounding cultures in their new homelands. In the Eastern Mediterranean, for example, the language admitted among others, Greek and Turkish words and in the Western Mediterranean, the language took in Arabic words. Another example of change occurred when "... the Sephardim in Turkey created innumerable Hispanicisms in that they inflected words taken from Turkish and from languages frequently spoken in Turkey (Hebrew, Greek, French, etc.), to make them sound Spanish."[131]

Judeo-Spanish also includes many words adopted from the Hebrew language. Words directly taken from Hebrew include *kavod,* which means honor, *beraja*, which means blessing, *neshama,* which means soul, and *lashon,* which means language.[132] In addition, "an interesting fact about Jewish languages, including Ladino, is that words about things that are somewhat unpleasant come from Hebrew and Aramaic."[133] For example, along with the Castilian word *espanto*, the word *pahad* also means fear in Judeo-Spanish. Both *bivda* and *almana* mean widow. The Spanish word *ladron* is most

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[130] Judith Cohen 12.
[131] William Samelson, "Romances and Songs of the Sephardim," in *The Sephardi Heritage: Essays on the history and cultural contribution of the Jews of Spain and Portugal*, ed. R. D. Barnett (London: The World Sephardi Foundation, 1971), 534.
[132] Samelson 535.
[133] Jochnowitz 7.

often employed to mean thief; the Hebrew word *ganav* is also used.[134] Other words are based on Hebrew roots, such as *sejeludo*, which is based on the Hebrew word *sehel*.[135] Both words mean wisdom. The Judeo-Spanish word *ladron*, mentioned above, is made plural using the Hebrew language formula; it becomes *ladronim*.[136]

There are certain 15th century Castilian elements of pronunciation that remain in the Judeo-Spanish language which are no longer part of the Spanish language. For example, the modern Spanish pronunciation for the letters *j* and *x* would produce the sound "*h*" as in the sound at the beginning of the word *Hanukkah*. This illustrates a change from the older pronunciation of the letter *j* which was produced more like the sound at the beginning of the word Jew. The Judeo-Spanish word for Jew, *Djudyo* or *Djidyo*, begins with the latter pronunciation; the word begins with the same sound as does the word Jew. Another example of a sound that no longer exists in modern Spanish but remains in Judeo-Spanish is the *sh* sound that can be heard in the English word "pleasure." This sound remains in words such as *ojo*, which means eye, and *ajo* which means garlic.[137] "...The phonetic system of Ladino does indeed preserve sounds that are no longer found in Spanish."[138]

The canon of life cycle songs compiled through this project includes examples from the liturgical and folk song domains; the specific genres are the liturgical *piyytut* as well as those that fall under the umbrella of Judeo-Spanish song. The elements of Judeo-Spanish song will be defined below. The definitions will utilize the criteria of form and

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[134] Jochnowitz 7.
[135] Samelson 535.
[136] Samelson 535.
[137] Jochnowitz 7.
[138] Jochnowitz 7.

content when relevant and will also refer to social function as a defining criterion when more appropriate.

"*Piyyutim* are Hebrew liturgical poems used to embellish obligatory prayers and other paraliturgical or religious events, communal and private."[139] The Hebrew liturgical poetry of the Iberian Peninsula's Golden and Silver Ages belongs to the genre of *piyyutim* and it is considered to be "the direct continuation of the Eastern school."[140]

The Arabic poetry of medieval Al-Andalus had a great impact upon the style of the *Piyyutim* being composed by the Jews. The greatest changes came with the addition of quantitative meters and strophic structures.[141] The quantitative meters existed in the surrounding Arabic poems and were also introduced to the Court in Cordoba through the poet Dunash Ben Labrat Halevi. With this introduction he "founded the new Andalusian school of Hebrew Poetry."[142] The changes taking place in the poetry of the courts affected the rapid introduction of such poetry into the synagogue.[143]

According to Idelssohn, Avenary, and Shiloah, the use of quantitative meters created a new phenomenon in the music of the synagogue; the music accompanying such liturgical poetry was characterized by a "fixed beat and recurring rhythmic patterns."[144] The congregations preferred songs that flowed as a result of their rhythmic dimensions over the arrhythmic tunes to which the older *piyyutim* were rendered.[145] Such musical

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[139] Seroussi 49.
[140] Seroussi 49.
[141] Seroussi 50.
[142] Edwin Seroussi, "Music in Medieval Ibero-Jewish Society" *Hispania Judaica Bulletin: Articles, Reviews, and Manuscripts on Sefarad* 5 (2007), 13.
[143] Seroussi 13.
[144] Seroussi 15.
[145] Hanoch Avenary, "Music," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 14, 655.

forms led to congregational participation during any refrains.[146] The melodies were taken from within the Jewish domain. After the 13th century they also included popular Arabic songs.[147] By the 15th century, it was common to absorb songs from the surrounding Christian culture; these songs were in Romance languages such as Castilian, Catalan, and Aragonese.[148]

*Contrafactum* is a phenomenon closely connected to the singing of *piyyutim*. On the manuscript of each *piyyut*, there is an inscription that notifies the performer of the *piyyut* of the melody of another text which is to be used for the rendering of the *piyyut* at hand.

The Arabic term *lahan* introduces the inscription; it means "[sung to the] melody of..."[149] Whether the title noted came from within the Jewish domain or from without corresponded with the borrowing practices noted above. For example, an early *piyyut* would be sung to the tune of a liturgical piece. A later *piyyut* might be sung to a popular Arabic melody and an even later *piyyut* to a melody of a Christian folk tune in Castilian. A post-exilic inscription could refer to a popular Turkish melody.[150]

Jewish poets composed *piyyutim* inspired by Arabic classical poetry until the 15th century.[151] "Paraliturgical devotions and life cycle events continued, however, to nurture the creation of new Hebrew religious poetry (also called *pizmonim)* until the early 20th century."[152] According to Tobi, the quality of Hebrew poetry changed during the period

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[146] Seroussi 22.
[147] Seroussi "Jewish Music" *EJ*, vol. xiii 50.
[148] Seroussi "Music in Ibero-Medieval Jewish Society" 25.
[149] Seroussi "Jewish Music" *EJ*, vol. xiii 50.
[150] Seroussi 50.
[151] Seroussi "Music in Ibero-Medieval Jewish Society" 33.
[152] Seroussi "Jewish Music" 38.

immediately preceding the Expulsions. A sacred poetry was born that was inspired by popular poetry. The poetical devices lost sophistication while the content of the *piyyut* and its accompanying melody became the central concerns.[153]

The *piyyutim* for the life cycle include the high art poetry inspired by classical Arabic forms as well as the more popular poetry that originated in the 15th century. One example of a phenomenon related to the connection of a *piyyut* with a life cycle event occurs when a *piyyut* is inserted during a Shabbat *shaharit* service in order to point to the presence of a groom in the congregation.[154] This often occurred when the groom was called to read from the Torah.[155]

While the folk song is often secular by nature of its form and content, the Judeo-Spanish folk song canon is filled with examples whose social functions are intimately connected to the life cycle.[156]

Celebrations relating to birth, circumcision, Bar Mitzvah, and marriage, as well as ceremonies that surround death and mourning are accompanied by Judeo-Spanish folk songs[157] in both the Eastern and Western Mediterranean traditions.

While *piyyutim* belong to the domain of male sung genres, women normally sing the Judeo-Spanish folk songs.[158] There is not a great deal of extant documentation regarding women's musical activities before the Expulsions.[159] According to Seroussi, there is documentation that does illustrate that Jewish women of Christian Iberia

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[153] Seroussi "Music in Ibero-Medieval Jewish Society" 59-60.
[154] Seroussi 32.
[155] Seroussi 26.
[156] Seroussi 75.
[157] Seroussi "Jewish Music" 75-6.
[158] Seroussi "Jewish Music" 75.
[159] Seroussi "Music in Ibero-Medieval Jewish Society" 47.

participated in music making during the rituals surrounding circumcisions and funerals. In addition, it is clear from the work of many modern scholars that, certainly post exile, women's voices have joined in Judeo-Spanish songs relating to almost every life cycle juncture. The *romance, the copla,* and the lyric song will be defined below according to their forms and content; a brief history of the *romance* will be presented as well. The breakdown that will follow will discuss the following groups of songs related to their specific social function within the life cycle: *canticas de parida, cantares de cuna, cantares de matesha, cantares de novia/ canticas de novia, cantes de boda//canticas de boda,* and *endechas.*

The form and content of the *romance*, its history, and its possible connection to Medieval Iberia were the focus of much serious study during the beginning of the 20th century. A brief summary of these elements will ensue. In addition, since the *romance* has played a large role as an accompanying element of the Sephardic life cycle, the social functions of the *romance* will be discussed.

"In its final and popular form, the *romance* has emerged as a sixteen -syllable verse divided by a medial pause into two octosyllabic hemistiches, the former hemistich without rhyme, the latter closed in assonance." [160] It had been referred to as "a rhymed novel."[161]

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[160] Israel J. Katz, "The Myth of the Sephardic Musical Legacy from Spain" *The Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies* 4 (1973): 237.
[161] Samelson 238.

In reference to its themes and content, it is "a narrative poem with a thematic content that reflects its Spanish Medieval origin, manifested by epic subjects and themes of adultery, fidelity, incest, love affairs, palace intrigues, and also biblical topics."[162]

The Judeo-Spanish *Romance* developed from the Spanish *Romance.* The corpus that likely led to the formation of the Spanish *Romance* is that of the medieval *Chansons de geste;* this body of popular epic poetry was alive in the practice of *juglares* in the lands of France and the Iberian Peninsula.[163] Early individual *romances* were ballads taken from the larger epic poems such as *Chanson de Roland* or *El Cid.* The popular epic fell into decline after its acme in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[164]

The four line stanza with its particular rhyme scheme noted above was an influence of the French poetry of the twelfth century.[165] According to Judith Cohen, the first appearance of the *romance* "in a recognizable form" occurred in 1421. The themes, however, are from medieval Iberia or of earlier periods.[166]

As the epic declined relative to its composition, it simultaneously became fashionable with the general populace. "The people listened to the reciting minstrel and retained in their memory only those small fragments of the long epics which most impressed them."[167] According to Samelson, it is these excerpts from the larger poem that made up the body of poetry known as the Spanish Romance.

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[162] Susana Weich-Shahak, "Social Functions of the Judeo-Spanish Romancero," in *Studies in Socio-Musical Sciences*, ed. Joachim Braun and Uri Sharvit (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1998): 246.
[163] Samelson 527.
[164] Samelson 528.
[165] Samelson 527.
[166] Judith R. Cohen, "Sephardic Song," *Mainstream* 49, no. 3 (July/August 2003): 12.
[167] Samelson 528.

Shortly after the popularity of the *chansons de geste*, poets began to compose their own *romances*; they composed both historical and popular genres. These *romances* were influences by the smaller pieces of the great epics but were only related to them in "meter and the use of assonance." The first of this form appeared in 1580 and the genre's popularity declined by the seventeenth century.[168]

It seems that while these great poets were composing their *romances*, the Sephardic women were reworking the fragments that they had gathered from the *juglares* in the lands of their resettlement; this reworking was a natural outcome of their use of the genre in daily life.

It is also commonly noted by scholars that the Jewish communities in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean came into contact with the culture of the Iberian Peninsula up to a century after their exile. This occurred through the arrival of New Christians to their lands as well as through commercial ventures. Therefore, the women likely caught up on the newest *romances* and perhaps their tunes due to these contacts.

According to Ramón Menéndez Pidal, "it is not at all rare that in all categories of Romances the Jewish versions improve or complete the versions collected in the XVIth century during which the Romance was in its fullest splendor."[169]

The fact the Judeo-Spanish *romance* survived is linked to the importance that it played daily in the lives of Sephardic women. The form was always growing and changing while also being influenced by the surrounding cultures of the news lands of

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[168] Samelson 529.
[169] Samelson 530.

settlement.[170] Other than the mention of *Romance* titles in the manuscripts of *piyyutim*, the first documented source to mention the form amongst Sephardic Jews in Morocco is a letter from 1873.[171]

The *Romance* can enter into any realm of the life cycle; while each life cycle ceremony tends to have other songs that are linked with it, *Romances* are also sung as lullabies, in celebration of birth and circumcision, as courting and wedding songs, and some *Romances* function as *endechas*.[172]

According to Susana Weich-Shahak, "almost any romance can serve as a cradle song."[173] Their hushed, slow and descriptive character lends to them the qualities of a lullaby.[174]

While literary Hispanists have shed light on the Medieval Iberian characteristics of extant Judeo-Spanish *Romances*, a similar attempt by musicologists has been rejected by many of their respected colleagues. While Edith Gerson-Kiwi as well as Judith Etzion and Susana Weich-Shahak have formulated arguments for the medieval Iberian roots of the *romance* melodies, both Israel Katz and Kate Shelemay have made convincing arguments for rejecting such a hypothesis. Katz notes that "we possess almost no

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[170] Judith Etzion and Susana Weich-Shahak, "The Music of the Judeo-Spanish Romancero: Stylistic Features," *Anuario Musical* 43 (1988): 223. 221-255.
[171] Mesod Salama, "The Reappropriation of the Judeo Spanish Romancero," in *Cultural Marginality In The Western Mediterranean*, ed. Frederick Gerson and Anthony Percival (Toronto: New Aurora Editions 1990), 144.
[172] Weich –Shahak "Social Functions of the Judeo-Spanish Romancero," 246.
[173] Weich-Shahak 247.

[174] Weich-Shahak 247.

documentation for the early musical tradition of the Sephardic *Romancero*."[175] In addition, Katz, along with other scholars, illustrates the impossibility of using current research to prove that any of the extant melodies are Peninsular.

