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Advisors: Dr. Rabbi Martin A. Cohen and Lillian M. Wohl

THE JOURNEY

FROM MARRIAGE TO CHILDBIRTH IN SEPHARDI SONG

INBAL SHARETT-SINGER

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for

Cantorial Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
The Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music
New York, New York

To my beloved husband, Jonathan William Singer, and my dear son, Amit Berry Sharett Singer. You are the fuel that keeps me going. You are the love of my life.

To my dear parents, Yaffa Sharett Roger and Yoram Sharett. Thank you for your endless love, devotion and support. I love you dearly.

To my dear sister, Gili Sharett. Thank you for always inspiring me. I love you.

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Abstract

This thesis discusses a small but beautiful part of the total repertoire of Sephardic music, which is rich and daring, covering many centuries and interacting with many cultures. I will focus on this music of the Sephardic Jews of the Eastern Mediterranean, beginning this thesis with an overview of the vast Sephardic experience through history and collective memory. Then I will discuss the customs of the Sephardic Jews, specifically in the Ottoman Empire and then the great city of Salonica where many of my ancestors resided.

In the introduction to my thesis, I will present an overview of the Sephardic Experience. I have relied on many books and encyclopedias, especially the old *Jewish Encyclopedia* which has many valuable articles and the more modern, *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Among the books that I have consulted, there are three authors who are prominent. One of them is Rabbi Michael Molho, who wrote extensively on the Jews of Salonica and whose work in translation was first published in 1944 (Molho 2006). I have relied heavily on the works of Rabbi Herbert C. Dobrinsky, whose works are classic in the field (Dobrinsky 2001). Third and not least, I have relied on the extensive writings on Sephardica, especially material dealing with the Ottoman Empire, by my senior adviser to the thesis, Rabbi Martin A. Cohen, who has spent his entire career, indeed almost his entire life, working with Sephardic material. I want to express my gratitude for the opportunity to have been able to consult these works, and I trust that my presentation in the following pages will be worthy of their contributions. In the second part of my thesis, I will analyze songs of the wedding ceremony as well as childbirth and baby naming rituals.

Acknowledgments

I have always been interested in Sephardic music. This is due in no small measure to the fact that I am descendant of two of the great Iberian Sephardic clans, The Abulafia and the Benveniste on my mother's side. Both of these clans have continued to be represented on the world Jewish scene and indeed the entire world scene ever since they began their history in the Iberian Peninsula. I have relatives by these names in various parts of the world today. Indeed, my relatives, the Abulafia family, are prominent in Mexico City.

I have spent a good part of my life contemplating the vast and varied Sephardic experience, of which I am a fortunate heir. I wish I could have studied more and hope that as the time goes by I will be able to study more about this rich and varied experience. For the purposes of my thesis, I present an outline of this experience, focusing ultimately on the music of the Sephardim in the Eastern Mediterranean, specifically the areas of the former Ottoman Empire and their derived areas in Turkey and in Greece.

I would like to thank my advisors in this thesis, Rabbi Martin A. Cohen and Lillian M. Wohl. Your wisdom, patience and generosity have made our work together profoundly impactful. I will always cherish your guidance and support, and I am deeply honored to have you as my advisors and mentors.

Chapter I - Historical Overview

The Sephardic experience, which Rabbi Martin A. Cohen in his long appraisal of this experience calls "The Sephardic Phenomenon," covers many centuries and many continents and indeed many different forms of civilizations (Cohen 1992) . The Sephardic experience has interacted with almost every country and culture in the Western and Eastern Mediterranean world and has contributed its no small measure to the development of these cultures. Sephardic Jews have been indeed, as the Hebrew tradition calls it, the leaven of the dough in having seeded and developed much of the culture, the technology, and the civilization of the western world.

The term *Sepharad* from which all Sephardic culture depends is found in the Bible in the book of Obadiah 20. We do not cite the chapter of the book of Obadiah because it has only one chapter and therefore we cite only the verses. In the same verse, we find the word *Tzorfat* which has come to be identified with France. Equally the same, Sepharad has come to be identified with the Iberian Peninsula (often called Spain). In reality, both of these terms refer to places in the area of the Holy Land when it was used in the book of Obadiah. The story of the development of the term Sepharad to its classical use as a designation for the Iberian Peninsula is a long and interesting story which goes beyond the confines of this study, but it is important that the term Sepharad was already used at the dawn of the Middle Ages to designate the Iberian Peninsula.

We do not know when Jews first appeared in the Iberian Peninsula. According to a legend they appeared as early as the time of King Solomon, but this legend can be dismissed. What is

known is that there were Jews in the Iberian Peninsula in classical Roman times, and certainly by the first century of the present era. We know that because there are tombstones that have inscriptions in Hebrew and Greek and Latin that refer to Jews, and these tombstones give us what Rabbi Cohen called anepigraphical evidence from the existence of Jews (Cohen 2003). A further footnote to all of this is found in the New Testament in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, where on two occasions Paul is quoted as saying that he wants to visit Sepharad, the Iberian Peninsula. All of this would indicate the existence of a Jewish community there, because wherever Paul traveled he always spoke to Jews, since only Jews could understand his message. As the New Testament tells us, Paul always spoke in synagogues because he gave a message that was Jewish at that time, the message that was the Messiah had come.

At any rate, the Jews were there very early and they seem to have had a good life under the Romans. After all, under the Romans the Jewish community in the Diaspora grew enormously and really formed the bulk of the Jewish population at that time. We can only surmise what kind of Jews were there. At the time of the Roman Empire, it is reasonable to suppose that these Jews were of the kind that were part of the Hillelite group and that they were part of the early Rabbinic tradition. There would have been very little connection between the kinds of Jews who were pre-Rabbinic and served the Temple and Jews of the Diaspora because the world of the Jews of the Diaspora was so much different than the world of the Jews who served the Temple. The odds are therefore heavily in favor that they were part of the pre-Rabbinic tradition. This incidentally was also the case of Saint Paul who himself was a Pharisaic Jew, as we are told, and the evidence shows in the Book of Acts.

Little is known beyond what we have said about the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula until the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula by the Visigoths in the beginning of the sixth century. By that time, the Romans in the Iberian Peninsula had been largely converted to Christianity of the Roman kind. The Visigoths brought a Christianity of the Arian kind, which was centered more or less in the area we now call Germany. The Arians fought regularly with the Roman Catholics, all the time that the Visigoths were in control more or less of the Peninsula, which is from their entrance until their expulsion by the Muslims in the year 707 and immediately following.

In their struggles between the Arian Christians and the Roman Christians, the Jews soon found themselves in the middle, and they were used by one group or another for their own political purposes. Generally, the Arians were quite tolerant to the Jews and the Romans behaved hostly toward the Jews since the Jews who found tolerance with the Arians tended to side with the Arians. As a result of this process we find that under the Arians some kings favored the Arian position, some kings were bought over by the Roman Catholics. As a result the fate of the Jews depended on who was in power. When an Arian king was in power, then the Jews prospered. Otherwise the Jews suffered. All this had very little to do with anything else but which group was able to harness the energy and the strength of the Jews.

Interestingly, one of the series of documents that Rabbi Cohen has studied emphasized the correctness of this point of view. The documents, which are written in Latin, concern the miraculous conversions of the Jews of the Balearic Island of Menorca in the fifth century. Ac-

cording to the sources which contains this tradition, the Jews of Menorca, who had a very fine life there and who carried Greek names and had important positions in the community, were miraculously converted when a relic of Saint Stephen brought from the East came into Minorca and this immediately created a major change in the role of the Jews and the attitude of the Jews in Menorca. The reality is that this legend masks the truth of the situation, because the Jews of Menorca were converted as a result of the struggle between the Arian Christians and the Roman Christians in which the Romans Christians were victorious and forced the Jews to convert probably at a great expanse of time, money, and life to the Jewish community.

Except for very few details, we know little more about the Jews of Iberia until the conquest of Iberia by the Muslims who came in the year 711 and by 715 had conquered almost all of the Iberian Peninsula except for a few pockets in the north. The Muslims came as a result of struggles within the Muslim Empire, but when the Muslims came they took over and created a culture of their own, Muslim culture with shades of development in the Iberia Peninsula. By the middle of the eighth century, different Muslim groups in the Iberian Peninsula who had been fighting with one another recognized the need of getting together under a single government. They invited a Muslim prince to come over and to become the great Emir of a united Muslim group. The name of this prince was Abd-er-Rahman the first, who came and became the general leader and was known as the emir because the Iberian Peninsula was an emirate of the greater Muslim empire. Under the rule of his successors the Muslim community grew and developed agriculture, the arts, fine living and everything else that you could possibly want until the Muslims reached their Zenith around 929 of the present era, at which point the Emir, Abd-er-Rahman

the third, was able to free himself from the rest of Muslim control which came out of Baghdad, and to creat a caliphate. He became the Caliph, no longer a lonely emir. He created a luxurious court and really ushered in the Golden Age of the Iberian Peninsula under the Muslims.

During all this time, especially from Abd-er-Rahman the first on, Jews were invited to the Iberian Peninsula and began to thrive there. They established themselves and they established communities. We know a great deal about these communities. We know that for example in the eighth century one of the the communities in Barcelona sent a letter to the Gaon Amram of Sura, asking him for a list of the prayers that had to be said and he sent to them what really became to be the first written prayer book of Rabbinic Judaism, called the Seder Amram Gaon. With the coming of the Caliph Abd-er-Rahman the third, the Jewish community prospered even more. Now, to be sure, officialy the Jewish community were dhimmis, that is second class citizens, and they had to pay a tax. But, this tax was nothing because they prospered so much and were better off than Jews in most parts of the world that they gladly paid this tax.

Just as under the Caliph Abd-er-Rahman the third and the Golden Age of Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula, the Jews also created their own Golden Age and in this process they often were involved with the Muslims. For example, the Jews were very important in agriculture and they had vineyards and plantations of different kinds such as citrus trees and more. Jews were involved in many trades and professions, especially medicine. Jews were involved with Muslims and among themselves in connection with the development of culture.

The Muslims, with all their wealth, had created a leisure class that was interested in music and in poetry and ultimately in philosophy. Poetry was very important because poetry was connected to music and to the court. But because Arabic poetry had not been very well developed in the Iberian Peninsula, Muslims began to create a new rich and flowery Arabic because they had grammarians who understood Arabic grammar and were able to create new words that came out of Arabic naturally. They created magnificent poetry for the court and ultimately they were interested in philosophy because the leisure class and the learned class began to question the philosophy of the Muslim religion which they had inherited.

What was true for the Muslims was certainly just as true for the Jews. The Jews also created an elite class. This elite community had its grammarians who took the Hebrew language, especially its poetry, from a very primitive mode and, by studying it, they created a rich and new developed Hebrew language. This made possible the creation of a varied, complexed and rich Hebrew poetry which we still use in our prayer books to this day. They also created a philosophy because they had the same questions about their inherited philosophy and religion that the Muslims had. Specifically, these questions revolved about the conflict between reason and revelation. Those Jews and Muslims were the heirs to a revealed religion with God being acknowledged in daily life, with miracles and with all kinds of other special considerations. But Muslims and Jewish thinkers under the influence of philosophy, especially Greek philosophy, and especially Aristotle which had been brought into the Muslim world and translated into Arabic, questioned their validity of their inherited traditions. They lived in a world where their traditions, the Muslim tradition and the Jewish tradition, were based on revelation, and their institutions were based on

revelation. Muslims and Jews had to find ways of combining religion and revelation so that they would be the two sides of the same truth. The Christians later did this themselves under the influence, in no small measure, of the Jews.

The Jewish culture that developed in the Iberian Peninsula was and remains to this day one of the greatest contributions to Jewish history ever made. Among the great poets we find Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Yehuda Halevi, Moses and Abraham Ibn Ezra and many others whose works are mentioned and included in the two volume anthology by Schirmann called *HaShira HaIvrit BiSefarad UveProvance*.The philosophers, of course, included Solomon Ibn Gabirol whose great poetic work (the "*Keter Malkhut*") is the first major work of philosophy in Muslim Iberia, anteceding all the work that the Muslims did, and it also is the only Jewish philosophical work in Hebrew. All the other philosophical works were written in Arabic, which was the general language of the Jews: it was their daily language. They did not speak Hebrew. They certainly did not speak that kind of beautiful Hebrew which they created for their poetry which they used in Jewish circles just as the Muslims used their work in Muslim circles, including the court. Their philosophy in Arabic included at least three great works that are worthy of mention. The first one is Yehuda Halevi's *Kuzari*, which shows a great influence of Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism. Two later works which were through and through Aristotelian. Really, when one reads them, one sees the influence of Aristotle prevailing over the influence of the inherited tradition of Judaism, the tradition of revelation with which these philosophers tried to make a compromise. The first of these two books is the work called *Emunah Ramah,* (The Exalted Faith) of Abraham Ibn Daud, who was also known as a historian having written a work which is called both the *Seder Hakab-*

balah, or *Sefer Hakabbalah*. This historical work traces the continuity of the rabbinic tradition from its origins until the days of the writer. The purpose of this work is to present a fight agains the Karaites who were very prominent in the Iberian Peninsula until the rabbinic Jews won out over them. The *Emunah Ramah* would have been the classical work of Jewish philosophy in the Iberian Peninsula were not for the second work written not many decades thereafter which quickly eclipsed this precious great work.

The second great work was the great philosophical work of Moses Maimonides, which is called *The Guide for the Perplexed* and the *Moreh Nevukhim*. This is really one of the classical works of Jewish literature in general. It is also a great work of double meaning in literature. It has a double meaning because it intends one meaning for the scholars initiated in philosophy and another meaning for the uninitiated. It has this double meaning because its real meaning, the meaning for the initiated, would have subjected Maimonides to being called a heretic. That was his real message, and, indeed, as time went on, many people called Maimonides a heretic or the equivalent. There were two main groups of scholars in Judaism. One was called the arm barriers for Maimonides, and they others were the opponents of Maimonides.

But the double meaning kept Maimonides safe from persecution. The double meaning is reflected in the fact that Maimonides was through and through an Aristotelian. Unlike all other works of Maimonides which are very precise and methodical, and move from one point to another with great clarity this work the *Moreh Nevukhim* does not. As Maimonides says in his introduction, he gives little bits of pieces and he connects then to other bits and pieces and only the

people who can understand the connection would get his real message. Obviously, most Jews were not trained in philosophy and to most Jews, Maimonides' confused meaning sounded like any rabbinic text of commentary. But people who could connect the dots got the real message that this was an Aristotelian presentation of Judaism and this became famous. This ultimately created a battle between the Maimonidians and the Anti-Maimonidians.[1] However, what really saved Maimonides and what saved the *Moreh Nevukhim* for all posterity was the fact that that in addition to being a philosopher (by the way Maimonides was not a poet), Maimonides was a great halakhist.

It is important now for me to say a word about the role of Halakhah in the Iberian Peninsula. When the Caliph Abd-er-Rahman the third broke from his leadership in Baghdad, he broke because he wanted to create, and did create, a new separate independent legal system in the Iberian Peninsula. The legal system was based on Muslim law. The Caliph continued to maintain his political connections with the Muslim leadership which came out of Baghdad. However, he took Muslim law and made its development in the Iberian Peninsula independent from Baghdad. This meant the he could have his own judges and legislate to they make decisions for the Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula.

By the same token this happened with the Jews. Just as the Muslims had their Caliph, with the blessing of the Caliph the Jewish community was governed by Jewish law and the chief

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[1] For an excellent book on this subject, see: Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, 1180-1240.* Leiden: Brill Publishers, 1965.

of this governance was the head of the Jewish community, who was a physician and was connected to the court, even a friend to the Caliph, and he became the head of the Jewish community. His name was Hasdai Ibn Shaprut and he was regarded as the Nasi, prince of the Jewish community. According to the tradition, Ibn Shaprut brought into the Jewish community copies of the Talmud which had been the basis of Jewish law under the Muslims, centered in the Geonim of Baghdad. Ibn Shaprut established an autonomous, independent Jewish community even though officially he maintained his contacts with the academies in Baghdad. Ibn Shaprut brought his own judges etc and created a whole system of Iberian Jewish law and jurisprudence. The Jewish law thrived, and, as a result, you had under the Muslims two major compendia of Jewish law. We can call these compendia codes. There were two major ones. The first one was by Alfasi, also know as "The *Rif*" who compiled a compendium of Jewish law, and, later on the great compendium of Jewish law was composed by Maimonides himself. The "*Mishne Torah*" also known as "The *Yad HaHazaka*," or simply "The *Yad*," because it deals with fourteen different areas. Maimonides was able to take all of Jewish law, all the *Halakhah*, and organize it systematically into fourteen different areas as had never been done before, and arguably, has never been done since. In doing so, in his "*Hakdamah*" Maimonides said that if you study the *Torat Moshe* and you study the *Mishne Torah*, "*Ein Tzarich Likro Seifer Acher Beneihem*", "it is not necessary to study any other book between the two." That really is correct, that Maimonides' work became the basis for the judgment of Jewish law. However it also became a source of controversy by his detractors who said "How dare Maimonides say "You don't have to study all the *Halakhah* between the Torah and the *Mishne Torah*. But because Maimonides "*Mishne Torah*" was so great and popular it could never be suppressed. Eventually, it had to be incorporated into the total corpus of

the Jewish tradition. What many later rabbis tried to do was to say that Maimonides really did not mean you do not have to use any other books, it really meant if you are a student you really could temporarily skip all the other books, but he wanted you to learn all the other books nevertheless. In any case, Maimonides' "*Mishne Torah*" really put him in the center of the Jewish tradition. There were arguments against the "*Moreh Nevukhim*", and many rabbis wanted to ban it. Even some yeshivas in Eastern Europe did not permit their students to use it. Nevertheless, since Maimonides "*Mishna Torah*" could not be rejected, the "*Moreh Nevokhim*" was always around and of course remains a pillar of Jewish thought.