The *romances* are sung to strophic melodies. The text itself is not strophic, so divisions are made by the music. Each set of four lines is made into a strophe. The general tendency is to vary each strophe musically.[176]

The *romances* are generally performed by one singer without any accompaniment.[177]

"The *coplas* are strophic poems with fixed metric schemes."[178] They are also called *complas* or *komplas*.[179] In general, *coplas* consist of alternating long and short verses. The strophes may consist of three or four lines with a single rhyme, or up to eight or nine verses." Generally they are made up of octosyllabic quatrains.[180] There is often a refrain.

*Coplas* can be "narrative, descriptive, or argumentative" in their style.[181] The themes of the *copla* genre are biblical, related to Jewish history or tradition, or current events.[182] *Coplas* frequently serve in a didactic role in order to "impart communal values." [183] They were recorded on broadsides in the Eastern tradition and therefore differ

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[175] Katz 241
[176] Shahak 14.
[177] Shahak 14.
[178] Susana Weich-Shahak, "Judeo-Spanish Moroccan Songs for the Life Cycle," 13.
[179] Seroussi 82.
[180] Seroussi 82.
[181] Weich- Shahak 13.
[182] Seroussi 82.
[183] Seroussi 82.

from the other orally transmitted genres. They also differ in that they were most frequently performed by male singers.

The lyric song is called the *cantica* or *cantiga* in the Eastern Mediterranean tradition and *cantare* or *cante* in the Western Mediterranean tradition.[184] According to Professor Eliyahu Schleifer, *canticas* are "life cycle songs in simple, popular style and short stanzas, sometimes with a refrain, sung to lively, rhythmical melodies and at times accompanied by a tambourine."[185]

The purpose of the text is not that of narration[186] but it can be descriptive of the events to which the song is connected; an example would be a *cantare de novia* (a song for the bride), that describes the process of dressing the bride. Within the corpus of lyric songs, there are examples that relate to all junctures of the life cycle. The most common theme is romantic love.[187]

Generally the lyric songs often are built in quatrains in which every other line rhymes. The number of lines per verse, however, can vary greatly. Many times there is a refrain, called a *strobilus*. The length of the lyric songs is characteristically shorter than that of the *romances* and the *coplas*.[188]

Both the *coplas* and the lyric songs are sung to strophic melodies. The performers also accompany the songs on percussive instruments such as the frame drum. Such

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[184] Seroussi 82.
[185] Eliyahu Schleifer, "From the Bible to Hasidism" in *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman and Janet R. Walton (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 36.
[186] Weich- Shahak 12.
[187] Seroussi 82.
[188] Seroussi 82.

accompaniment supports the "clear beat and meter" common to both genres. [189]Unlike the *romance* the strophic nature of these genres make them more naturally conducive to joining strophic melodies. Most commonly the meters of the songs are in 4/4 2/4 and 6/8. Some examples from these genres alternate between compound and simple meters; specifically, there is an alternation between 6/8 and 3/4. There are also examples that do have a clear beat but do not conform to "a clearly defined metric pattern."[190]

*Canticas de parida* are the "songs for the mother of the newborn child."[191] They belong to the Jews of the Eastern Mediterranean and are rare in the Western Mediterranean tradition. They include songs that are sung during the eight days between the birth and circumcision of a male newborn. The lullabies or cradlesongs also belong to this corpus. In the Moroccan tradition, they are called *cantares de cuna*. "There are very few lullabies in the Sephardic tradition which are not romances."[192]

C*antares de mateša* , literally swing songs, belong to the genre of courtship songs; for the purposes of this project, they are to be considered an extension of the marriage juncture of the life cycle. The *cantares de mateša* were sung by young unmarried women in Morocco while swinging on swings hung in courtyards.[193] Frequently, young men would listen to the young women and would even interact by taking one of the verses. If the young man was interested in the young lady and if she had

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[189] Shahak 14.
[190] Shahak 14.
[191] Shahak "Childbirth Songs Among Sephardic Jews of Balkan Origin" 87
[192] Shahak, "Social Functions of the Judeo-Spanish Romancero" 247.
[193] Judith Cohen, "Women's Roles in Judeo-Spanish Song Traditions, in *Active Voices Women in Jewish Culture*, ed. Maurie Sacks (Chicago: Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 1995), 187.

showed interest through her response through song, he would later engage a matchmaker to intervene.[194]

The songs of the bride are called *cantares de novia* in the Western Mediterranean tradition and *canticas de novia* in the Eastern Mediterranean tradition. The songs of the wedding are called *cantes de boda* and *canticas de boda,* respectively. These bodies of songs and their functions will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

*Endechas* are dirges that are sung during the period of mourning. They exist in both traditions. Chapter 3 will discuss an old custom of women performing *endechas* in a semi-professional capacity during the periods of mourning in their communities.

[194] Shahak "Judeo-Spanish Moroccan Songs for the Life Cycle" 10.

# Chapter Three

In most cultures, the birth of a new child is accompanied by great celebration. Here the Sephardic communities are not unique. They are exceptional in relation to some of the rituals that surround childbirth and circumcision and the centrality of music in the daily life of the mother and her surrounding female community.

This chapter will make a comparison between the male and female domains in relation to the religious rites and secular celebration of birth; it will also discuss culturally inspired themes shared by the texts of both domains.

The following discussion will include aspects of the *Brit Milah* and *Zeved ha-bat* ceremonies that are unique to various Sephardic communities, that share a theme with the *canticas de parida* of the women's domain, or that could simply enrich the current ceremonies in the Reform movement.

The *Brit Milah* ceremony as laid out in the Levy anthologies as well as in *Siddur Aish Matzliah,* a Sephardic and Edot Mizrahi Siddur,[195] does not differ greatly from the ceremony found in the Birnbaum *siddur* [196] frequently used in Ashkenazi congregations. A comparative study of the various divergences that occur is beyond the scope of this paper; however those differences central to this study will be included.

In the ceremony of the Jerusalem tradition as recorded by Levy[197] as compared with the ceremony in the Birnbaum *siddur,*[198] the order of the first two blessings is

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[195] *Siddur Aish Matzliah*, (B'nei Brack: Makhon Ha-Rav Matzliah, 1996; reprint 1997).

[196] *Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem.* ed. Paltiel Birnbaum (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1995).

[197] Isaac Levy comp. and ed. *Liturgia Judeo-Espānola,* Ten Volumes. (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education and Culture, 1965-1980), Volume 4.

reversed. In the Jerusalem tradition the first blessing chanted ends with *vezivanu lehahniso bivrito shel Avraham avinu* and is followed by the blessing that ends with *vezivanu al ha-milah* and in the Birnbaum *siddur*, *vezivanu al ha -milah* is to be recited first.

The section of the Levy collection devoted to the Jerusalem rite[199] notes that if the father acts as *mohel* during the ceremony, he is to chant a different version of the second blessing.[200] Instead of ending with *vezivanu al ha- milah,* he is to chant *vezivanu lamul et ha-ben.*[201] According to Dobrinsky, "this was a custom that prevailed in Spain itself until Nahmanides (Ramban) changed it to be the blessing *al- ha milah* even for a father who serves as *mohel.* "[202] Dobrinsky observes that this is the practice among Moroccan Jews.

The ceremony recorded in the Levy collection as performed in Tangiers includes some *piyyutim* that are not present in the other ceremonies as recorded by Levy or in the *siddur* noted above.[203] Dobrinsky notes that in the Moroccan tradition, there are indeed special *piyyutim* that are to be sung in the ceremony.[204]

A *piyyut* of notable sophistication comes at the end of the ceremony as the *mohel* prepares to perform the circumcision.[205] Levy notes that the *piyyut* is to be chanted after the child is transferred to the lap of the *sandak* (godfather) who is sitting in the Chair of

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[198] Birnbaum *Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem* 741-744
[199] Isaac Levy, Volume 4, 331-339.
[200] Isaac Levy, Volume 4, 332.
[201] Isaac Levy, Volume 4, 332.
[202] Dobrinsky 14.
[203] Isaac Levy, Volume 4, 349
Note: This is the specific *piyyut* that will be discussed, there are others in the ceremony; the ceremony falls between pages 340 and 349.
[204] Dobrinsky 14.
[205]Isaac Levy, Volume 4, 349.
Note: See Appendix A for full Hebrew Text of *Piyyut.*

Elijah (*Kisei shel Eliyahu Ha-navi).* It appears that the congregation would sing this *piyyut* literally as the *mohel* prepares his instruments. [206]

The general theme of the *piyyut* connects the child with Abraham, traditionally the first Jew to be circumcised and, in effect, to have entered into the covenant with God. Poetic allusions are made to other Biblical accounts such as the last line of the first stanza that echoes *Parashat Noah*; the phrase is *hithalekh lefanav vehyeh tamim.*

Broadly speaking, the *piyyut* praises Abraham in his acts of keeping the *mitzvah* of *milah* and connects the present act of the congregation back to Abraham and his merit. The text asks for God's favor upon the boy because of the merit of the act performed through the *brit milah.* A further discussion on the themes of this *piyytut* will ensue at the end of this chapter where its themes will be compared to those present in the repertoire of the women's domain.

In reference to the music, Levy notated the song in 3/8 and added that it should be sung *Allegretto; allegretto* implies a rather quick tempo.[207] With the waltz-like rhythm, the occasional syncopation, the fast tempo, and the catchy tune, it seems that the congregation would be compelled to sing if they knew the melody and the Hebrew text. The strophic nature of *piyyut* singing lends itself to eventual participation. It is likely that the congregation is intended to join in singing this *piyyut.*

In the Italian rite as recorded by Levy, *L'kha Dodi* appears.[208] It is placed after another *piyyut* which is notably modern in comparison with the classical *L'kha Dodi* of

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[206] Levy, Volume 4, 349.
[207] Levy, Volume 4, 349.
[208] Levy Volume 9, 401-402.

Shlomo Alkabetz.[209] The connection of this *piyyut*, usually sung during Kabbalat Shabbat, is not immediately clear. The connection is found in those stanzas that refer to redemption. In the fifth stanza the second line reads: *ki va oreih*, which means "for your light has come."[210] This implies that the newborn boy has brought the potential for redemption. This theme will be discussed at the end of the chapter as the same themes appear in the *canticas de parida*.

In the Amsterdam tradition as recorded by Levy, there is a *piyyut* at the beginning of the ceremony that incorporates the phrases *b'rukhim atem kahal emunai u'varuh haba b'sheim ado(m)ai.*[211] This is a call and response pattern and is common in the Sephardic *brit milah* ceremonies. The call is slightly different from the call in the other traditions but the response is exactly the same. The novelty lies in the way that this call and response mark the beginning and end of the *piyyut* that falls in the middle. Each phrase ends with God's name which echoes a piece of the well-known response from above. This is a cleverly employed poetic device that ties the *piyyut* together.

The melody of this *piyyut* is not as simple as others that a congregation would be expected to sing. It seems to fit, however, with the more Western type of ornate style of the Spanish Portuguese musical rite. The lovely melody represents the musical rite of this community very well.

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[209] Isaac Levy, Volume 9, 399-400
[210] As translated in the Birnbaum *Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem*, 246.
[211] Isaac Levy, Volume 10, 303-304.
Note: See Appendix B for Full Hebrew Text of *Piyyut*.

The addition of Psalm 128 is unique to the Sephardic communities [212] and is included in Levy's collection for the communities in Tangiers and Amsterdam. Psalm 128 is also found in *Siddur Aish Matzliakh.*[213]

Previously in the Moroccan communities, the *Brit Milah* ceremony generally occurred in the home of the parents of the newborn. Members of the congregation, including the *mohel* and the *sandak* (godfather), accompanied the father of the newborn child home after the morning prayers on the eighth day after the birth of the male child.[214] At present, the Moroccan communities hold the *Brit Milah* ceremony in the Synagogue.[215]

According to Dobrinsky, the Eastern Mediterranean communities refer to the ceremony as *Birkhat Milah* rather than using the more common term of *Brit Milah.*[216] The ceremony generally takes place in the Synagogue.[217]

In the Spanish Portuguese rite, the *Brit Milah* ceremony used to occur at the home or hospital. At present, the community in New York holds the ceremony at the synagogue.[218]

In addition to the commanded ritual of *Brit Milah*, the Sephardic communities mark the naming of a newborn girl in a special ceremony entitled *Zeved ha-bat.*

In both the Ashkenazi and Sephardic traditions, the ceremony is found in the Torah service section of the *Siddur* with the other communal blessings. The various

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[212] Dobrinsky
[213] *Siddur Aish Matzliah* 663.
[214] Dobrinsky 14.
[215] Dobrinsky 16.
[216] Dobrinsky 20.
[217] Dobrinsky 22.
[218] Dobrinsky 26.

Sephardic ceremonies differ from the Ashkenazi practice of conferring a name upon a baby girl in a few ways.

First, the ceremony as recorded in *Siddur Aish Matzliakh* [219] presents a commemoration that is more fleshed out than the blessing found in the Birnbaum *Siddur* frequently used by Orthodox Ashkenazi communities. It includes the singing of the Song of Songs, Chapter 2:14 and a fuller *Mi Shebeirakh* for a newborn girl.

Second, the specific *Mi Shebeirakh* is unique to the Sephardic Communities in that it names a line of Biblical women who were blessed by God rather than Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the Ashkenazi blessing preserves the paternal line in the blessing. In addition to the Biblical mothers and Miriam the prophet, Esther is also mentioned. The segment at the end of the present chapter will reflect on the cultural significance of the addition of Esther's name.

While the *Siddur* includes the option of creating the ceremony in the synagogue in the manner stated above, according to Dobrinsky, the ceremony generally takes place at home in Moroccan[220]and Eastern Mediterranean communities.[221] According to Dobrinsky the ceremony is called *fadas* in the Eastern Mediterranean communities.[222] In the Spanish Portuguese communities, there are two possibilities. According to one possibility, the mother brings her newborn daughter to the synagogue for a private ceremony where she recites the *Birkat H-gomel* and the Cantor chants Song of Songs verse 2:14 as well as 6:9 if the girl is the first born. Psalm 128 is also recited.[223]

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[219] *Siddur Aish Matzliah* 463-464
[220] Dobrinsky 11.
[221] Dobrinsky 20.
[222] Dobrinsky 20.
[223] Dobrinsky 25.

The second option has the father ascend to the Torah during the Torah Service and receive a *Mi Shebeirach* prayer for the health of his wife; the newborn is blessed with the special *Mi Shebeirach* for newborn girls.[224]

It appears that presently, the *Zeved ha-bat* ceremony can either occur at the synagogue or at the home.

The following section will discuss additional customs related to the circumcision.

Traditionally, the first eight days of the life of the male newborn is period of nervous worry over his well-being.[225] The fear for the safety of the newborn is shared by both the Eastern and Western Mediterranean communities. According to Dobrinsky, the fear of Lilith with her strong intention to harm the infant before the day of circumcision is very strong in the Moroccan communities.[226] In the Eastern Mediterranean communities it seems that the fear concerns "the evil eye and other omens."[227]

The Eastern and Western Mediterranean Communities as well as the Spanish Portuguese communities held a function on the night preceding the circumcision. The communities in Morocco held a ceremony called *Tahdid* during each of the eight nights;[228] this included the night before the circumcision.

A full description of this ceremony is beyond the scope of this project; however, a few key aspects will be noted. The guests recited Psalms and biblical phrases in order to protect the newborn from the "evil eye." They also sang *piyyutim*.[229]The prime concern was the safety of the newborn; this governed the set-up of the room, with certain Psalms

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[224] Dobrinsky 25.
[225] Weich-Shahak 91.
[226] Dobrinsky 11-13.
[227] Weich-Shahak 91.
[228] Dobrinsky 12-13.
[229] Dobrinsky 12.

and protective amulets hung about, as well as the choreography of the guests; this choreography included placing a sword under the pillow [230] or bed of the newborn.

In the Eastern Communities, there was a *shmirah* during the night before the circumcision; guests studied the *Zohar*.[231] The customs of the Eastern Mediterranean communities also involved shielding amulets; they were given to the parents and to the newborn. The family would hang a *yad* on the crib to protect the male infant.[232]

The custom of studying the Zohar in this context has not fallen out of practice.

In the Spanish Portuguese community, there is a study session known as *meldado*.[233] Presently, this study session, where the men study Torah, Prophets, and Psalms, among other, rabbinic works, is a tradition in Holland; it is not usually held by the Spanish Portuguese Jews in America.[234]

The body of childbirth and child-rearing rituals that once belonged to the domain of the women of the Mediterranean traditions offers a unique approach to celebrating birth and supporting the new mother; these rituals were inextricably related to the singing of *canticas de parida*. In addition, the *romances* of this corpus ensured for the mother a company of vividly painted medieval heroes and heroines after all the guests had departed and she alone rocked her newborn to sleep.

This project will present various songs from the repertoires of *canticas de parida* and *romances* that incorporate themes that connect to the themes mentioned above as

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[230] Dobrinsky 12.
[231] Dobrinsky 20.
[232] Dobrinsky 20.
[233] Dobrinsky 28.
[234] Dobrinsky 28.

well as songs that could potentially add a meaningful component otherwise unexplored to the personal celebrations of parents in our Reform congregations.

The repertoire of *canticas de parida* is largest in the Eastern Mediterranean tradition.[235] The Eastern Mediterranean tradition will therefore receive most of the focus of this section, while a majority of the few extant Moroccan songs will be noted.

Two specific themes of the *canticas de parida* are found in songs that describe the childbirth process and all of the characters involved in that process,[236] and in songs that relate to circumcision and therefore discuss themes related to the domain of religion. [237] There are also humorous songs that poke fun at social situations, such as the better treatment of mothers of male newborn children than mothers of female newborn children.[238]

There are quite a few versions of *canticas de parida* that are descriptive of the birth process; the songs included in this chapter have been transcribed by Levy [239] as well as by Susana Weich Shahak.[240]

Susana Weich- Shahak presents two texts related to childbirth which are presented as three separate songs in her article related to Sephardic childbirth songs amongst communities in the Balkans. The three songs are labeled as Examples three,

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[235] Weich-Shahak 88.
[236] Weich-Shahak 91-92.
[237] Weich-Shahak 88.
[238] Judith Cohen, "Humor and Satire in Judeo-Spanish Song," in *Studies in Socio-Musical Sciences* ed. Joachim Braun and Uri Shavit (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1998), 236.
[239] Isaac Levy comp. and ed. *Liturgia Judeo-Espānola,* Ten Volumes. (Jerusalem: Ministry of Education and Culture, 1865-1980).
[240] Weich-Shahak 92-96.

four, and five.[241] The first song was sung by an immigrant from Salonika and the latter two examples by immigrants from Bulgaria.

Example number three begins with the line *Oh, qhé mueve méseś travates*[242] *d'estrechura* ("Oh, nine months you were in distress").[243] The song continues to describe the newborn boy; it describes his radiant face (*cara de luna).*

A similar *cantica de parida* appears in the Levy collection Volume Four as example number 242.[244] Levy transcribed it as performed by an informant from Esmirna (Izmir) and gave it the title "Cuando mueve mezes," (After Nine Months). The language appears to be slightly different grammatically, however the text of this song includes two paragraphs parallel to each other that are similar to the description in example number three above; the first notes the birth of a daughter, rather than a son, with the same radiant face (*cara de luna*) and the second paragraph notes the good fortune of the son's birth (*de buena ventura*).

Example number three adds that the mother and her child should live long. This same sentiment is heard in "Parida Parida," example number 238 in the Levy collection.[245] Levy cites Jerusalem as its source. In this example, it is noted that the father and the mother should live long (*Nos biva el parido y también la parida).* In example number 239, also from Jerusalem, the same sentiment appears in the second paragraph;

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[241] Weich-Shahak 92-96.
[242] See Appendix C for Judeo-Spanish and English full versions of the song text.
[243] Weich-Shahak 92-93.
[244] Levy, volume 4, 378-379.
[245] Levy, volume 4, 373.

the mother and her precious son should live long (*Mos biva la parida con el hijo preciado).*[246] This version of the sentiment is present in other sources as well.

Example number 241 bears the title "Ya Viene'l Parido." (Here comes the father of the newborn) and is from Turkey, according to the Levy collection. Its fourth paragraph includes a mixture of all of the elements presented above. It begins like example number three in the Weich-Shahak article with "Oh! qué mueve mezes travatex d'estrechura"... It does not, however describe the radiant face of the newborn; the description is more like that in example 242, speaking of good fortune (*de buena ventura*).

There is a refrain in example number three which appears in a similar form in examples in the Levy collection:

*Ya és, ya és buen simán d'esta alegria* ("It is, it is already a good sign of joy")

*Bendicho el que mos allegó a ver este dia.* ("Blessed who let us come to see this day")

In the Levy collection, Volume Four, example number 240 has a similar refrain; its first phrase comprises the first half of example three only: *Ya és, ya és buen simán.* ("It is, it is already a good sign of joy"). The second phrase is: *esta criatura* (this child). This example is from Izmir (Smirna) and Levy entitles it "Ya Viene'l Parido." (Here comes the father of the newborn).

Example 241, which bears the same name as example 240, is from Turkey, according to Levy. The refrain in this example is very similar to the refrain in example 240. The first phrases are identical except that in the latter example the word *Ah!* precedes the other words and the second phrase is *esta alegria.* (this joy).

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[246] Levy, volume 4, 374.

Example 242, already noted above, also has an extremely similar refrain; it is only different in that its second phrase is *d'esta criatura.*

The next paragraph of Example three from the Weich-Shahak article refers to the verbal exchanges between the midwife, the new mother, and the family

The midwife says: *dale dale* ("go on, go!)"

The mother in labor then answers: *Ah, Dio, escapadme* ("Oh God, save me!").

Then the family responds: *amen amen amen.*

Example number 242 in the Levy Collection, volume four, once again is from Esmirna (Izmir). It includes the scene noted above in its third paragraph; the wording is exactly the same.

The final paragraph of example number three of the Weich-Shahak article is found in many other examples, including examples four and five from the same article and many of the examples in the Levy collection. In this paragraph the father enters with all of the guests. In one hand he carries "meat and good fish" and in the other "ducats." Example number four tells that he carries "apples and pears" in one hand and candles in the other.

Example 239 of the Levy Collection, volume four, is from Jerusalem and it is entitled "Ya Viene'l Parido." The two paragraphs that make up this song are based up the same first line of example three; *Ya Viene'l Parido con los conbidados;* this one phrase makes up the first two lines of this shorter song. The theme of the father carrying symbolic objects is not present here. The first paragraph presents a conversation between the entering father and the mother in labor and the second states that the mother and her newborn should live long.

Example 240 of the Levy Collection, as noted above, is from Izmir (Esmirna). It begins with a paragraph very similar to the last paragraph of example number three. The theme of the husband bringing fish and ducats is present here. The ducats are for the mother of the newborn. (*para la parida, resta de ducados).*

Example 241 from Turkey begins with a stanza that discusses the entrance of the father with the guests. The first half is almost exactly the same as the first half of the similar paragraph in example three; it begins with *Oh qué mueve mezes...* The third and fourth lines add: In his hand there is a tray with meat and "good fish." The paragraph ends like example 240, noting that *para la parida resta de ducados,* for the *parida,* there are ducats.

Another example, number 127, is found in the Levy Collection volume Eight. It is from Adrianople. This example is entitled "Cuando La Parida" (When the mother of the newborn...). This example contains three layers within three stanzas; each element is present in a version already noted. The first paragraph illustrates a conversation wherein the mother in labor notes *ado (m)ai m'escape* (God! Save me) and her mother responds *amén amén amén*! The second paragraph presents a question from the mother in labor *Qué parites (*what did I bear?) and the others answer that she gave birth to a boy with a radiant face (*cara de luna)* and they bless her that she and her son should live long.

The final stanza mentions the entrance of the father with the guests and the poem asks what is in his hands. The answer is "meat and good fish" and a handful of ducats for the newborn's mother. This example allows for the substitution of the word *hija* (daughter) in place of the word *hijo* (son) if the song is to be sung about the birth of a female child.

Among other aspects presented in the various *canticas de parida* which describe birth, a few others are included in example five of the Weich-Shahak article. Example four, like some others, addresses the *parida.* This song adds a religious element, as she is told that God will watch over her. In addition it refers to the wishes of her own mother that her daughter be a mother. (This likely is sung to a new mother). The last line of the first stanza notes that "the queen has given birth." This last line likely was likely influenced by the women's singing of epic *romances.*

In the second stanza the father comes in with the guests and in his hands are apples and pears as well as a "handful of candles."

In the third stanza, when the mother complains of having eaten nothing, she is told to "eat the hen and leave the bones under the bed." (*se come la gallina, los güesos debajo la cama).*

The final stanza praises the "one who delivered us" along with the newborn and it is wished as a good sign for the newborn and the father.

Along with elements similar to other versions, example five has a few additions. It alludes to the presence of "boiled wine." It illustrates that there are women in the kitchen cooking for the *parida.* The last stanza gives honor to the *sandaka,* the godmother. There is a refrain; it is very similar to the last stanza of example four as described above.

In her article regarding the childbirth songs of the Balkan communities, Susana Weich-Shahak presents two songs that refer to circumcision. As noted in the article, these

songs present "the idea of the circumcision symbolizing the tie between the people of Israel and their God, as described in the Bible."[247]

The first song is example number one in the article.[248] The first line of the song is *La mujer de Terah preñada staba* (Terah's wife was pregnant).The majority of the song refers to the condition of the mother and her concerns; the last two lines connect the song to the rite of *brit milah* by noting that the father was privileged that he "signed Abraham avinu's name." [249] Signing of the name is likely an allusion to keeping the mitzvah of *brit milah* which was first practiced by Abraham.

The second song, example number two in the article, refers directly to Abraham's birth. This song is entitled *Cuando el Rey Nimrod*; it is a well-known. As with the prior example, this song refers to the condition of the mother. Both songs note the pallid of the mother's face. The last line of *Cuando el Rey Nimrod* notes *ella ya sabia el bien que tenía* (She already knew the boon she was bearing).[250] This seems to account for the paleness of her face.

There are more examples of *canticas de parida* that resemble the examples alluded to above. Some share similar themes and even wording. Others have different themes within them that also relate to childbirth. This study aims to illustrate that common themes run through songs that were preserved in different Eastern Mediterranean communities; these themes, as gleaned from the various examples, will also provide a window into the culture of the women singing the songs and fodder for the upcoming discussion.

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[247] Weich-Shahak 88.
[248] Weich-Shahak 89.
[249] Weich-Shahak 89.
[250] Weich-Shahak 91.

It is of note that the informants who sang these songs were from areas of the Eastern Mediterranean such as Bulgaria, Turkey, Izmir (in Turkey) as well as from Salonika and Adrianople. Levy also cited Jerusalem as a source for some of the songs.

The few songs that represent the Moroccan tradition tend to be humorous. Judith Cohen refers to a song entitled "La parida del hijo y de la hija" In this song, "the mother of a boy receives all sorts of treats, but the mother of a girl receives 'skimpy sardines', and banished to the kitchen to "squabble with the neighbors."[251] A similar song is included in "Judeo-Spanish Songs for the Life Cycle" by Susana Weich-Shahak as example 1a.

Example 1a from the compilation is entitled "Leventáivos el parido." The title and first line refer to awakening the father for the circumcision. The first stanza continues to note that the guests are waiting. The second stanza notes that while for those who give birth to boys there are *buenoś vicios* (good vittles), for those who give birth to girls there are *flacas sardinas* ("skimpy sardines")[252]. According to the Weich-Shahak, the last lines show that the mothers of girls "are frustrated and angry"[253]likely due to the treatment.