Maimonides' major works were created not in the Iberian Peninsula but in Egypt to which he had fled. Nevertheless, Maimonides works reflect a mind that always lived in the Iberian Peninsula.

The next phase of Sephardic history is the history of the Jews in Christian Iberia. Christian Iberia began shortly after the Muslim conquest. It began with skirmishes near the foothills of the Pyrenees by small group of Visigothic Christians whom the Muslims were not able to expel. They eventually created guerrilla warfare and they fought against the Muslim settlements up in the Northern Iberian Peninsula where the Muslim settlements were sparse and gradually gained forces and were able to push the Muslims out. It was not very easy. There were struggles and losses and the victories of the Christians were sporadic. In reality, while the Muslims conquered the entire Peninsula in approximately four years, it took the Christians nearly eight centuries to reconquer the territory for the Christians, beginning with 718, or 722 depending on upon where

one places the initial Christian victory. It took the Christians until 1492 until the last Muslims were expelled or converted.

Nevertheless, Christian tradition, reminiscent of the tradition of the biblical book of Joshua, had tried to present the Christian conquest of the Peninsula, or as they call it the *Reconquista*, the Reconquest, as a regular direct unchallenged if slow process of conquest beginning with the early eighth century and continuing until 1492. Of course, this is legendary and the reality was quite different. The reality is such that occasionally, maybe even frequently, Christians fought with Muslims against other Christians and without any scruples about their religion. It is noteworthy, and I must note this, that the great champion of the Christian Reconquest is know as the El Cid, which, of course, is a Muslim title.

As the Christians moved southward they came across and conquered more and more territories in which Jews lived. Many Jews defected to the Christians because during the last days of the Muslims, many Jews were persecuted by Muslims. Other Jews just remained where they were and were taken over by the Christian communities. The Christian communities liked the Jews because the Jews were skilled. They had lived under the Muslims who were far more advanced agriculturally, technologically and culturally and generally than the Christians. The Christians inherited the Jews, and even put them to use working for them, even in administrative positions. The Jewish communities flourished under the Christians, under the *Reconquista*, as long as the *Reconquista* developed and the *Reconquista* developed as long as there was more territory for the Christians to conquer. I have said, and I would like to repeat, that the farther south

the Christians went, the richer were the Muslim communities, so that it was an incentive for Christians to keep on fighting and marching, and to conquer more and more territory. But, eventually by the middle of the fourteenth century, except for a few outposts on the Mediterranean which were conquered by 1492, most of the conquest had been completed. Once the conquest was completed, Christians began fighting amongst themselves for top positions in the Christian world. As a result of this fighting, Jews found themselves in the middle, being compelled to connect with one Christian group or another.

Let me back track first by saying that in the heyday of the Christian Reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula, Jews continued developing their culture. They continued their poetry as we find recorded in Schirmann's work, "*HaShira HaIvrit BiSfarad UveProvance*," and also in his work "*Toldot HaShira HaIvrit BiSfarad UveProvance*." They also continued their studies of grammar, science and philosophy. But, there was one major difference between their work in Christian Iberia from their work in Muslim Iberia. That difference is found in the fact that the language of the poetry changed and included more and more words that were created under the circumstances of the Christian Reconquest. And their philosophy changed also, becoming more traditionally oriented, even though it did not relinquish its Aristotelian or Neo-Platonic roots.

The reason for that is that the Christians, under the influence of the Church, were very much opposed to the subordination of religion and revelation to philosophy. They could not do without philosophy because philosophy was in the air and many of the great Christian groups were philosophically oriented. That was the case of the Franciscans and the Dominicans, whose

orders began in the thirteenth century. The Dominicans, incidentally, were really started by Saint Dominic who was from the Iberian Peninsula. As result of all of this, the philosophy of the Christians in the Iberian Peninsula was more oriented towards utilizing Greek philosophy to establish and reestablish the values of Christianity. Of course, Jews did the same for Judaism. Another factor of Christianity (which influenced Judaism) was the anti-philosophical interest in mysticism. Not that their mysticism was not philosophical, but it was oriented towards the magical, the mystical, the revelational dimension of Christian life. Jews did the same thing, and one of the great classics of the Jews coming out of the Iberian Peninsula was "The Zohar." "The Zohar," is a medieval Jewish work based on all kinds of older traditions but it came out of the Iberian Peninsula. Written primarily in Aramaic and although it is not directly related to what was going on in the Christian world, it came out of the same atmosphere as the Christian world.

Also, out of the creativity of the Jewish community came some of the great *halakhic* works of the Iberian Peninsula. One of the greatest was those by Rabbenu Asher Ben Yehiel, who was a German transported into the Iberian Peninsula in the early fourteenth century in order to create a unity among the diverse opposing factions within the Jews. He established a kind of central community in the Christian capital, which was Toledo, and he is the author of the great collection of *Responsa*. He is know as "The *Rosh*." The son of Rabbenu Asher, Jacob Ben Asher, codified all of the *halakhah* up to his time. He divided all the *halakhah* into four major sections. He took a different approach of organization than Maimonides did. His work is knows as "The *Arba Turim*", the four columns, or orders. "The *Arba Turim*" also known by a single word, "The *Tur*" became the basis, ultimately for the work of Joseph Caro. His great work, "The *Beit Yosef*,"

which is always printed with "The *Tur*," and, ultimately the digest of the *Beit Yoself*, which is called "The *Shulkhan Arukh*" which follows like the *Beit Yosef* does the order of the "*Tur*."

In the struggles for control between the various groups of Christians once the *Reconquista* had reached its climax, as I said, the Jews were caught in the middle. They were caught in the middle in a strange way because understandably two different dimensions of Christians arose. The first dimension were the Christians who had succeeded in the *Reconquista* and had established themselves in various parts of the Peninsula, who had achieved wealth and status and wanted to keep that. The other dimension of Christians were the Christians, who like their predecessors who had conquered the bread basket of the Muslims, wanted to do the same for themselves. They wanted to be conquerors like their predecessors. But after the *Reconquista* had reached its climax and all of Andalusia, and the great bread basket of the Muslims had been conquered, these Christians had no where to go. They could not achieve what their predecessors had achieved and there were only two things they could do. They could fight against their predecessors who had established themselves, or they could look for new ways to achieve greatness, fame and fortune. Or they could do a little of both, which is essentially what they did, and the Jews got caught up in the middle.

For the Christians who had established themselves Rabbi Cohen uses the term"Old Guard." For the New Christians who had the same good fortune, and were looking for such as they were fighting the establishment and were looking for new ways of doing things Rabbi Cohen has the term "New Guard." The "New and Old Guard" were in constant struggle. The "New

Guard" tried to attain its position by fighting against the "Old Guard" which was very difficult and by looking at new things which is why the "New Guard" became the great adventurers. The Portuguese among them were the ones who conquered the Far East, and the people in Aragon and Castile were the ones who conquered the New world (the Portuguese conquered Brazil).These territories were conquered by the "New Guard".

Now, both the "Old Guard", and the "New Guard" knew the value of the Jews. They knew the value of the Jews because the Jews were skilled, and they were ambitious. They did not have much power, their power depended upon Christians. Both Old Christians and New Christians wanted to use the Jews to the best of their advantage.

All of this helps to explain the problems of the Jews in the fourteenth century. The "Old Guard" protected the Jews, but the "New Guard" wanted Jews to convert and were responsible for many of the anti-Jewish conversionist activities such as those that were preached by Saint Vincent Ferrer in Catalonia. When Jews converted they became part of the "New Guard" and had no problems whatsoever. The only problems that were left were problems of Jews who remained Jews. During these troubles many Jews left the Iberian Peninsula and went to North Africa, Italy and such places but most remained in the Peninsula. With the continuation of these troubles things got very bad for most of the Jews, and in the fourteenth century there were severe anti - Jewish activities in all of the Iberian Peninsula. As a result of these many Jews converted. The reason for their conversion was that Jews were not that deeply religious, nor were Christians at

that time, and it was easy to for many Jews to become converts to Christianity so that they could continue whatever work they were doing and now be part of the upper crust of the "New Guard."