Example 1b is another example of a circumcision song. "Parida está la parida" reflects the same idea; the mothers of boys enjoy fine meals (*ricaś comidas*) and the mothers of girls get fatty chickens (*ricaś* gallinas).[254]

The following statement about Middle Eastern women effectively represents a phenomenon that characterized Sephardic women of past generations; Sephardic women "often enjoy the privilege of all-women space, a setting which facilitates the power of

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[251] Judith Cohen "Humor and Satire in Judeo-Spanish Song" 236.
[252] As translated in Judith Cohen's article "Humor and Satire in Judeo-Spanish Song" 236.
[253] Susana Weich-Shahak "Judeo-Spanish Songs for the Life Cycle" 33.
[254] Weich-Shahak 34.

female solidarity and provides the principal context for music-making."[255] It is important to grasp this concept in order to understand the context in which many of the *canticas de parida* were sung.

Along with the traditions mentioned above, there were all-female gatherings that lasted throughout the night during the pre-circumcision week in the Mediterranean traditions, especially the night before the circumcision; like the male functions noted above, these gatherings also served the purpose of protecting the mother and child during the presumably dangerous period.

The mother of the newborn would be joined by her mother and mother-in-law as well as her friends and female neighbors. Especially on the seventh night, they would stay until morning with her. The name of this tradition in Solonica is *noche de viola.*[256]

It is noted that in Morocco, the women would stay to assure the mother of the newborn that the pain of the circumcision would pass quickly and to protect her from the evil eye.[257]

In the Eastern Mediterranean tradition, the women passed "the long hours of vigilance by singing romances and other songs," often specific *canticas de parida.*[258]

In addition to enriching the activities of this completely female domain, *canticas de parida* were also sung by members of the household as they greeted guests that returned home with the father of the newborn after Shabbat morning services; according

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[255] Veronica Doubleday 103.
[256] Weich-Shahak "Childbirth Songs" 91.
[257] Dobrinsky 13.
[258] Weich-Shahak "Social Functions of the Judeo Spanish Romancero" 249.

to Levy, "Parida Parida," example number 238 of volume four was sung in this setting and for this purpose.[259]

When rocking their newborns to sleep, the Sephardic mothers continued singing. Beyond the *canticas de parida* that accompanied them through the earliest days of their children's lives, these women also possessed a body of *romances* that functioned beautifully as lullabies; their perfection lied in their ability to suit both the mother with their exciting epic themes, and the baby with their slow, quiet, and a capella melodies; such melodies served well in "lulling a baby to sleep."[260]

According to Weich–Shahak, "...almost any romance can serve as a cradlesong, without any regard to its thematic content, be it medieval chivalry, or a biblical story, a theme of incest, adultery, or simply love.[261] The power of the lullaby lay in the potential for the women to relate to its stories and specifically to its female characters. The *romances* serve as "escape valves"[262] into another epic world. Judith Cohen relates from conversations with her informants that the women "derive much pleasure from their intimacy with these ladies."[263] According to Cohen, "The *romancero's* portrayals of women range from the passively victimized to the dynamic, articulate, and inventive."[264]

There are numerous rabbinic responsa that outlaw the singing of the *romances* due to their content; it is clear from certain responsa that the rabbis knew that the women connected to the characters personally.

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[259] Levy, Volume 4, 373.
[260] Susana Weich-Shahak "Social Functions of the Judeo-Spanish Romancero" 247.
[261] Weich-Shahak 247.
[262] Cohen 184 "Women's Roles in the Judeo-Spanish Songs" 184.
[263] Judith Cohen 184.
[264] Judith Cohen 184.

Rabbi Eliyahu ben Shelomo Abraham Hacohen of Izmir wrote the following statement preserved in a work called *Shevet musar* in 1712:

> "It is forbidden [for] women to raise their children with lascivious songs and lustful lyrics, because these songs profane the body and soul. And the mind of the woman becomes light and [she] interprets the lyrics about forbidden loves as if they referred to herself and she imagines that she actually participated in the plot and from this she falls into profane thoughts, as the snake that engenders the flying serpent, the leper of prostitution."[265]

The interesting phenomenon is that the Sephardic women possess a body of *romances* that has survived with them until the present while men had traditionally been uncomfortable with this possession. That women possessed such epic songs gave them power in their own domains where the men did not generally function. This may have seemed threatening to the men. In the end, the women, as a subculture held on to these epic songs; they sang them in their private domain. The men would only hear the singing of these *romances* if they entered into the female domain; this, of course occurred in homes regularly.

The themes and processes that are present in the music of the male liturgical and paraliturgical domain that are also in the female folksong domain are the following: the connection of the *brit milah* with Abraham, the tendency to appropriate material from Christian Spain and to align it with Jewish values, the preference given to the birth of male children, and the relationship of Esther the queen to the epic queens of the *romances*.

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[265] Edwin Seroussi www.umbc.edu/eol/MA/index/number3/seroussi/ser_0.htm Section IV

A comparison can be made between the *piyyut* that Levy included in volume four of the Levy Collection as number 215. This *piyyut* was discussed earlier; it is from Tangiers and it seems to be unique to the *brit milah* ceremony in the communities of Tangiers. As noted above, the theme connects the community and the newborn boy with Abraham through their common fulfillment of the mitzvah of *brit milah*.

On this level, the two circumcision songs mentioned above share the theme with this *piyyut*.

While the *piyyut* focuses on Abraham and his holy acts, especially in relation to the mitzvah of *brit milah*, the first of the circumcision *canticas de parida*, "La mujer de Terah," brings a woman's voice to the table. Before we focus on the merit of Abraham, we discover the journey of his mother while she was pregnant. Only at the end, the father of the newborn is praised for his merit of keeping the commandment of *brit milah*, in line with Abraham.

The second of the circumcision songs is *Cuando el Rey Nimrod*. This song, like the *piyyut*, connects the *brit milah* of the newborn with the same act of Abraham. The text alludes to the importance of Abraham as does the *piyyut;* the *piyyut*, however refers to specific meritorious actions of Abraham while the folk text refers to the birth of an important person. The folk song ends by painting Abraham's mother as intuiting the importance of the son she would bear; the text alludes to the fact that this is something that even her husband does not know.[266]

It is clear that in both domains, there is a deliberate attempt to connect the ceremony at hand with the original action of Abraham. The *piyyut* discusses the acts of

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[266] Weich-Shahak 91.

Abraham as he entered into the original covenant with God. It notes how he had every male in his house including his servants circumcised in keeping with the covenant; this certainly included future children and that is the connection to the ceremony at hand. The folk songs mention the mother of Abraham. This, first of all, furnishes an obvious connection for the song to be a childbirth song, especially related to circumcision. It also connects the newborn boy, again, with the original holy act of Abraham. Furthermore, the songs allow the mothers to feel an intimate connection to the Biblical importance of the act; they can relate to the mother who gave birth to the important Biblical figure.

The same two *canticas de parida* also illustrate a common practice of the Sephardim which was to retain the text of a song which was part of their Iberian heritage and which they, if they were part of the *converso* community of Iberia, may have sung, and to substitute Jewish content for any Christological allusions these songs may have had. When the Jews were exiled, they took the Iberian culture with them; this culture included the folk texts of Christian Iberia and the worldview that even crept into the texts of their religious poetry. "One of the most outstanding characteristics of Sephardic Jewry was their lasting, almost stubborn, fidelity towards the customs and influences which they carried over from their Spanish life."[267]

The first *cantica* notes that the mother had pains and did not know where she would give birth to her child. This sentiment bears remarkable resemblance to the Christian story of the birth of their savior. It quickly adds a line that seems out of place "He was studying and writing in the Yeshiva."[268] It is possible that this line was inserted

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[267] Samelson 532.
[268] Weich-Shahak 89.

later to add a Jewish symbol, the Yeshiva, in order to counteract the earlier theme. It otherwise seems out of place where it sits.

In addition, the text ends with the connection to Abraham and circumcision, which undeniably aligns itself with the Jewish worldview. The fact that the son to be born is Abraham also aligns the entire text with the Jewish worldview. The Christian influence can be seen however, in the setting of the scene; the details are presented as if Abraham's mother shared elements of Mary's birthing story. Therefore, the text likens Abraham to Jesus somehow. The connection could be that Abraham is an important person in the Jewish saga; he fills an important spot in the line of eventual, still unrealized, redemption.

The second *cantica, Cuando el Rey Nimrod,* also includes elements that relate to the Christian's story of their savior's birth. It speaks of a king who sees "a Holy light from Juderia," which means the Jewish quarter.[269] The light becomes a symbol of the birth of Abraham, rather than of the birth of Jesus. This text retains a Christian symbol which it recasts with Jewish content; it still points to a Holy Birth, however, it is the birth of Abraham. The symbol complies with the Jewish worldview.

The *piyyut* mentioned above does not include notable influences from the Christian culture; it does however end with a strong sentiment against the people who are not circumcised; it states "happy are they who despise un-circumcision." This sentiment reflects anger and pain towards a culture that rejected the Jewish people who had once considered itself part and parcel of the Iberian culture. Post-exile, the anger of rejection showed itself in texts that aimed at differentiating the Jewish people from their Iberian neighbors with an heir of superiority. In this way, the *piyyut* records a sentiment that

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[269] Weich-Shahak 91.

reflects the worldview of the Sephardic Jews post-exile; on one hand, they held tight to their Iberian culture, while on the other, they felt rejected and hurt and wanted to distance themselves from the people who rejected them.

In addition, the fact that *L'kha Dodi* is included in the Italian circumcision ceremony is likely possible because of the allusion in stanza five to redemption. The specific reference is in the line that states: *ki va oreikh* ("for your light has come"). As noted earlier in the chapter, this verse expressed the sentiment that the birth of the boy brings hope of redemption. Additional support for this possibility is the *piyyut* prior to *L'kha Dodi* with its obvious redemptive hopes; the first paragraph reads

יה' שלום בחילנו

ושלוה בישראל

בס'מן טוב בן בא לנו

בימיו יבא גואל

*May there be piece in our gates*

*And peace in Israel*

*With a good sign a boy has come to us*

*In his days the redeemer will come.*

The same *piyyut*, according to the Levy Collection, volume four, is sung in Sarajevo. In addition, the fourth line of the first stanza, as noted above, is sung to its own melody.

A similar text is sung in Corfu. It is called "Nolad Ben L'siman Tov." The sentiment of this one stanza text is very simple; it expresses that the boy will do well in his life and that he will be a good man all of his days, lacking nothing good. The first

line, however, connects to the theme noted above; the birth of the son brings a good sign. This sign has redemptive implications.

In addition, Dobrinsky notes that the father of a newborn son is greeted with the phrase *b'siman tov!* To the father of a newborn daughter, one would say *mazal tov,* which has come to mean congratulations; it does not have the same redemptive insinuations. [270]The greetings are the same in the Eastern Mediterranean Communities. [271]

This special treatment of the father of a new son, in reference to the greetings that he receives in synagogue, is reflected in the humorous Moroccan *cantares de parida* noted earlier in the chapter. While the mothers of newborn boys received wonderful treats, mothers of newborn girls received "skimpy sardines." [272] While the songs were meant to be funny, they almost certainly served a function that stretched beyond their humor. Through them, the women were able to poke fun at a cultural system that favored the birth of males over the birth of their own gender.

Finally, the *Mi Shebeirakh* blessing conferred upon female infants at their *Zeved ha-bat* ceremonies includes the name Esther in the line of our woman ancestors who were also blessed by God. The addition of Esther has great cultural significance. First of all, according to Rabbi Martin Cohen, the Jews of Spain had been conditioned by the Christian's belief in Mary as the mother of their savior; the Jewish women found a parallel female heroine in Queen Esther. She served this role perfectly in that she had taken part in the Persian Jews' redemption in *Shushan.* The Jews of the Iberian Peninsula knew the story of Esther well, as they did their own story of persecution. Esther was a

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[270] Dobrinsky 10.
[271] Dobrinsky 19.
[272] Cohen "Humor and Satire" 236.

powerful woman who helped to save the Jews while being a secret Jewess; this served as a powerful connection for these women, as many of their ancestors had also led secret Jewish lives when living in the Iberian Peninsula. Therefore, with the Sephardic women's interest in the epic heroines of the Iberian ballads, it makes sense that they would feel a powerful connection to the heroine of one of their own stories. This heroine was not the mother of a redeemer, as Mary was cast by the Christian religion; she herself served a redemptive function, even while keeping her faithful Jewish identity a secret.

In addition to the shared themes within the songs of both the male and female domains, there is one common theme found in the behavior within both domains; female and male groups, in their separate functions, modeled a deep commitment to the other members of their community at each life cycle event.

Dobrinsky notes that in Morocco a group called *Hevrat Eliyahu* or *Hevrat Halevaya* developed.[273] This group came into being in order to ensure that every deceased person would have a decent amount of mourners at their funeral. All members of the group had the responsibility to attend every funeral in town. They eventually extended their responsibilities of attendance to include being at the home of the male newborn's father on the night before the circumcision.[274] While this group was particular to Morocco, the activities of the group reflect the general sense of communal responsibility characteristic of the Sephardic communities.

The all-night vigil as held by the women on the night before a circumcision also provides a beautiful model of community support. Each mother could count on the females in her family and her community to spend the extremely difficult night with her.

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[273] Dobrinsky 78.
[274] Dobrinsky 78.

Along with the worries related to Lilith or the "evil eye," the need for friendship, female companionship, and comfort must have been another driving force behind this incredible institution.

# Chapter Four

The corpus of Judeo-Spanish songs that is related to courtship and marriage is extremely rich. There is a song available to accompany the couple each step of the way from their first meeting, if it occurs at the *mateša* (swing) in a Moroccan courtyard, through the deliberations over the marriage contract, during the extensive wedding preparations and into the weeklong festivities. This chapter will give a list of the social functions along with the music that accompanies them. In addition the chapter will focus on two particular functions, the courtship activities associated with the Moroccan *mateša* as well and the presentation of the bride's trousseau.

As already noted, the *mateša* was a swing hung in the courtyards of Moroccan Jewish families during the Passover season.[275] Young women would swing on the *mateša* and sing *cantares de mateša* as a social activity. This form of entertainment "was an important 'institution' of Sephardic matchmaking."[276] The *mateša* gave the young women a place to interact with young men, albeit through song. Interested young men would seek the aid of a *jotaba* (matchmaker) after an encounter at the *mateša*.[277]

An interesting characteristic of the *cantares de mateša* is that many of them functioned as vehicles for dialogue; the young men and women would sing specific stanzas of a song in order to express an idea. For example, the young women would sing certain songs that included "built in instructions for the girl to relinquish her place to

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[275] Judith Cohen "Women's Roles in Judeo-Spanish Song" 187
[276] Weich-Shahak "Social Functions" 252.
[277] Weich-Shahak 252.

another."[278] Beyond setting the stage for socialization between friends, the activities at the *mateša* allowed for potential courtship; according to Judith Cohen, this was time "away from parents' close surveillance."[279] The young adults would communicate with each other through the lyrics of a song; even though metered by the specific lyrics, the interactions were often flirtatious. For example, "when a young man wanted to woo one of the girls, he sang one stanza or a *copla* for her, alluding to his feelings."[280] She would be equipped with alternate verses within one song; she would respond by singing one verse if she were interested while another choice would signify her disinterest.[281]

There is a specific *mateša* song which fits the above description. It is entitled "Eres Chiquita y Bonita." Susana Weich-Shahak has included two versions of this song in two different publications; this paper will reproduce the shorter of the two versions as published in her work "En Bwen Siman."[282] The version presented here includes six of the possible seventeen stanzas found in the longer version. The first two stanzas present the words of an adoring admirer toward a female. By the third stanza, his flirting becomes more aggressive.

The shorter version includes only negative stanzas which a girl could have used as a response. These would function as a way to deter the unwanted attention. The fourth paragraph notes that the young man's words were inappropriate. The fifth stanza is outright insulting; with it a girl could have told her suitor to get out of here. It refers to him as a raw soot- face and likens him to a beetle which suddenly hatched from a wave of

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[278] Cohen 187.
[279] Cohen 187.
[280] Weich-Shahak "Judeo-Spanish Moroccan Songs for the Life Cycle" 10.
[281] Weich-Shahak 10.
[282] Susana Weich-Shahak, "En Bwen Siman" 77.

soot. The last stanza includes the option of wishing upon the suitor a fever, malaria, and a sharp pain in the ribs.

The *cantares de mateša* were songs through which the young adults were able to communicate with each other without engaging in direct spoken conversations. In essence, they were able to convey their intentions and desires or lack thereof through words already constructed into a commonly known song.

It is likely that, for many, the *mateša* took on a meaning beyond entertainment; in other words, the *mateša* most probably became a symbol of potential courtship in the eyes of many of the Moroccan unmarried young adults.

For a Sephardic couple about to be married there are a myriad of customs that accompany the wedding preparations as well as the ensuing celebration; along with the customs, there is an entire corpus of music in both the Eastern and Western Mediterranean Traditions.

Traditionally, the actual wedding ceremony took place on a Wednesday in Moroccan communities [283] and on a Sunday in Bulgarian (Eastern Mediterranean) communities. [284]

For the Moroccan community, there is a celebration two Sabbaths before the wedding ceremony and a *tufera* is held the next Thursday; the *tufera* is an event, held in a completely female domain, during which the bride's female family members "unfasten her plates and comb out her hair, putting on a *cinta rosada* (rose ribbon) and a gold-

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[283] Weich-Shahak 11.
[284] Weich-Shahak, "The Wedding Songs of the Bulgarian-Sephardi Jews: A Preliminary Study" *Orbis Musicae* 7 (1979-1980): 90.

embroidered kerchief."[285] The next big event is shared by both communities. In fact, for the Bulgarian community, "the sequence of celebrations opens with the exhibition of the trousseau."[286]

The preparation of the bride's trousseau, known in Judeo-Spanish as *ajuar*, is a serious undertaking in both communities. The bride's trousseau consists of all of the items that she will bring with her into her new household; this includes gifts that she receives from her mother as well as from others. In the Bulgarian community, the day of display is certainly celebratory; it is also serious. The groom's family inspects the trousseau to be sure that all items agreed upon are present. In addition, two *preciadores* (trousseau value estimators) including the *Haham*, or community Rabbi, record "an estimate of its monetary worth."[287]

"The whole event of the exhibition of the trousseau is accompanied by singing and drumming on the *pandero*."[288]

The next event is called the *bañio de la novia* (the bath of the bride). The bride is accompanied to the *mikveh*, or ritual bath by her female family members, old and new, as well as her female friends and neighbors.[289] The female relatives of the groom sing songs to the bride and play *panderos*.

In addition, the groom's female family members are given various honors. In the Bulgarian communities, the mother-in-law- washes the bride first. In the Moroccan

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[285] Weich-Shahak "The Judeo-Spanish Moroccan Songs for the Life Cycle" 11.
[286] Weich-Shahak, "The Wedding Songs of the Bulgarian-Sephardi Jews: A Preliminary Study" *Orbis Musicae* 7 (1979-80): 83.
[287] Weich-Shahak 83.
[288] Weich-Shahak 83.
Note: A *pandero* is a tambourine.
[289] Weich-Shahak 86.

communities, it is requested of the female members of the groom's family to lead the others in undressing the bride at the beginning of the ceremony and in dressing her after the ceremony.[290] An example of a song related to the ritual bath of the bride is entitled "Cuan bien me lavi" (How Well I Washed Myself). This song is descriptive in nature; it mentions covering herself with soap, with the help of servants. In addition, she notes that her new brother-in-law will pay for the expenses.

Of added note is the inclusion of Turkish words in the song; *telecás* comes from the Turkish word *tellák*, which means "hair washer or masseur."[291] The word *kindí* is also used. This is another Turkish word that refers to the Muslim afternoon prayer at 4 o'clock.[292] In the context of the song, the word *kindí* is used to show that she is still bathing at 4 o'clock in the afternoon; it is indeed a luxurious bath.[293]

A great repertoire of songs also accompanies the preparation of the bride on her wedding day. Some examples include a description of the bride getting ready, such as "Ah, siñora novia, abajes abajo!" ("Ah, Lady Bride, Come Down Below")[294] Others discuss the custom of the groom providing the wedding dress for the bride. An example of this is found in "Yo le mandi a la mi novia" ("I Sent To My Bride").[295]

There are many wedding songs that refer to the topic of the bride's dowry as well as her trousseau; these songs, though mostly light-hearted in nature, offer a great lens into the culture of the Eastern Mediterranean Sephardim. Two such songs have been chosen; a

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[290] Weich-Shahak "Judeo-Spanish Moroccan Songs" 11.
[291] Weich-Shahak "The Wedding Songs of the Bulgarian Sephardi Jews" 81.
[292] Weich-Shahak 81.
[293] Weich-Shahak 81.
[294] Weich-Shahak 81.
[295] Weich-Shahak 81.

comparison of the two will be presented below along with a web of cultural information that can be gleaned from an analysis of the embedded cultural symbols.

In the Judeo-Spanish songs "Ah! el novio no quere dinero" (Oh, The Groom Wants No Money) and "El ragateo de las conusegras" (The haggling of the Mothers-in-law), the overriding focus is on the dowry and the trousseau.

The following study will take the topic of the songs as a starting point and will also focus on the following related themes: the specified conditions of the dowry, the *Ketubah*, and objects of the trousseau as tangible cultural symbols, as well as Shabbat and festival time among modern Moroccan Jewish communities as hallowed time during which family and ritual themes are strengthened, partially through the presentation of trousseau heirlooms.

Upon first glance at the text of the song "Ah! el novio no quere dinero"[296] (Oh, The Groom Wants No Money) one learns that the bride's family must pay a dowry to the groom. This was indeed part and parcel of traditional Judeo-Spanish culture. The song is made up of three stanzas that are sung by a wedding guest. The guest lauds the groom for his intent to marry the bride because of love and not because of the amount of her dowry. A second song is called "El regateo de las consuegras"[297] (The Haggling of the Mothers-in-law). This song talks about the bride's trousseau. In general, the trousseau contains "clothing, ornaments, jewelry, house wares, etc., which the bride would provide for her

[296] Note: See Appendix D for the full text of the song in Judeo-Spanish.
[297] Note: See Appenix E for the Full text of the song in Judeo-Spanish and following, the English translation as rendered by Dr. Martin A. Cohen.

new household."[298] This includes gifts from her mother, and as indicated here, by others, such as her new mother-in-law.

During Biblical times the custom was called *Mohar.* This custom dictated that the groom would pay a price for the bride and that the bride would bring "slaves, cattle and real estate."[299] Jews in Muslim Countries tended to keep the custom of *Mohar,* although the money from the groom benefited the couple. [300]

According to Dobrinsky, in the Moroccan Jewish community, when a couple decides to marry, "the families come to an aural agreement between the bridegroom and the parents of the bride."[301] During the week prior to the wedding, the groom and the father of the bride go before the Rabbinic court to affect a binding contract. The amount of the dowry is recorded. This information is included in the *Ketubah*, or marriage contract.[302] Along with the stipulated amount of the dowry, the items of the trousseau are also noted in the *Ketubah*. According to Dobrinsky, among Moroccan Jews, "In all cases the *ketubah* was prepared in advance to carefully check that all items of the trousseau which the bride would bring conformed to the agreed upon specifications."[303]

The dowry, the *Ketubah,* and the trousseau are cultural symbols on many levels.

First of all, the written agreement in the *ketubah* which stipulates the amount of the dowry was indicative of the bride's family's status. According to the *Encyclopedia*

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[298] Dobrinsky, 49
[299] "Dowry" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica.* Vol. 6. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971) 186
[300] "Dowry" in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 6. (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971) 186.
[301] Dobrinsky 47
[302] Dobrinsky 47-8.
[303] Dobrinsky 53

*Judaica*, her family gave "according to their social standing."[304] "The portion relating to the conditions was quite revealing as to the social and economic position of the couple."[305]

In Sephardic Jewish communities, the *ketubah* is a binding code whose terms pertain to the couple. It serves as a model for how they are to live their lives.[306] It is a tangible symbol of the expectations of the holiness that should inform their daily lives as a couple.

According to *Ketubot 13:5*, "If the father was unable or unwilling to pay the promised dowry at the betrothal ceremony, the groom could refuse to marry his bride."[307] Rabbi Culi wrote in the *Ma'am Lo'ez*, an 18th Century Judeo-Spanish compilation, that "if a man is promised a large dowry, and then it is retracted, he should not refuse to marry the girl because of this."[308] This Rabbinic attention across centuries illustrates that there was likely a problem.

The story is represented in the words of the wedding guest in the song "Ah, el novio no quere dinero." While the song is quite playful, the serious tone of worry lies beneath. Does the groom really want no ducats or bracelets? If this is true, then this groom is being painted as a model groom. The assumption is that there are many others whose intentions are not so pure.

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[304] "Dowry" in *Encyclopedia Judaica* 185
[305] Shalom Sabar, "The Sephardi Marriage Contract" in *Ariel* vol. 88 (1995): 72
[306] Shalom Sabar, 70
This way of reading the cultural symbol is specifically informed by Geertz in his chapter *Religion as a Cultural System*, in *Interpretation of Cultures*.
[307] Dowry" in *Encyclopedia Judaica* 185
[308] Rabbi Yaakov. Culi *et al. The Torah Anthology: M'Am Lo'ez*. Volumes 1:2 and 1:3 Translated by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan. (Jerusalem; New York: Maznaim Publishing Corporation, 1977): 388.

The *ketubah* can serve as a symbol of affluence. An ornate *ketubah* is a symbol of wealth. Such is the case with a *ketubah* that originated in Istanbul in 1881. Its sheer size and the special artistic techniques applied to its creation contribute to the clarity of this symbolic message.[309] According to Sabar, such *ketubot*, "with their exquisite decoration, reflect differences of class or status within the community, whose wealthiest or leading members did not content themselves with the standard versions of adornment available to everyone else."[310]

Within the *Ketubah*, there are various artistic symbols that can be decoded. Sephardic *Ketubot* are pieces of art. According to Sabar, the elaborate art that surrounds the text was developed due to an injunction of a Rabbi of 14th/15th century Palma known as the *Rashbatz*. The artwork that fills the page functions to see that "the witnesses would not sign above or below the lines of the ketubah and leave blank space on the page."[311] Sabar takes this to mean that space would allow for a person to change the conditions of the contract and this was to be avoided with a binding agreement.

Artistic images that filled different *ketubot* are indicative of the outside influences of their host cultures. Many of the symbols and artistic designs were borrowed. Some examples of symbols include religious symbols found in Italian *ketubot* such as "symbols of the twelve tribes," "the ritual objects of the Temple," the scene of the giving of the Torah, which is the symbol of a marriage between God and Israel,[312] as well as borrowed symbols such as Zodiac signs in hopes of "bestowing good fortune on the marriage."[313]

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[309] Shalom Sabar 79.

[310] Sabar 79
[311] Sabar 71
[312] Sabar 77
[313] Sabar 77

Artistic influences are seen in cases such as the copper engraving of *ketubot* in Amsterdam, as influenced by the Dutch, as well as a in the "dense" style of Islamic ornamentation known as *horror vacui*[314] which is found in *ketubot* of Jews in Eastern lands.

The trousseau serves as a visual symbol of the wealth or lack thereof of the bride's family. It also encapsulates items that will become a part of her family history, as it "usually includes linens with special embroidery which were made especially for the bride by her mother."[315] The items of her trousseau are often displayed.[316] "In Levantine communities, for the entire week prior to the wedding, the bride's trousseau would be publicly displayed in the bedrooms of the parents' home for the guests to see."[317]

The importance of the mother's contribution to the trousseau is illustrated in the song "El regateo de las consuegras." The mother of the bride and the mother of the groom are in a heated competition as to who is going to give more. The song is meant to be playful, but the underlying cultural message supports the claim that contributions to the trousseau were an important matter of public notice.