In the meantime, the "Old Guard" found itself with a dilemma. On the one hand, they wanted to retain their possessions and their positions and the service of the Jews. But on the other hand, they saw the "New Guard" growing and becoming prosperous through their overseas activities. The "Old Guard" could crush the "New Guard" but that would not help them very much because the "New Guard" was growing and was doing good work. On the other hand, they could use the services of the "New Guard" and the wealth that the "New Guard" was generating. The problem that they had was how could they maintain their power and the position and make use of, and even cooped the services of the "New Guard" without losing power to the "New Guard."

The solution was very simple. Out of the "Old Guard" came a group of people, still rooted in the "Old Guard," whom Rabbi Cohen calls the "Modern Old Guard." This group of people found a way to harness the energies and activities of the "New Guard" without losing their own power and privilege. That way was the Inquisition. The Inquisition was an instrument by which the "Old Guard" maintained control over the entire country, and control over the "New Guard, because the "New Guard" had included many former Jews, some of whom continued to practice Judaism, although most did not. The Inquisition under the power of the "Old Guard" was able to call all of the "New Guard" Jews or Judaizers.

Indeed, the Jews who had converted to Christianity, and became part of the "New Guard," were called "New Christians." The "Modern Old Guard" had no problem using the label "New Christians" whenever they wanted to get after anyone in the "New Guard." While it is true that many people in the "New Guard" had been Jews or intermarried with people who had been Jews, the majority of the "New Guard" were no longer Jews. But what made the "Modern Old Guard" able to use the Inquisition were the activities of the "New Guard" and they were able potentially to call all the people of the "New Guard" "New Christians" and even Jews.

The complex history of the Inquisition is more than I can deal with in this paper. However, it is clear from the writings of Dr. Cohen that the Inquisition utilized religious ideology in order to attain a particular end. All of this can be found in Dr. Cohen's survey of the Sephardi Phenomena, but also in his book called, "The Canonization of a Myth," which shows exactly how the mechanism of the Inquisition using religious ideology was applied for political purposes.

As a result of all the events of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the activities of the Inquisition many people who had remained Jews became uncomfortable because although the Inquisition did not go after Jews who had not been converted, they saw what was in store for them. Either they would be pressured to convert, or their status as Jews will be limited by the growth of the "New Guard," and if they converted they would be subjected to the inquisition whether or not they practiced Judaism. As a result, many Jews in the fifteenth century also left the Iberian Peninsula. Finally, at the end of the fifteenth century the Catholic Sovereigns, King

Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile, who had married and federated their two kingdoms, issued an edict of expulsion of the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula.

As a result of this edict of expulsion, which was really intended to get many Jews to convert, large numbers of Jews converted, following the many large numbers of Jews who had converted in the past. A significant number left the Peninsula. When they left the Peninsula, they left as Jews and can only go to places which welcomed Jews. The biggest place that welcome Jews was Portugal. Other places that welcomed Jews were North Africa, Italy and the Ottoman Empire. These Jews formed the beginning of what can be called the Sephardic Diaspora. But they were not the only ones to leave. Eventually, many "New Christians" left. "New Christians" left and went to places like the Low Countries, where Jews were not permitted, but they were Christians and they could go. The Low Countries were under the control largely of Spain. They could also go to Italy and live as Christians. They could also go to the Ottoman Empire where they were welcomed, but only if they said they had been Jews before and did not want to be Christians anymore. The Ottoman Empire welcomed them because the Ottoman Empire was Muslim and did not like Christians. But it liked people who claimed that they were being persecuted as Christians by the inquisition and really were Jews, and so they came over to the Ottoman Empire. As a result of all of this, they too contributed to the Sephardic Diaspora. Music was also an important part of the life for the Jews in the Ottoman Empire (Jackson 2013; Dorn 1991).

The Sephardic Diaspora is interesting because it consisted of various groups. It consisted of groups who were always Christians, and remained Christians in the countries where they went. They consisted of groups that had been Jews and left before 1492. And then there was the group that left after 1492 as Christians and went to the Ottoman Empire as Jews. This is how the Sephardic diaspora began. Interestingly, remaining in the Iberian Peninsula were many "New Christians," who had to face the problems of the Inquisition whose descendants remain there to this day. Many of them know they are of Jewish origin, and some of them are proud of their Jewish origin, and most of them have contributed greatly to the development of the Iberian Peninsula and its two great remaining nations of Portugal and Spain. I cannot continue more on this interesting subject in my paper.

Map adapted from Encyclopedia Judaica.

What I am interested now in doing is talking briefly about the Sephardic diaspora in general, and then moving on to a discussion of the role of the Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire. In the Sephardic diaspora, the people who were Christian in the Low Countries and also in England remained Christian until these countries became Protestant. At this point there was a hatred of the Spaniards, a hatred of the Portuguese, and a hatred of the Catholics. Many of these people came out as Jews saying, "We were persecuted in the Iberian Peninsula, we are not Catholics. We are really Jews." And so they established Jewish communities in the Low Countries, particularly in Holland and England. From Holland, England and North Germany some migrated to the United States. With similar effect New Christians who lived in Brazil until Holland took over, and who declared themselves as Jews these Sephardim of Brazil, England, Holland and North Germany formed the basis for the Sephardic community in the United States of America, starting in 1654. These Sephardim are know as Western Sephardim. All of them had been Catholic at one time, regardless of whatever what Jewish ancestry they had. Although they became Jewish, they retained some of of the customs from their Catholic background. Some of the customs are hidden within the practice of the Sephardic Jewish community but which are still present for those who understand the history for Western Sephardim, and still present in the great Western Sephardic congregation of the United States, namely "*She'erit Yisrael*", the "Spanish - Portuguese Synagogue of New York."

The other Sephardim are known either as the African Sephardim or mostly, the Eastern Sephardim those of the Ottoman Empire. Today, many *Mizrahi* Jews consider themselves as part of the broader Eastern Sephardi development, but that was not the case originally.

It is also interesting to study the Sephardic community in Italy and Morocco, because their contributions to Jewish culture and to general culture are significant. However, the most significant dimension of the Sephardic diaspora that did not go to the West is the Sephardic diaspora was established in the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In The Ottoman Empire, the Sultans welcomed the Sephardim because of their sophistication, experience, science, general knowledge and understanding of trade. The Sephardic communities grew in four different layers. First of all, they came upon Jews who had been living in the Ottoman Empire, especially in Greece where Jews had been living for a long time. These Jews are known as the Romaniot Jews. When the first Spanish Jews came over, they formed a higher echelon in the communities and became its leaders. They were followed by the Spanish and Portuguese New Christians who declared themselves as Jews, who by virtue of their involvement in "New Guard" activities were even more sophisticated, and they took over the leadership of the communities. The Jewish communities lived by their own law. That was the desire of the Ottoman Turks, and they lived in their own communities which were separate from one another, under the leadership of their own Rabbis, and their own Rabbinic political establishment. Obviously, the different political establishments communicated with one another. However, each city and its environs had *halakhic* autonomy. Jews lived under the *halakhah*. The Jewish communities of the Ottoman Empire grew in large numbers and they tried to maintain many of the traditions which they had in the Iberian Peninsula.

Of all of these communities the most important was Salonica. One of the great former New Christian writers of the era has a beautiful description of Salonica in his work. The writer is known by a name that may not have been his originally. His name is Samuel Usque, and he wrote a great work of Jewish literature of the Jewish tradition and Portuguese literature, translated into English, by Rabbi Martin Cohen as, "The Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel" (Usque 1965). We do not know exactly where he wrote this work, but it was published in Italy because it was subsidized by one of the great Jewish ladies of the Ottoman Empire, named Doña Gracia Mendes Nasi. In this book he describes Salonica as follows:

"There is a city in the Turkish kingdom which formerly belonged to the Greeks, and in our days is a true mother-city in Judaism. For it is established on the very deep foundations of the Law. And it is filled with the choicest plants and most fruitful trees presently known anywhere on the face of the globe. These fruits are divine, because they are watered by an abundant stream of charities. They city's walls are made of holy deeds of the greatest worth. The majority of my children who have been persecuted and exiled from Europe and many other parts of the world have taken refuge in this city, and she embraces them and receives them with as much love and good will as if she were Jerusalem, that old and ever pious mother of ours."