The objects of the trousseau and the ketubah itself both function as symbols of the culture of which they are a part and symbols that create connections between members of families. Another symbolic connector of family members is sacred time. This is

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[314] Sabar 79
[315] Dobrinsky 57
[316] Dobrinsky 49
[317] Dobrinsky, 57

highlighted in Joëlle Bahloul's article "The Sephardi Family and the Challenge of Assimilation."[318]

In this article, Bahloul refers specifically to Moroccan Jews in Modern France. She notes that Shabbat and Passover, family-centered rituals, serve as a "rite of separation from ordinary time." "It is through this symbolic articulation that North African Jewish identity has strengthened itself in the era of urban individualization and shattered sociability."[319] During ordinary time, there is a preoccupation with modern French culture and modern education.[320] During sacred time, families come together, their generations sharing in an "ahistorical" common story.[321] Similar to the connection of a shared family story are the heirlooms of the trousseau which become a visual symbol of their history. Bracelets and embroidered fabrics handed down from generation to generation also function to connect family members.[322] This illustrates the power of symbols. With the continuous threat of assimilation into modern society, Moroccan Jewish families manage to find a way to continue family connectedness. This is done through the symbols of sanctified time and through the stories that ensue during such time as well as through the visual symbols that come with heirlooms passed from generation to generation.

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[318] Joëlle Bahloul. "The Sephardi Family and the Challenge of Assimilation: Family Ritual and Ethnic Reproduction," in *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).
Note: Sacred time is a general idea throughout the article.

[319] Joelle Bahloul 317
[320] Bahloul 317
[321] Bahloul 322
[322] Bahloul 322

While times are always changing, and therefore the meanings of symbols change as well, such symbols can be recast in order to remain relevant. For example, the bracelet that a woman received from her mother as a gift towards her trousseau may now adorn the wrist of her granddaughter who sits across from her at the Sabbath table. It was once a sign of the wealth of her family, a source of great pride to her. Presently, it is a symbol that helps her remember her youth and it is also a symbol that will ensure that future generations will hear her name.

In looking at and comparing two song texts, it is possible to glimpse the culture of the various people who are connected to the songs. In the case at hand, a little song about marriage for the sake of love instead of the dowry or another about the games of two mothers- in- law who wish to one-up each other in bestowing trousseau gifts to the bride, considerable cultural information is transmitted. It becomes evident that the dowry has played an important function in marriages and that mothers have taken great pride in contributing to the trousseau. The competitive nature of the families is also clear. Beyond these notable messages, it is possible to find many other symbols that are connected to the dowry, trousseau, and *ketubah*. These symbols have changed over time and have been influenced by many host cultures.

In the end, some of the meanings that the symbols once signified are less endearing to modern sensibilities. This is because people view the world with eyes that are shaped by their particular culture.[323] While such symbols as the dowry and the trousseau may not signify what they once did, they are symbols that stand for a new

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[323] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1973), 87-125.
This section applies Geertz' overall concept of culture shaping a person's tools of conception.

meaning. That meaning depends on the culture at hand, and as with heirlooms, they will also shape the culture at hand. Items of the past trousseaus and *ketubot* of deceased family members can serve as strong symbols of connection between generations past, present, and eventually, future. The concerns of the bride in the first song are still present today, as people still worry if marriage is for love or for money. It is also apparent that the mothers in the second song knew the symbolic power of their gifts to the bride. Perhaps they concerned themselves at the time with pride in showing off wealth. Perhaps they knew just how powerful such gifts would be for future generations.

# Chapter Five

Among the many customs related to death and mourning in the Sephardic communities, this chapter will discuss two elements specifically related to music; first, the chapter will discuss a number of *endechas* from the Sephardic repertoire and second, the phenomenon of female professional mourners, known as *plañideras*.

As noted in chapter two, there are *Romances* which have traditionally been used as dirges. These *romances* are well suited in that their plots deal with death. A commonly noted Biblical example is *Triste está el rey David* (King David is sad).[324] This ballad tells of King David's grief when he learned that his son Absalom has died. An *endecha* bearing a similar name is *David Llora a Absalón*.[325] According to Messod Salama, a

[324] Weich-Shahak "Social Functions" 251.
[325] Messod Salama "The Reappropriation of the Judeo-Spanish Romancero" 143.

similar dirge called *La muerte de Absalón* is only sung during the three week or nine day period before *Tish'A Be'-Ab.*[326]

Another example from Morocco is a *Romance* entitled *The Death of Prince John.*[327] This *endecha* or another similar to it is also referred to by its Judeo-Spanish name *De Burgos partio ese rey.*[328] This ballad relates the story of a king who finds out that he is going to die and must say goodbye to his mother and wife.

Another *endecha,* "Muerte que a todos convidas" is from Tetuan. This *romance* personifies death. Death converses with the guard at the king's palace as well as with the king himself. By the guard's introduction of Death to the king, the king knows that it is Death he is describing; he hopes to put off Death but it is to no avail. The details regarding his death are also described.[329]

Susana Weich-Shahak includes two non-*romance endechas* in her collection of "Judeo-Spanish Moroccan Songs for the Life Cycle." Both of the *endechas* bear the title *Ya crecen laś hierbas* and they were sung by an informant originally from Tetuan.

Both versions of the song include one of the common symbols found in *endichas;* According to Edwin Seroussi, *las hierbas* ("simple or bitter plants") is a "recurrent" theme "in songs of admonition and mourning that have survived in the oral tradition."[330] The song narrates the bitter life of a girl; it begins by saying that "the herbs have changed

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[326] Messod Salama, "Factors in the Preservation and Re-creation of the Judeo-Spanish Romancero," in *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review Sephardic Folklore: Exile and Homecomming* 15, no.2 (1993): 7.
[327] Weich-Shahak "Judeo-Spanish Moroccan Songs" 82.
[328] Messod Salama 143
[329] Weich-Shahak 82.
[330] Edwin Seroussi, "Music in Medieval Ibero-Jewish Society" 51.

color" (*Ya crecen laś hierbas y dan de color).*[331] After noting her heartache, the song goes back to her birth "on a dark night" and it continues through her ill-fated life. The second addition adds the details of her failed love affair.[332]

As noted by Professor Eliyahu Schleifer, Sephardic music is "characterized by the absence of a sharp dividing line between the secular and the sacred."[333]This close connection between the sacred and secular is present when secular *romances* as well as other folk songs are used as *endechas*; the fact that the scenarios within the songs relate to death render them appropriate for use in mourning.

It is characteristic of the Mediterranean Sephardic communities to utilize their vast body of *romances* and other songs as a mode of expressing the profound emotions that accompany the various life cycles through the media of popular song; in this fashion, the community as a whole expresses commonly held emotions. While this is especially characteristic of women with the *canticas/cantares de novia* and the *canticas de parida* as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, it is also the case with the *endechas.*

An example of a liturgical song used as an *endecha* is found in the Levy Collection, volume four. According to Levy, the source is Corfu. Included as example 311, it is entitled "Shokhnei batei homer." According to Rabbi Martin Cohen, this *endecha* seems to be a post-Medieval *piyyut.* It refers to the smallness of the human being. One example, in the middle of the *piyyut* states:

כי אנחנו תולעת

ו׳איך יגבהה לבנו

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[331] Weich-Shahak 78
[332] Weich-Shahak 79.
[333] Eliyahu Schleifer, "From Bible to Hasidism" 37

For we are worms

And how can our hearts feel superior.

This one unit among many stanzas alludes to the smallness of man that the entire *piyyut* aims to capture.

The *endecha* above also relates to a section of *Pikei Avot* that is quoted earlier in the Levy Collection as example number 306.[334] The Hebrew text notes that a person must consider from whence he came, where he is going, and before whom he will make an account. The answer to where he is going is: *to a place of dust and worms.* This excerpt from Pirkei Avot also serves to illustrate the smallness of man and to point out that, in the end, all accounts will come before the Holy One, Blessed Be He.

It is evident from Inquisitorial documentation as well as from Rabbinic Responsa that Sephardic women sang in a professional capacity at funerals and other events related to mourning.[335]

The testimony of María González in relation to the case against Leonor de la Olivia in the city of Ciudad Real presents evidence that *converso* women were hired to sing at Jewish funerals during the late 15th century; a specific woman Catalina de Zamora is mentioned as performing the role as *a converso plañidera.*[336]

Another testimony mentions a second *converso plañidera* and notes that she sang a specific *endecha* entitled "Fey del campo la mal casada e cogio las yerbas."[337] This *endecha* includes two symbols associated with "admonition and mourning," *la mal*

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[334] Isaac Levy, *Liturgia Judeo-Espãnola*, Volume Four, (Jerusalem: Press 1969),479.
[335] Seroussi 49.
[336] Seroussi 50.
[337] Seroussi 50.

*casada*, ("the badly wedded") and *las yerbas* ("simple or bitter plants");[338] the second example was noted above in relation to another *endecha*.

In addition, Jewish women also greeted mourners while singing laments during the week of mourning after morning and evening prayers.[339]According to a Responsa written by R. Yitshaq ben Sheset of the 14th century on the topic of female lamenters:

> "In Zarakast the mourners go to the synagogue all the seven days of mourning (*shiv'a*) for morning and evening services even on the First Saturday and weekdays. After the prayers, when they return to their homes, followed by most of the congregation which accompanies them up to the entrance to the courtyard, the woman mourner awakes the entourage and plays the drum in her hand and the other women lament and clap their hands, and because they do this in honor of the deceased their custom should not be abolished."[340]

The Rabbinic voice that arises from this responsa presents a wealth of pertinent information.

First of all, the fact that there was a responsa written by such a well-know Rabbi illustrates that there existed a serious debate over whether or not to allow the practice; it came down to the Talmudic prohibition of men hearing the woman's voice as found in Berakhot 24a.

Second of all, R. Yitshaq ben Sheset presented a lenient response; he ruled that the women could sing in mixed company since they their practice was "in honor of the

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[338] Seroussi 50.
[339] Seroussi 49.
[340] Seroussi 50.

deceased." [341] This document falls into the category of historical Rabbinic responsa that rule against the Talmudic prohibition related to *kol isha*.

Finally, the document gives valuable details regarding the practice of the Jewish female lamenters in the Iberian Peninsula.

It is furthermore noted that the practice of the *plañideras* was characterized by "heart-rending lamentations and loud expressions and demonstrations of utmost sorrow."[342]

According to Seroussi, Judeo-Spanish *plañideras*, as described in all the medieval sources mentioned above, remained an integral feature in funerals of Sephardic communities well into the 20th century.[343]

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[341] Seroussi 50.
[342] William Samelson "Romances and Songs of the Sephardim" 534.
[343] Seroussi 50-51
Note: S
Seroussi cites M. Alvar as his source for this statement.

# Conclusion

The corpus of Judeo-Spanish songs presents an overall message that is extremely valuable for our communities; the songs and life cycle customs have captured the importance of the family and the community in the life of each individual.

A strong sense of communal responsibility is evident when the men of the community join the father of a newborn son the night before the *brit milah* ceremony for a communal study in honor of the event. The same sense of communal responsibility was demonstrated by the women who spent the hours before dawn with the new mother, singing songs to her that referenced commonly held values and concerns.

This sense of community continued during the wedding preparations and celebrations as noted in so many of the songs. The women accompanied the bride during her extremely personal trip to the *mikveh*. She was joined by her own female relatives and friends; in addition, her new female relatives joined her and attended to her at the *mikveh* and on her wedding day.

The men of the communities have created social institutions that ensure that no person in the community will be buried without a properly attended funeral; through this they convey the message that all community members are to be honored properly.

The communal commitment referenced in many of the *canticas de parida* can remind our communities of the importance of supporting families with new babies. While the superstitious worries that once plagued new mothers may not be of immediate concern, we should remember the more basic needs of friendship and community.

Even the songs that relate to symbols that may be foreign to our modern sensibilities have something to teach us. A simple recasting can provide great inspiration for members of our communities. For example, if one chooses to add a song such as "El regateo de las conusegras" (The haggling of the Mothers-in-law) to their own wedding celebration, while the choice can be made simply because of its connection to the past, there is additional value; the song can remind the couple to look to particular family heirlooms in their possession in an attempt to uncover the symbolic meaning it once had for the family member who had possessed it. Sephardic brides of past generations took great pride in the items that comprised their trousseau. Such items carried powerful symbolic import.

It is precisely at our own life cycle junctures that we can take a moment to reflect on our families' histories. As noted in chapter 3, there is a perek in *Pirkei Avot* that urges a person to know from whence he came and to where he is going. These are important questions to ask when preparing to enter into a marriage.

When beginning a life together, a newly married couple naturally looks to the future; they should also be encouraged to look back, not only upon their individual lives, but also upon their respective family and its history. Family heirlooms offer a tangible symbol of connection to the past and to individual family members.

The following is the translation by Rabbi Martin Cohen of the text of a song included in the Levy Collection. It chronicles the details of the life of man, gazing between the lines of each life cycle.[344]

1. I'd like to share with you a tale
   To root it in your memory's trail
   By reciting all the travail
   That freights the mind of man

2. Know that all there is is naught
   This life for e'er is drab, distraught
   There is indeed no rhyme or thought
   In the lifespan of a man

3. From his beginnings, his life's first page
   Until he's four or five of age
   Like a chick-chick in a cage
   So grows the child of man

4. When his speech at last emerges
   Then the joy of his family surges
   To embrace or kiss him it urges
   Its experience a delight to man

5. Whether in his mother's arms he's curled
   Or on his father's shoulders hurled
   He's like a rose that is unfurled
   Such is its similarity with man

6. Say they: If you saw him prance
   How glorious then your trance
   "Neither in Venice nor in France
   Has such been seen by man"

7. And when he at age ten arrives
   On constant mischief he survives
   On destruction and tearing he blithely thrives
   Beyond the reckoning of man

8. He blurts and says what's on his mind

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[344] "The original Castilian/Ladino doggerel has been paraphrastically translated into obviously not superior doggerel by Rabbi Martin A Cohen." – Rabbi Martin A. Cohen Note: Please see appendix F for the original Castilian/Ladino Text.