The Jews in all the cities in the Ottoman Empire were very successful as tradesmen, merchants and servants of the Sultans. They were welcomed by the Sultans and had a very prosperous life. We know that because of the growth of the communities for by proliferation of population and especially because of all the growth of Rabbinic *Responsa*. Jews in the Ottoman Empire

asked all kinds of necessary questions to their local Rabbis, and the local Rabbis had to provide answers, which they could occasionally borrow from other areas, but they had the control of their own communities. As a result, the *Responsa* of the Rabbis of the Ottoman Empire constitute one of the greatest collections of information about the daily life of the Jews of any community in Jewish History.

The problem that Jews faced with their autonomy and the control of individual Rabbis was that although they all stemmed from the same *halakhic* system and had at their disposal, the great codes of Alfasi and Maimonides, and the knowledge of their own Rabbis, it turned out because of different applications of the *halakhah* in different areas that it became very difficult for one to know exactly what the *halakhah* was in specific cases, and this became a burden as people moved from one *halakhic* jurisdiction to another. Ultimately, this gave rise to the need for a unified *halakhah*, and this could be one only with the agreement of great power elements amongst the Jews in the various cities in which Jews lived.

This did occur toward the middle of the sixteenth century when one of the great Rabbis of the Ottoman Empire, namely Rabbi Joseph Caro, was provided with the means by which he began a twenty two year job of compiling all of previous Jewish law and organizing them into the basis for a new code. This new code is called the "Bet Yosef", the "House of Joseph". It is based on the *halakhah* of thirty, or thirty two Rabbis but primarily those of Alfasi, that is the "*Rif*", Maimonides, that is the "*Rambam*," and Rabenu Asher, that is the "*Rosh*." Interestingly, the organization of the "Bet Yosef" follows the organization of the "Rosh" in standard publications. The

"Bet Yosef" is written as a commentary to the "*Tur*," which is the centerpiece of every page of the publication. Later on, Joseph Caro composed a synthesis of the "Bet Yosef" which is known as the "*Shulkhan Arukh*," and which was adopted by Sephardic communities and ultimately with editions by Moses Isserles, by Ashkenazic communities as well, and in many cases it itself has become a centerpiece of contemporary Jewish *halakhah*. It is fascinating to note that the great *halakhic* compendia of the Jewish tradition come from Sephardic sources.

The rich world of the Sephardim also produced a great mystical literature in which incidentally Joseph Caro participated. This mystical literature was centered around the city of *Safed* where there were groups of *Kabbalists* who created many interesting *kabbalistic* works and a wonderful literature which is a very important part of the Jewish tradition. One of the leaders of this group was Rabbi Moses Cordovero, whose style in an interesting way resembles the style of Maimonides himself. But unlike Maimonides who was anything but a mystic, Rabbi Cordovero's work such as the "*Tamar D'vorah*", "The Palm Tree of Deborah," are magnificently mystic. Ultimately, mysticism and Kabbalah led to the appearance in the seventeenth century of a Messianic movement, centered around Shabtai Tzvi, who was regarded, and regarded himself, as the Messiah until he was exposed and ultimately became a Muslim.

The literature of the Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire is *Halakhah, Responsa,* Codes and Mysticism, rich as they are, should not be considered as the major literary achievement of Jews of the Ottoman Empire. The major literary achievement was an ongoing commentary to all the books of the Bible, except Esther, and additionally to *Pirkei Avot* which was begun at the be-

ginning of the eighteenth century by Rabbi Jacob Culi. This great study and commentary which includes an anthology of Talmudic and Midrashic literature, is known as the "*M'Am Loez*." Jacob Culi began this commentary. It was ultimately advanced across the next century by a number of his followers. The important fact of this anthology is that it is composed in Ladino, or as it was was called *Judezmo*. *Judezmo* really is the language that was spoken in Castile at the time of the Edict of Expulsion. It is basically Castilian Spanish of the fifteenth century, to which were added, in the course of time, regional words that came form the various regions of the Ottoman Empire where Jews lived, and also a sprinkling of Hebrew words because some of the Castilian words, which were good Castilian, nevertheless were used in the Church, like the word for benediction (*bendición*) which then became B'racha, and other such words. Basically it is the Castilian of the fifteenth century. There is a good book that deals with this, written by the great philologist of Spain Ramón Menéndes Pidal. Its title, translated from the Spanish, is "The Language of Christopher Columbus." Judezmo is the language spoken by Christopher Columbus, a language which underwent many transformations in the following century. In the Ottoman Empire, various dialects or varieties of Judezmo develped. These can be grouped into two constellations: Western Ladino, which is found in Bosnia, Masadonia, Romania, Salonica and Serbia, and Eastern Ladino, which is found in Costantinopol, and Smirna.

Ladino was the daily language of the Jews. That is how they spoke. And Ladino informed the songs which they sang and their daily conversations. Indeed, many of these conversations took place in t*ertulias* in the late afternoon particularly. t*ertulias* were gatherings in coffee houses, where men who had been working drank coffee and discussed the events of the day, or any-

thing else they wanted to discuss in Ladino. It was the intention of Jacob Culi to have people who attended the *tertulias* buy a copy of a commentary of the "M'Am Loez" in Ladino for the entire group, and discuss this with the groups during *tertulias*. The purpose of Culi's work was to provide Jews with an education, which in bad times Jews did not have, and therefore to teach them something about the Bible and the Jewish tradition, including it's history and it's many stories so that they would have at least a modicum of Jewish knowledge.

Because they were confined to their own communities, under Jewish law, even in good times when there were cordial relations between Jews and non-Jews, Jews continued the customs and traditions that they had followed in the Iberian Peninsula. In other words, they remained Hispanic. Therefore, among the customs that they had were many customs that came out of their Catholic environment. Their songs reflect this. There are even religious songs which reflect this, except that in place of Catholic symbols and personalities they used Jewish symbols and personalities. For an example, in place of the blessed virgin they used Queen Esther.

The customs of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire are fascinating and have inspired a significant secondary literature. I would like to discuss the customs dealing with the life-cycle events of which my recital will deal.

Chapter II - In Search of Isaac Levy

In the summer of 2014, I had a chance to visit Jerusalem to interview Dr. Yitzchak (Itzik) Levy, the director of *Rashut HaLadino* (The National Authority of Ladino Culture in Israel). My goal was to hear about his own personal experience of the lifecycle events that I am researching. When I asked Itzik if he had ever experienced a Sephardic lifecycle event his answer was: "All the Sephardic events were accompanied by songs." This statement only strengthened my need to explore this theme, confirming the importance of music to the Sephardic experience. Itzik told me that he remembered hearing the song "*Avram Avinu"* (*Quando El Rey Nimrod*) during a *Brit Mila* ceremony, and he explained that the reason for this specific song used on this occasion was because Abraham, or Avram as he was called before his circumcision, was the first to be circumcised as a Jewish man. Furthermore, Itzik remembered that "there were many songs, but I don't remember them now." What he did remember was that "there was a lot of colorfulness in these events." He recalled beautiful wall paintings at the synagogue and wonderful foods and drinks. He also remembered neatness, cleanliness and elegance all around.[2]

Since he could not recall the songs of life-cycle events, he called out for his secretary, Dolly, across the office. When she did not answer, I got up to bring her. Dolly, like Itzik, was probably is her 50s or 60s and was also Sephardic but spoke Hebrew with a Latin American accent. Sadly, Dolly did not recall having any Sephardic customs in her wedding, and she explained that in the late 70s no Sephardic customs were practiced in Israel. As Dolly told me:

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[2] Interview with Yitzchak Levy in Jerusalem, Israel. August 2014.

"The whole Ladino thing started with the Rashut HaLadino. If you want songs of weddings etc., there are the books of Yitzchak Levy." I am thrilled she brings up these wonderful anthologies, since I am already familiar with this work. We have it at the Hebrew Union College in New York City where I study to become an ordained cantor. I ask her where can I get the recording that comes with it but she does not know. I begin a search for Isaac Levy that became more complicated than I initially imagined.

As Edwin Seroussi notes, individual collectors and insiders to the Sephardic tradition are guardians of Sephardic music (Seroussi 2003). At my meeting with Itzik and Dolly we were unable find the cd of the singing of Isaac Levy, but I felt strongly that hearing Levy's own interpretation and delivery of the Sephardic music would be crucial for my deeper understanding of Sephardic culture and repertoire that Levy collected. I knew that I must have the cd. I could not leave Israel without it, but I was unaware of the accessibility of this precious and rare recording. On another day, prior to my meeting with Itzik, I had interviewed Matilda Coen-Sarano, a writer, scholar, and poet of Ladino and Sephardi culture, during which I had listened to parts of the Levy cd together at her office. Matilda told me she was the author and producer of the cd liner notes.[3] She mentioned that the cd, "The Song of Life" is out of print and is no longer available to purchase.[4] Speaking with Itzik, he mentioned to me that I might find the cd in the stores nearby his office, but he was not sure[5]. Sadly, my time was cut short for this exploration since there was a

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[3] Interview with Matilda Coen Serano, Petah Tikvah, Israel. July, 2014.

[4] Ibid

[5] Interview with Yitzchak Levy in Jerusalem, Israel. August 2014.

war in Israel at that moment, and everyday was uncertain and terrifying. As Itzik and I speak, loud sirens are heard due to a terror attack nearby. In the middle of all this, Itzik suggests we call Levy's late wife, Kochava Levy, who is a famous Ladino singer on her own merit and also is the mother of internationally renown singer, Yasmin Levy.

On the phone with "Kochava the Great," as Itzik calls her, Itzik introduces me as "a researcher from New York." This introduction surprises me since I am a born and raised Israeli, and I do not usually consider myself a researcher but rather a cantorial student. Also, as a fellow Israeli, I assumed that Itzik would see me just as himself, a native, however I come to understand that this thesis project created a new identity for myself as researcher, changing how this collector and insider of Sephardic customs views me. When Itzik asks Kochava if we can purchase the cd in the stores she tells Itzik that there are no more left. She puts him in touch with her son-in-law Yishai, Yasmin's husband, who might have some left. Itzik contacts Yishai right away, and unfortunately he too is not sure if there are any left. Yishai explains that they used to have a box with some cd's, but there is a strong chance they were sold. I feel frustrated and dread leaving Israel for Berlin to visit my mother the next day without the cd at hand, but I thank everyone and leave.

In Berlin, I obsess about the cd. I search for it over and over in Hebrew online and find it on a website of various cd's for sale. Immediately, I buy it and feel a huge sense of accomplishment and relief. Weeks later, and much to my astonishment, I find it on iTunes. Isaac Levy's cd - a recording of his own singing of Ladino songs - was there in front of me the whole time.

Isaac Levy (1919-1977) was a composer and cantor, as well as a pioneer researcher into the long and rich history of the Ladino music and culture of Spanish Jewry and its diaspora. He was the editor of the Ladino language magazine *Aki Yerushalayim*. Levy is of Sephardic descent, and was born at Manisa near the city of Izmir, Turkey. Levy's family moved to Jerusalem, Palestine when he was three years old and, after the creation of the state of Israel, he was appointed head of the Ladino department at Israel's national radio station. He devoted his life to the collection and preservation of Sephardic Jewish songs, which had been passed orally from generation to generation for more than five hundred years.

One day, as a child in Jerusalem, while Levy was at home with his mother, his ears perked up as she sang an old song while cleaning the house. Not only did he realize he should record this ancient tune, but that he should preserve the songs others in his community knew as well. He went from household to household, recording any family that would sing anything in Ladino, a mixture of old Castilian, Spanish and the local languages. He wrote down the lyrics and the melodies, thus preserving songs that would have died with the people he recorded. The first volume of Isaac Levy's Chant *Judéo-Espagnols* published in 1965 offers a rich treasury of these songs (Levy 1965-1980).

As the head of the Ladino language broadcasting section at Radio Israel, Levy would typically collect several different versions of a song, strip out his informants' microtonal embellishments, regularize the meter, and then publish them in an art song setting. Most of the songs date

from the late 19th century (Cohen J. 2003). Eventually he published four books of romantic songs and ten books of liturgical songs. The Jews preserved these songs wherever they settled after their expulsion from Spain in 1492: the Balkan countries, Turkey and northern Morocco. As I will discuss later, women were critical in maintaining these song traditions across many generations by performing them in their work as girlfriends, wives, mothers and daughters for various life-cycle and everyday occasions (Cohen, J. 1995). Isaac Levy's anthology is a milestone in the documentation and revival of this 1,000 year-old folk music.

Isaac Levy's daughter, the famous singer Yasmin Levy says: "My father came from Turkey to Jerusalem when he was three years old and began the project of taping the songs as an adult."[6] Yasmin continues:

> "It was his life's work, and he was worried that after his death, there would be people who disagreed with the way he recorded the notes for the music he heard from elderly people who sang it to him. That's why he ordered that his entire collection of recordings be destroyed after his death. Every time he would say to Mom: `What will you do after I die?' she would always answer: `I'll tear everything up.' I remember myself the many spools that the whole family tore and I even hurt my finger on one of the coils. In my opinion, it's terrible, and if he were alive I'd ask him, 'Why, why did you do it?" But

[6] Noam Ben Zeev, "Echoes of Forgotten Music," *Haaretz*, May 13, 2003. http://www.haaretz.-com/life/arts-leisure/echoes-of-forgotten-music-1.10257

from the stories about my father, I know that he was very critical and determined and perhaps his sensitivity about his life's work is understandable."[7]

In 1970, the Israeli musical "*Bustan Spharadi*" (The Sephardi Garden), written by Israel's President Yitzchak Navon premiered. The original compositions were adapted from Isaac Levy's Anthology, another example of Levy's tremendous accomplishments in collecting Sephardi songs. Navon and Levy were childhood friends. As Edwin Seroussi and Motti Regev write: (Regev and Seriussi 2004) "The musical format also provided an opportunity to bring the ethnic musical styles of different Jewish communities to public attention" (Regev and Seroussi 2004). *Bustan Sfaradi* became very famous and is being performed to this day.

In the following chapters, I will discuss important life-cycle events in Sephardic culture and the music that accompanied these rituals. These life-cycle event include costumes relating to marriage, childbirth and baby naming.

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[7] Ibid.

Chapter III - Marriage

One of the most fascinating dimensions of Sephardic culture is the study of customs and ceremonies involving life-cycle events. These customs and ceremonies are luxuriant in their diversity and proliferation, as well as in the social interchanges that took place within them across the centuries and continue to take place today.

On the one hand, these customs and ceremonies rigorously follow the *halakhic* tradition of the Jewish people, especially the Sephardic *halakhic* tradition canonized in Joseph Caro's *Shulkhan Arukh* and its derivative commentaries. On the other hand, these *halakhic* traditions are enriched by a large number of customs that these Sephardic Jews carried with them to all parts of the world to which they were dispersed. These customs and ceremonies often have a common origin in the Iberian Peninsula where they were influenced by the surrounding culture, especially in the case of the new Christians who were officially considered Catholics at the time of their exodus from the Iberian Peninsula. At the same time these Sephardim in different parts of the world developed their own traditions and customs or embellished those that they had brought with them. These traditions and customs provide the basis for our understanding of the Sephardic customs in four major categories corresponding to the major groups of Sephardim in their Diaspora: The Syrian Sephardim, The Moroccan Sephardim, The Western Sephardim, comprising largely former New Christians who left the Iberian Peninsula for the Low Countries, Western Germany, England and The Western Hemisphere, and, finally the vast number of Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire. In all of these cases, the *halakha*, enriched by customs and ceremonies,

covers almost every dimension and every moment of the experience of the Sephardim from gestation to death and are amazingly detailed in the literature.

In this study, I approach these customs and ceremonies around the beginning of the life-cycle from betrothal to marriage; to child bearing to circumcision; and to the naming of children. For our purposes, I will address customs and ceremonies from the vast number of congregations within the Ottoman Empire, with a special focus on the area of Salonica. For this reason, I will now turn to an examination of the critical customs in this area.

In Salonica, in olden times and without too much difference today, young Jewish girls married while they were still minors, even before they reached their physical maturity at around age fourteen. Indeed, it was regarded as a humiliation if their marriage was delayed. The betrothal usually took place three or four years prior to the wedding and, at that time, neither the future bride nor the future groom had met; all the weddings were arranged by the parents and other relatives of the future bride and groom and were dependent largely on the social class structure of Jews that had developed in the Ottoman Empire. As a result, parents of the upper class would make certain that their children married in the same class and, of course, other classes had fewer options.

Until the early part of the 19th century, for about a year before the wedding, the bride and her family assembled her trousseau, in a series of processes that were carefully orchestrated with parties, celebrations and the like. An approximate date was established for the wedding, which

had to be confirmed by the bride and her family. There was a long series of rejoicing events associated with the wedding beginning with what was known as the *almosama* in the bride's house on the Shabbat prior to the week of the wedding. The term *almosama* is probably of Arabic origin.

From the *almosama* day until the ceremony the bridegroom, *El Novio* (the groom), was not allowed to visit his bride. This situation has changed in recent decades, but the *novio* did have the obligation of preparing for the wedding, including people and orchestra and a person to be in charge of all the invitations. The person in charge of the invitations would visit relatives and friends to make the invitations in person until recent times when the idea of a printed invitation arose. Another quaint custom was the one of showing the trousseau of the bride on the Sabbath of the week when the wedding took place. Later, the trousseau was sent to the house of the groom, again, with great festivity. Beginning with the 18th century a Turkish orchestra appears to play for the wedding observance.