And no one around can figure its kind
And so at his age fifteen we find
He has on his own become a man

9. And then at twenty's youthful song
Like an uncaged lion very strong
His heart on getting married longs
To assume his role as man

10. Once married as he could
And achieving what he would
This is the joy which understood
Which must bring pleasure to a man

11. And before the year has passed
His wife with child is fast
If two in her womb are cast
It spells trouble for a man

12. Soon with aches and pains he fills
And tries to flee from mounting bills
His loss of color betrays the ills
In the appearance of the man

13. He becomes consumed like a blaze
He sells his possessions in a craze
Herewith begins life's critical phase
Whose prospect frightens men

14. Then, at that point, in its very start
He begins to seek a life apart
And thus begins the battle of heart
Between a woman and a man

15. Now set upon on every side
Her demands, begun, do not subside
For all sorts of fashions he must provide
Beyond the capacity of man

16. When his fiftieth he attains
His life is overwhelmed with pains
Old age begins to bring him strains
And control the life of man

17. At sixty, though once hale
His strength begins to fail
With one foot on grave's rail
What alternative has man?

18. At seventy he looks crazed indeed
Everyone pays him little heed
The very marrow starts to recede
From the braincells of a man

19. When with eighty he is graced
Into a corner he is placed
None at all seek out his taste
Or consider him a man

20. For him at ninety there is no space
In mind or counsel no worthy place
Like one long dead without a trace
And no more counted as a man

21. If indeed all this we know
How would we our true value show
If through riches we must crow
They do not save a man

22. For who would flee post-mortal harms
Let him do well with open arms
Teshuvah and good deeds are charms
For the salvation of a man

23. Yet, for sure, as life toward old age flows
More and more our sekhel grows
Till on an aged's face there glows
A malakh in the form of man

24. Don't react to me with pique
Dubbing shameless my critique
It's only of my grandpa that I speak
And not of any other man

While the text of this song is meant to be a humorous parody upon a more serious ballad, it thoroughly chronicles the life of man and his experiences at each stage. This

poem offers a number of simple, yet worthy messages beneath its humor and beyond the fact that it treats the woman as an object of man's experience.

Most of the stanzas in the ballad discuss common problems or life experiences, such as the desire for love, financial concerns, and even marriage troubles.

In the end, the text reflects on the misplaced focus on material gains rather than on "*teshuvah*" and good deeds.

Another concern for man is his fear of being forgotten. After all the days that he has lived and all of the experiences that have made up his life, he worries that, at eighty, he will be placed in a corner and his opinions disregarded.

These two concerns connect the poem to the discussion at the beginning of the conclusion. The Sephardic communities have generally modeled tightly bound familial and community relationships. Through acts of kindness towards family and community members during important life cycle moments, individuals can be certain that they are not loosing sight of what is important.

Additionally, beyond the hopes of enriching the Reform Movement's life cycle ceremonies with songs from the Pan- Sephardic repertory, the project aims to create a new context where the Judeo-Spanish songs can continue to be a vibrant genre.

The women who sang these songs as part of their daily lives and most precious celebrations are now in their eighties. The songs, however, are generally not a part of the daily lives of their daughters and granddaughters.

In transferring these songs into the Reform movement's repertory, it allows for the songs to take on a life in a new context. With the increasing number of congregants of

partial Sephardic background in the Reform movement, the connection to such repertoire can be additionally powerful for them.

Perhaps it is possible for a young new mother to sing the same song that flowed from the lips of her grandmother as she rocked her own daughter to sleep. Like the items of the trousseau, a descriptive wedding song can be a tangible symbol for a young bride of her grandmother's experiences.

In essence, the life cycle events as celebrated in the Reform movement can be greatly enriched through the addition of Sephardic music to their repertoire. First of all, the rich corpus of Pan-Sephardic music described in this project holds intrinsic value; in addition, the music tells the story of the Sephardic Jewish people and their various journeys.

The inclusion of Sephardic music in the Reform Life cycle repertoire will add to the already rich body of music available to enrich and beautify the important moments in our congregants' lives. Such an addition would further assist the Reform movement in its quest to give voice to all of its diverse members.

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# Appendix

A. "Ezrahi Haya"
Isaac Levy. *Liturgia Judeo-Espānola*, Volume 4, page 349.

B."Berukhim Atem"
Isaac Levy. *Liturgia Judeo-Espānola*,Volume 10, page 304.

C. "Oh, qué mueve meśeś travates d'estrechura"
Susana Weich-Shahak. "Childbirth Songs among Sephardic Jews of Balkan Origin: A Preliminary Study." *Assaph* 8 (1982-1983): 92.

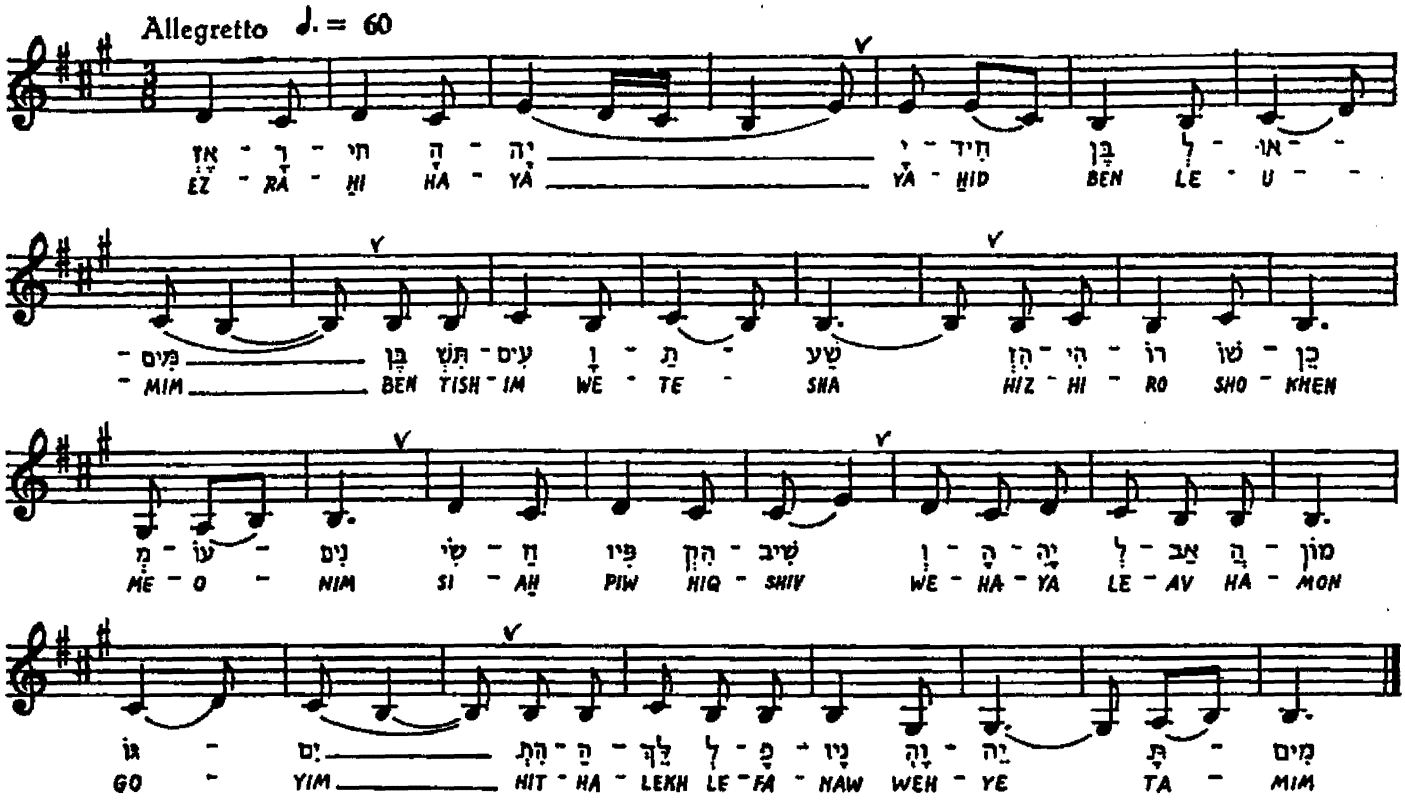
D. Ah! el novio no quere dinero...
Richard Neuman. *The Nico Castel Ladino Song Book*. Cedarhurst: Tara Publications, 198, pages 28-29.

E. "El regateo de las consuegras"
Alberto Hemsi. *Cancionero sefardí*, pages 308-309.

F. "Cantar Quero Una Farsa"
Isaac Levy. *Liturgia Judeo-Espānola*,Volume 4, page 382-383.

EZRAHI HAYA
Tánger

215· אזרחי היה
טנג׳יר




פיוט זה שרים לאחר שמסרו התינוק לידי הסנדק היושב על כסא אליהו הנביא, והמוהל מתכונן לבצע את ברית־המילה

אֶזְרָחִי הָיָה יָחִיד בֵּין לְאוּמִּים
בֶּן תִּשְׁעִים וְתִשַּׁע הִזְהִירוֹ שׁוֹכֵן מְעוֹנִים
שִׂיחַ פִּיו הִקְשִׁיב וְהָיָה לְאַב הֲמוֹן גּוֹיִם
הִתְהַלֵּךְ לְפָנָיו וֶהְיֵה תָּמִים

תָּמִים תִּהְיֶה וּבְרִיתִי אִם תִּשְׁמוֹר
מִצְוַת מִילָה לְךָ אִם תַּחֲמוֹד
רוֹמֵם אֲרוֹמְמְךָ וּכְמִדַּת צִדְקְךָ לְךָ אָמוֹד
אָנֹכִי מָגֵן לְךָ שְׂכָרְךָ הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד

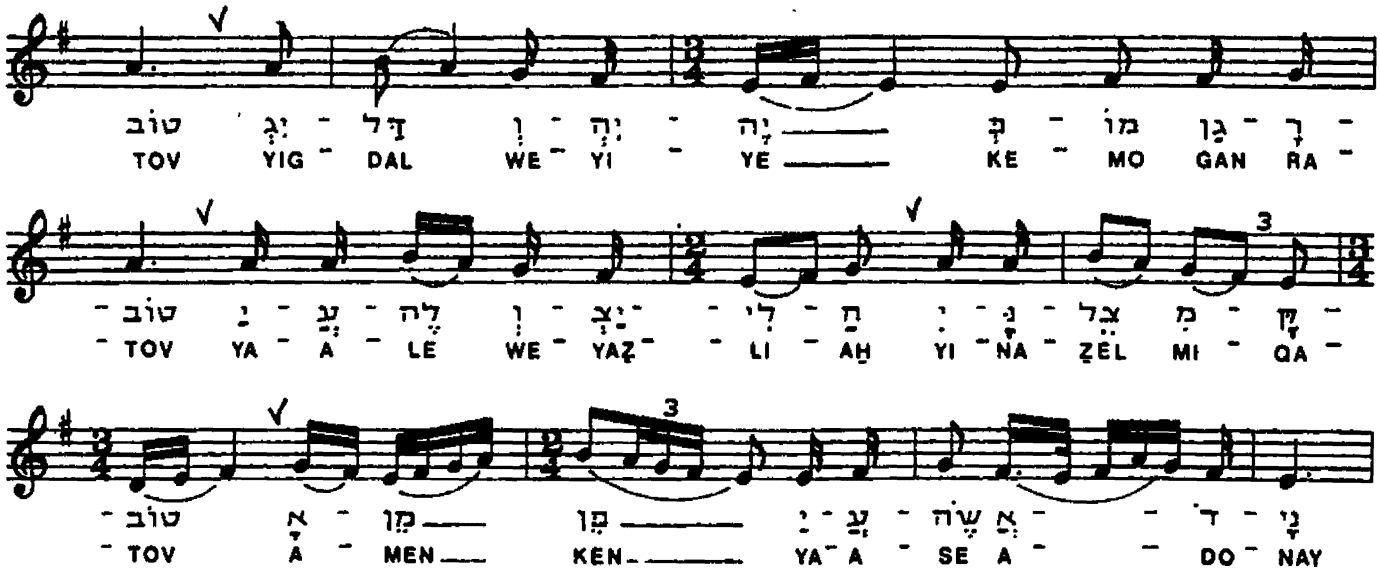
מְאֹד שָׁמַר אַבְרָהָם מִצְוַת שׁוֹכֵן גְּבוֹהִים
וַיִּקַּח יְלִידֵי בֵּיתוֹ וּמִקְנַת כַּסְפּוֹ אֲשֶׁר אַחֲרָיו נוֹהִים
וַיָּמָל אֶת בְּשַׂר עָרְלָתָם וְהֵם רָצִים אַחֲרָיו וְלֹא שׁוֹהִים
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אוֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים

אֱלֹהִים חוֹן יָחוֹן אֶת הַיֶּלֶד הַזֶּה וּבְאֶבְרָתוֹ יָסֵךְ לוֹ
הַיֶּלֶד יִמָּלֵא וּשְׁמוֹ יִגְדַּל בְּקֶרֶב קְהָלוֹ
קַיֶּם יְקַיֶּם עָלָיו לְמַלֹּאת מִשְׁאָלוֹ
חַיִּים שָׁאַל מִמְּךָ נָתַתָּ לוֹ

לוֹ וּלְכָל עַמּוֹ תּוֹשִׁיעַ מְקַיְּמֵי מִצְוַת דַּם הַמִּילָה
יַגְדִּיל בְּתוֹרַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ יַרְבֶּה בְּתוֹךְ הַקְּהִילָה
בְּיָמָיו תִּוָּשַׁע יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁכּוֹן לָבֶטַח בִּרְנָּה וּבְגִילָה
אַשְׁרֵי מוֹאֲסֵי עָרְלָה וּבוֹחֲרֵי מִילָה
כִּי מְאוֹסָה הָעָרְלָה וּבְחִירָה הַמִּילָה