One of the most important customs was the visit of the bride to the bath prior to her wedding. This also was the cause of a great deal of festivity and a solemn ceremony until the beginning of the 18th century. There was also a musical accompaniment to the bride as she went to the bath, but in the 18th century the rabbinical authorities decided to forbid this custom. One of the most important elements in preparation for the wedding was the requirement for the bride, the *novia*, to visit the *tevila*, the dipping in water, on the morning of her wedding day, so that she can

purify herself before being intimate with her husband. The same was true of the groom: he too went to the *tevila*, and this process was part of a very solemn and formal series of ceremonies.

At times, the solemnity of the occasion was emphasized by the rabbis for the simple reason that all too frequently this ceremony lent itself to lascivious behavior. Initially, musicians accompanied the bride and groom to the *tevila*, and then the bride's mother and her aunts and sisters arrived, all of whom carried the necessary material for the *tevila.* Initially the bride wore elaborate clothes and numerous pieces of the jewelry, which in the 18th century was forbidden by the rabbis, who said that the bride could only wear a necklace. At the same time the rabbis forbade much of the music and also the drinking of wine and any other alcoholic beverage.

There were songs for the bride and groom upon leaving the bath, and it was also customary for the mother of the *novia* to trim the nails of her daughter. This custom was so important that if the mother forgot to cut one of the nails the daughter would have to go through the *tevila* again. It was also important to adorn the bride with cosmetics for the face, the eyebrows, the nails after the *tevila*.

When the bride entered her home she came back to another rejoicing with song and dance such as the following song:

Cuando yo l baño vengo, del baño de la giudería y tantas rozas claveinas debaxo de su camisa. Yo bolí de foja en foja, para alcanzar una novia galana, y linda novia, de ande bolatex? El más lindo novio alcansatex. Yo bolí foja en foja, para alcanzar una linda novia. Y linda novia, de ande vinitex? El más lindo novio alcansatex.	When I come from the baths, from the Jewish baths, with so many roses and carnations under her dress I flew from leaf to leaf, to reach my elegant bride, oh lovely bride, from where did you fly? You caught the most handsome groom. I flew from leaf to leaf, to reach my beautiful groom. Oh, lovely bride, from where did you come? You caught the most handsome groom.

(Source: Rabbi Michael Molho, *Traditions and Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica*, 1965.)

For the wedding, the bride wore a beautiful headdress which took many hours to prepare. Once the bride was ready to leave her home many women would come to accompany her to the matrimonial place, which was the synagogue. In the meantime, the groom's parents and relatives would go to the synagogue to pray and promise under oath that he would fulfill all the conditions of the *katubah* (wedding contract). If the couple to be married came from an important family the chief rabbi would usually preside over the marriage.

After the wedding service there was a procession in which the groom and all his near relatives went back to the place of the wedding. The *novia* was seated on a couch with her future mother in law to her right and her own mother to her left. Because of many problems resulting from the practice of *kabbala* among the Jews of Salonica, a rabbinical decree ordered that the ladies in the seats of honor near the bride should cover their faces with a black veil in order not

to be regarded as more attractive than the bride. The wedding service was concluded with the breaking of a glass to remind people that along with love and joy, that life was fragile and so were the materials of life, and especially the ancient temple that was destroyed.

The wedding reception was known as the *la tatrava*. It lasted for many hours, during which there was music, usually Turkish songs or Spanish ballads. The women's dress was influenced by Turkish and Spanish customs. Towards the end of the festivities a voice called out: "All those who make a donation stay, the others may go," and the table was set for the feast. Soon thereafter, the newlyweds went into a bedroom and closed the door, obviously to consummate the marriage.

The wedding ceremony lasted for seven days. Interestingly enough it was called a *sevah* from the Hebrew *sheva.* Beginning with the day after the wedding, the father of the bride distributed sweets among his neighbors. During the seven days the husband never left home. He received visitors and played cards while his mother had the responsibility of feeding everyone who came. Visitors were served with cakes, biscuits, and Turkish coffee prepared by his mother several days before.

On the Sabbath of the wedding week the groom and his father would go to the synagogue and sit in a special place, and the chorus of youngsters would sing. There were various customs here such as the custom in the Aragon synagogue where there was well of a fresh water in the middle of the pavement. The new groom carried a scroll of the Torah, followed by his family and

friends, and would make a series of circles around this well. This had all kinds of symbolic significance. In some parts of the Ottoman Empire, that Sabbath was celebrated by people who would come early in the morning to the home of the groom, read the early morning prayers, and then accompany the newlyweds to the synagogue.

The last day of the wedding week was known as “the day of the fish.” The new husband would buy many fish and then put them in a container. The bride walked around the container three times in the presence of relatives and neighbors in order to ensure her fertility. Then before the receptacle was removed the people present would place money for the cook who had worked hard for the seven days for food for all the newlyweds and their numerous guests. A favorite song accompanying the desert was often sung, such as the song below.[8]After the *huppa* (wedding ceremony) the bride was required to visit her parents home and this, too, was with great ceremony and song.

[8] Ibid., 30-32.

El novio le dize a la novia Cómo se llama esta cabeza?
Esto no se llama cabeza, sino una linda pertucal.
A mi linda pertucal,
A mi campo espacioso,
A mi lindo namoroso.
Biva la novia con el novio!

El novio le dize a la novia: Cómo se llama estos cabellos?
Estos no se llama cabellos, sino crima de lavar.
A mi cirma de lavrar
A mi linda pertucal .....

El novio le dize la novia: Cómo se llaman estas cejas?
Estos no se llaman cejas, sino arcol de tirar.
A mi arcol de tirar,
A mi cirma de lavrar .....

El novio le dize a la novia: Cómo se llaman estos ojos?
Estos no se llaman ojos, sino lindos veladores.
A mi lindos veladores,
A mi arcol de tirar .....

El novio le dize a la novia: Cómo se llaman esta nariz?
Estos ne se llama nariz, sino péndola de escribir.
A mis péndola de escribir,
A mis lindos veladores .....

El novio le dize a la novia: Cómo se llaman estas caras?
Estos no se llaman caras, sino mansanas d'Escopia.
A mis mansanas d'Escopia,
A mi péndolade scribir .....

El novio le dize a la novia: Cómo se llaman estos lavios?
Estos no se llaman lavios, sino lindas cerezas.
A mis lindos cerezas,
A mis mansanad d'Escopia .....

El novio le dize a la novia: Cómo se llaman estos dientes?
Estons no se llaman dientes, sino perlas d'enfilar.
A mis perlas d'enfilar,
A mis lindas cerezas .....

El novio le dize a la novia: Cómo se llaman esta eluenga?
Estos no se llama eluenga, sino pala d'enfornar.
A mi pala d'enfornar,
A mis perlas d'enfilar .....

El novio le dize a la novia: Cómo se llaman esta boca?
Estos no se llama boca, sino piñón de comer .....

The groom says to the bride: What do you call this head?
This is not called head, but a pretty orange.
To my pretty orange,
To my spacious countryside,
To my handsome beloved,
Long live the bride and the groom!

The groom says to the bride: What do you call this hair?
This is not called hair, but golden embroidery thread.
To my golden embroidery thread,
To my pretty orange .....

The groom says to the bride:What do you call these eyebrows?
These are not called eyebrows, but bows for arrows.
To my bows for arrows,
To my golden embroidery thread .....

The groom says to the bride: What do you call those eyes?
They are not called eyes, but beautiful candles.
To my beautiful candles,
To my bows and arrows .....

The groom says to the bride: What do you call this nose?
This is not called nose, but a writing pen.
To my writing pen,
To my beautiful candles .....

The groom says to the bride: What do you call these cheeks?
These are not called cheeks, but apples of Skopje.
To my apples of Skopje,
To my writing pen .....

The groom says to the bride: What do you call these lips?
These are not lips, but lovely cherries.
To my lovely cherries,
To my apples of Skopje .....

The groom says to the bride: What do you call these teeth?
there are not called teeth, but a strand of pearls.
To my string of teeth,
To my lovely cherries .....

The groom says to the bride: What do you call this tongue?
This is not called tongue, but oven paddle.
To my oven paddle?
To my strand of pearls .....

The groom says to the bride: What do you call this mouth?
This is not called mouth, but pine nuts for eating .....

A mi piñón de comer, A mi pala d'enfornar, A mis perlas d'infilar, A mis lindas cerezas, A mis mansanas d'Escopia, A mis péndola de escribir, A mis lindos veladores, A mi arcol de tirar, A mi cirma de lavrar, A mi linda pertucal, A mi campo espacioso, A mi lindo namoroso, Biva la noviacon el novio.	To my pine nut, To my oven paddle, To my strand of pearls, To my lovely cherries, To my apples of Skopje, To my writing pen, To my beautiful candles, To my bow for arrows, To my golden embroidery thread, To my pretty orange, To my spacious countryside, To my handsome beloved, Long live the bride with the broom!