A




בְּרוּכִים אַתֶּם קְהַל אֵמוּנַי
וּבָרוּךְ הַבָּא בְּשֵׁם אֲדֹנָי

יֶלֶד הַיּוֹלֵד יִהְיֶה כְּסִימָן טוֹב
יִגְדַּל וְיִהְיֶה כְּמוֹ גֶן רָטוֹב
יַעֲלֶה וְיַצְלִיחַ יִנָּצֵל מִקֶּטֶב
אָמֵן כֵּן יַעֲשֶׂה אֲדֹנָי

חֵלֶק יִתֵּן לָנוּ בַּנְּעִימִים
וּבְיָמָיו נַעֲלֶה לְשָׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים
לְבֵית אֲדֹנָי גְּדוֹלִים וּקְטַנִּים
וּבָרוּךְ הַבָּא בְּשֵׁם אֲדֹנָי

זְכוֹר רַחֲמֶיךָ וְדַם הַבְּרִית
וּפְקוֹד אֶת צֹאנְךָ צֹאן הַשְּׁאֵרִית
עַל יַד מְשִׁיחֶךָ אֶת אוֹרְבֵינוּ תַּכְרִית
וּשְׁלַח אֶת אֵלִיָּה נָבִיא אֲדֹנָי

הַיֶּלֶד הַזֶּה זָכָה לִבְרִיתוֹ
אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ יִרְאוּ אֶת חֻפָּתוֹ
הַמַּלְאָךְ הַגּוֹאֵל יְבָרֵךְ אוֹתוֹ
יִזְכֶּה לַחֻזּוֹת בְּנוֹעַם אֲדֹנָי

בְּרוּכִים אַתֶּם קְהַל אֵמוּנַי
וּבָרוּךְ הַבָּא בְּשֵׁם אֲדֹנָי



B

## ***Oh, qué mueve meśeś travates d'estrechura***

*Oh, qué mueve meśeś travates d'estrechura,*
*voś nació un hijo de cara de luna,*
*Viva la parida con su creatura.*

*Ya eś, ya eś buen simán d'ésta alegría,*
*Bendicho el que moś allegó a ver este ía.*

*Cuando la cumadre diće: dale dale,*
*diće la parida: Ah, Dió, escapadme,*
*diće la su ġente: Amen, amen, amen.*
*Ya eś, ya eś...*

*Ya viene el parido con los convidadoś,*
*Ya trae en la mano cinta y buen pešcado*
*Y en la otra mano resta de ducados.*
*Ya eś, ya eś...*

Oh, nine months you were in distress,
A son was born to you, his face, beautiful as the moon,
long live the mother and her infant.

It is, it is already a good sign of joy.
Blessed who let us come to see this day.
When the midwife said: go on, go!
the mother says: Ah, God save me,
the family says: Amen, amen, amen.
It is, it is...

Here comes the father of the baby with his guests,
he brings in one hand meat and good fish,
and in the other hand, a handful of ducats (coins).[1]

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[1] This is taken from Susana Weich-Shahak. "Childbirth Songs among Sephardic Jews of Balkan Origin: A Preliminary Study," *Assaph* 8 (1982-1983): 92.

C

## Ah, el novio no quere dinero!...[2]

*Ah! el novio no quere dinero!*
*Quere a la novia de mazal bueno.*
*Yo vengo a ver.*
*Que gozen y logren y tengan muncho bien.*

*Ah! el novio no quere ducados!*
*Quere a la novia de mazal alto.*
*Yo vengo a ver...*

*Ah! el novio no quere manillas!*
*Quere a la novia cara de alegria.*
*Yo vengo a ver...*

Oh, the groom wants no money!
He only wants his bride of good fortune.
I've come to see! May they have joy and
Prosper and always be happy!

Oh, the groom wants no ducats!
He only wants his bride of great good luck.
I've come to see...

Oh, the groom wants no bracelets!
He only his bride with her face of joy.
I've come to see...

[2] This text is taken from: Neuman, Richard. *The Nico Castel Ladino Song Book.* Cedarhurst: Tara Publications, 1981. Pages 28-29.

## 130 *El regateo de las consuegras*

Source: Sta. Ester Vital, Rhodes, 1925.
*Cancionero*: Boda 5; *CS* XXXII.

—Bueno, así biva la coshuegra:
¿Qué es lo que le dio a su hija?
¡Nada no le dio a su hija!

—Bueno, así biva la coshuegra,
ya le di yerdán de perlas,
que se pase con la shuegra.

Bueno, así biva la coshuegra,
ya le di manillas de oro,
que se pase con el novio.

Bueno, así biva la coshuegra,
ya le di anillos de oro,
que se pase con el eshuegro.

Bueno, así biva la coshuegra,
ya le di siete camisas,
que se pase con las tías.

Bueno, así biva la coshuegra,
ya le di siete vestidos,
que se pase con los tíos.

Bueno, así biva la coshuegra,
ya le di siete pirones de plata,
que se pase con las cuñadas.

Bueno, así biva la coshuegra,
ya le di siete sepetes,
que los abra y los cerre.

Bueno, así biva la coshuegra,
ya le di cama armada,
que se eche de bien casada.

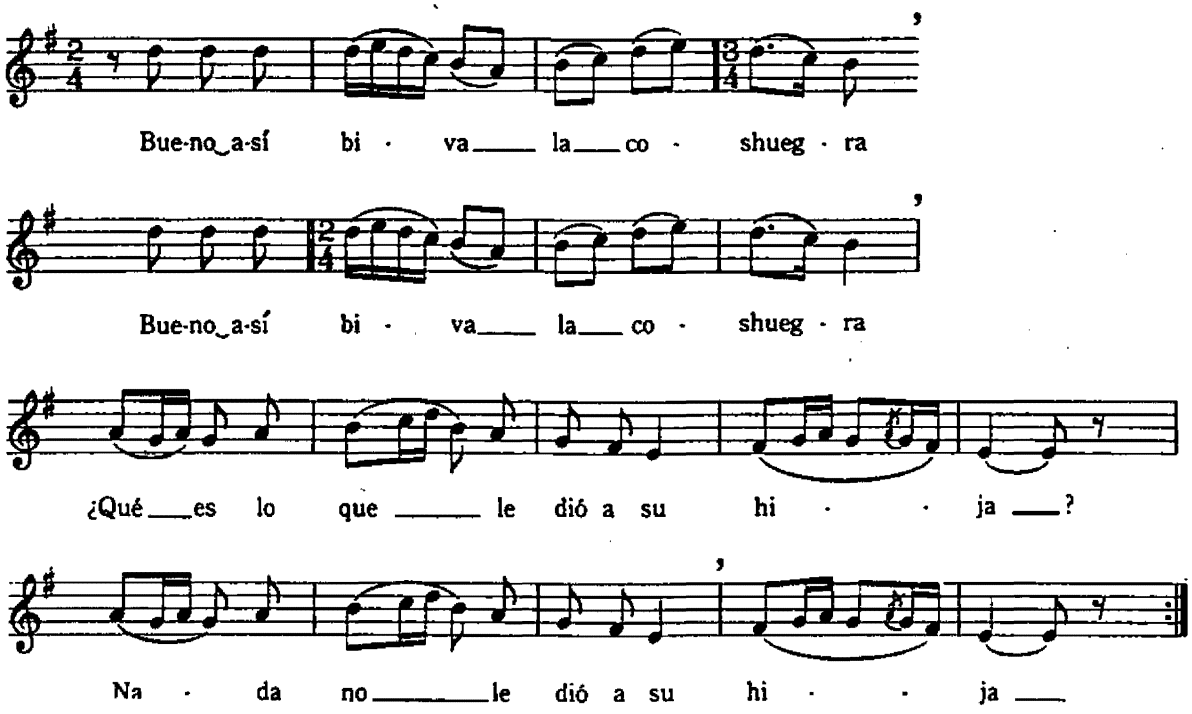
E(1)

Bueno, así biva la coshuegra,
¿qué es lo que le dio a su elmuera?
—Ya le di un mancebico
sin barba y sin mustachico.

**Note:** After the first verse of each stanza Hemsi writes "bis".

**Bibliography:** Amato 1987:135; Attias 1961, no. 96; Levy 1971, nos. 107-110; Levy 1973, no. 84; Weich-Shahak 1979/80, no. 2.

**NSA versions:** Rosa Avzaradel, Rhodes, Y 5672c (2).




E (2)

A. So my good *mehutenet*
What did you give t o your daughter?
You gave nothing to your daughter.

B. So my good *mehutenet*
I gave her a string of pearls
To show off with her mother-in-law

C. So now, my good *mehutenet*
I have given her golden bracelets
To show off with her fiancé

D. So now, my good *mehutenet*
I gave her golden rings
To show off with her father-in-law

E. So now, my good *mehutenet*
I gave her seven shifts
To show off with her aunts

F. So now, my good *mehutenet*
I gave her seven dresses
To show off with her uncles

G. So now, my good *mehutenet*
I gave her seven silver forks
To show off with her sisters-in-law

H. So now, my good *mehutenet*
I gave her seven trunks
She can open and she can close

I. So now, my good *mehutenet*
I gave her a gorgeous bed
As befits a well-married woman

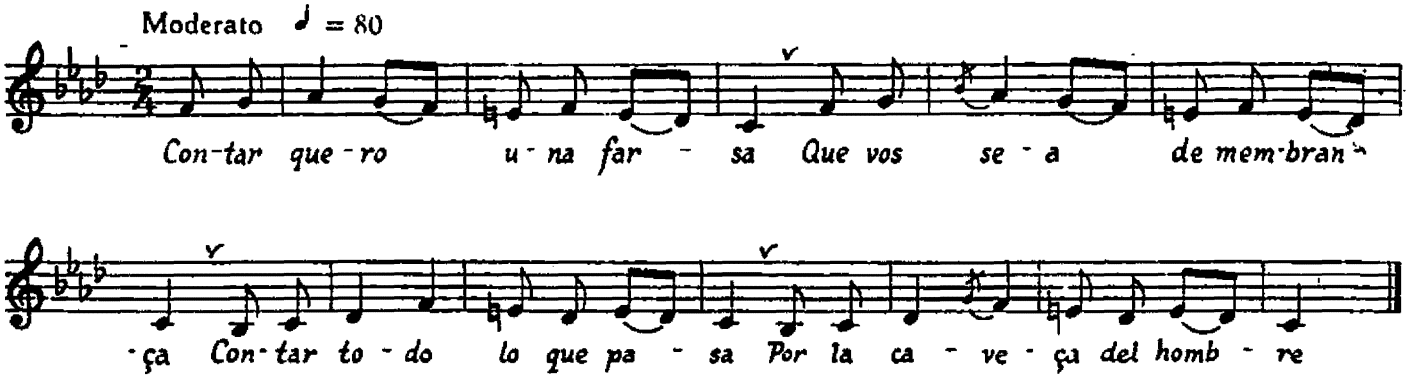
J. So now, my good *mehutenet*
What did you give your daughter-in-law?
I gave him a young lad
Not yet bearded or mustached

## CONTAR QUERO UNA FARSA

**Esmirna y Rodas**

## 244. קונטאר קירו אונה פארסה

**איזמיר ורודוס**




שיר זה נקרא ג'יב "Cante de xemirá" ונהגים לשיר
אותו בלילה שלפני יום הברית. ראה הערה בעמוד 392

Contar quero una farsa
Que vos sea de membrança
Contar todo lo que pasa
Por la caveça del hombre

Sepamos que todo es nada
Esta vida arrastada
No hay salida ni entrada
En la vida del hombre

Dezde que nace el chico
Hasta años cuatro y cinco
Como se cría el pollico
Ansí se cría el hombre

Cuando havlar ya empeça
Es alegría de la meza
Quen lo abraça, quen lo beza
De oírlo se gusta el hombre

En los braços de su madre
Y en hombros de su padre
Como la roza que se avre
Ansí asemeja el hombre

Dizen: Si veréx su gracia
¡Cual vos sea la ganancia!
Ni en Venezia ni en Francia
No lo vido ningún hombre

Cuando tiene los diez años
Todas sus hechas son daños
Destruir y romper paños
Que no abastece el hombre

Lo que quere havla y dize
No hay ninguno quen divize
Dezde que tiene años quinze
De suyo se haze hombre



F (1)

Cuando se vee por los vente
Se haze un león fuerte
En cazar mete su miente
Por entrar en cuenta de hombre

Ya cazó como podía
Alcançó lo que quería
Esta es la alegría
Que ha de gustarse el hombre

Antes que pase la añada
La mujer queda preñada
Si son dos en una vientrada
Mal, la encampa el hombre

Se vee lleno de dolores
Fuyendo de los devdores
Se le piedren las colores
De las caras del hombre

Se quema como la braza
Empeça a vender lo de caza
De aquí empeça la cavza
Que se atema el hombre

Luego en aquel instante
Le demanda caza aparte
Ya empeça el combate
De la mujer con el hombre

Cudiado por munchas vandas
Empeça con las demandas
De hazer todas las modas
Que no abastece el hombre

Cuando tiene los cincuenta
Tiene dolores sin cuenta
La vejez que lo apreta
Y lo governa a el hombre

De sesenta ya empeça
A quitársele la fuerça
Tiene el pie en la fuesa
Qué espera más el hombre

De setenta es como un loco
Todos lo toman un poco
Se le aflaca el meollo
De la caveça del hombre

Cuando tiene los ochenta
En un cantón lo asentan
De nada lo hazen cuenta
Ni lo contan más por hombre

Los noventa no enmento
Ni en cuenta los meto
Ya se conta como un muerto
No se conta más por hombre

Si todo esto savemos
En qué mo lo contenemos
Si en riqueza diremos
No lo escapan al hombre

Quen quere escapar de penas
Haga bien con manos llenas
Texuvá y hechas buenas
Lo escapan a el hombre

Cuanto más se envejece
Más y más el sekhel crece
De ver sus caras parece
Malákh en forma de hombre

No vos raviéx tan presto
Por que havlo deshonesto
Por mi avuelo todo esto
No lo dixe por ningún hombre



(F2)