(Source: Rabbi Michael Molho, *Traditions and Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica*, 1965.)

Chapter IV - Childbirth

As I have earlier stated, women married very early, often as early as the age of nine. They also had many children who unfortunately, in large numbers, did not survive. But all of this had an effect on the women, retarding their growth in many ways and bringing them to middle age much before their time. The ideal situation for the woman, according to their community, was to have many children and it was regarded as a handicap if she could not become pregnant. If she did become pregnant immediately her relatives, especially her mother, began to dote on her. So did her husband and his parents. Interestingly the period of pregnancy was accompanied by many superstitions such as the opening of doors, the moving of furniture, the prohibition against shutting the door, all of which were intended to facilitate the pregnancy and the birth.

When a pregnant woman reached the ninth month of her pregnancy the entire family began preparing for the birth and for the many festivities and ceremonies that were attendant on the birth. Before the birth the family would visit the cemetery to pray at the graves of rabbis and also at the graves of some of their dead relatives. The purpose of the prayers was to seek intercession for the pregnant women to make sure that the pregnancy went well. These occasions, including the visits to the cemetery, were regarded as joyous occasions, full of hope and the understandable expectation. It is interesting also to note that the pregnant woman was also regularly supposed to go to the cemetery unless she was not well enough to attend, in which case her relatives would bring back pieces of grass from the tombs and give them too her. Nowadays this custom which

was prevalent in the past has given way to a simpler custom where family visits a local rabbi for prayers and the rabbi goes to the graves of the family and sings psalms and says kaddish.

In preparation for the delivery, the pregnant woman would regularly take a hot bath with herbs in order to hasten the delivery and then, when it became apparent that she was to deliver, a large number of people in the neighborhood would get ready and create a kind of congregation to share the expectancy. Sometimes a number of Jews with large homes would open their doors to many neighbors in order to increase the feeling of family. Of course if the pregnant woman was not feeling well, everyone joined together to help in every way they could. If the birth were delayed, the family and others present would recite psalms and sometimes get involved in superstitious activities. In addition, the family, often with friends, would take a large supply of oil to the synagogue for the *ner tamid* and sometimes, indeed, a woman who was to be present at time of birth would raise her apron and go and move from the pregnant woman to a mezuzah and from a mezuzah to the pregnant woman all the while saying “God have pity on her”. There was also a belief that if there was a delay in the birth it was because someone that the pregnant woman wanted to see was not around. In such cases, especially where the person could not be produced, something belonging to the person or even a picture of the person would be given and hung over the head of the pregnant woman and waved in front of her so that this would encourage the quickness of the birth. Also, if the woman was in pain, the husband would gently touch his wife’s belly and say: “I gave you the burden. May God help you discharge it”.

With the birth, everyone shouted in joy “A child, a child!!!.” A midwife would raise her index finger to announce the arrival of a boy. The happy father would then receive congratulations from all those involved. This was apparently not done in the case of the birth of a daughter.

After the birth the midwife would cut the umbilical cord and wrap the baby in diapers. In the past, the babies' layette would include a large soft cloth which would be bound around the waist to cover the navel until it was healed, a sleeveless chemise which was fastened at the back, a napkin or swaddling clothes, and a covering of fabric or wool or cotton that was folded underneath and wrapped to cover the lower body of the baby, and two large bands of cloth which surrounded the chest controlling the arms along the body and the other part of which was split to cover the lower extremities. The baby was wrapped for two or three months in the summer and longer in the winter. The diapers, of course, were changed several times during the day to keep the child clean. In the meantime, a woman who had just given birth was not allowed to be alone because of the superstition that the dark would encourage an evil spirit or a devil to take over. The grandmother of the baby would normally accompany her daughter day and night for at least ten days and would take care of the food that was especially selected to allow the best issue of the mother’s milk and special soup with milk and ground almonds, called a *formigo*.

A very special song, "*O! Que Mueve Mezes"* ("Oh! What Nine Months"), describes a woman in birth. In the song we are presented with the characters that are involved in this experience such as the midwife, the newborn baby boy, the people in the room, and God. Matilda Coen Serano notes that: "If the baby is a boy, which is always the goal because males were valued

more than females, then he is handed to the mother of the husband, and then she passes the baby to her son. Finally, the baby is handed to the mother."[9] "*O! Que Mueve Mezes*" portrays the pain of the woman, and all the challenges she is facing during pregnancy and birth. We are told that the boy is born with face as beautiful as the moon. The song ends giving thanks to God, and with a great feast.

[9] Interview with Matilda Coen Serano, Petah Tikvah, Israel. July, 2014.

O! que mueve mezes travatex de estrechura, Vos nació un hijo de carade luna. Biva la parida, con su scriatura! Bendicho el que mos ayegó a ver este día. Ya es buen *simán* esta allegría.	Oh, what a difficult time you had for nine months, A handsome boy has been born to you. Long live the mother, with her child! Blessed be He who brought us to this day. This joy is a happy omen.
Cuando la cumadre dize: dale, dale, Dize la parida: O Dió, escapadme! Dizen la su gente, Amen! Amen! Amen! Ya es buen *simán* esta allegría.	When the midwife says, Push, push The mother calls out, Oh God, help me! Her relations say Amen! Amen! Amen! This joy is a happy omen.
Que bien empleads fueron las dolores, Vos nació un hijo de cara de flores, Siempre de continuo al Dío demos loores. Ya es buen *simán* esta allegría.	How worthwhile were the pains, You have a son with a face as lovely as flowers, May we give continuous praise to the Lord. This joy is a happy omen.
Cuando la cumadre *baruk ha-bá* le dixera. Se alegro el parido con su casta entera, A toda su gente mucho gusto le diera, Ya es buen *simán* esta allegría.	When the midwife exclaims, Blessed be He who has arrived. The father along with his entire family is filled with joy, It gives great pleasure to all his people, This joy is a happy omen.
Parida! Parida! dexeme las estrenas, Por esta cantiga que es una de las buenas, Vos alevantarex parida con vuestras manos llenas, A criar y gozar niño en su vida. Bendico el que mos ayegó en esta allegriá.	New mother! New mother! let me be the first, To sing this song, one of the best, You will get up with your hands full, To raise and enjoy the boy in his life. Blessed be He who brought us this joy.
Vistan al nacido de filos brodsdos, Allegre este el parido con los combidados! Que venga con su mano llena de ducados. Ya es buen *simán* esta allegría.	Dress the baby with fine embroidery, Happy the father with all his guests! May he come with his hand full of *ducats.* This joy is a happy omen.

Oh, que fiesta, fiesta de allegría! Mos viva la parida con toda la compañía. Que se alevante sana y biva, A criar y a gozar niño en su vida, Bendicho el que mos ayegó en esta allegría.	Oh, what a celebration. Celebration of joy! Long live the mother and all her family. May she rise in goo health, and with life, To rise and enjoy the son in her life, Blessed b H who brought us this joy.
Oh que pino, pino revedrido! Mis biva el parido! Que mos traiga vino, por *meze* licorino. Ya es buen *simán* esta allegría.	Oh pine, Oh pine, so verdant! Long live the father! May he bring us wine and fish to eat. This joy is a happy omen.
Ya vino el parido con los combidados, Él truxoen la mano sinta y buen pexado, Ya la otra mano yena de ducados. Ya es buen *simán* esta allegría.	The father has come with his guests. He brought with one hand meat and a fine fish, in the other a fistful of ducats. This joy is a happy omen.
Ya vino el parido a los pies de la cama, Le dixo la parida: hoy no como nada. Presto que se traiga gallina enreinada. Ya es buen *simán* esta allegría.	The father come to the foot of the bed. The mother says, Today I will eat nothing. May they quickly bring a stuffed chicken. This joy is a happy omen.
Oh, que parra, parra revedrida! Mos biva la parida con toda la compañía, A criar y a gozar niño en su vida. Ya es buen *simán* esta allegría.	Oh, what a grape wine, grape vine so verdant! Long live the mother and all her family, To raise and enjoy the son in her life. This joy is a happy omen.

(Source: Rabbi Michael Molho, *Traditions and Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica*, 1965.)

Chapter V - Circumcision and Baby Naming

Circumcision of a male newborn took place, of course, on the eighth day beginning with the first day and was known by the Sephardic Jews as *la voila* meaning ”the evening before” in old Castilian. That evening began with a banquet attended by relatives and friends and a rabbi would give a little talk and then chant the kaddish. There was a children's choir in many cases where there was a professional cantor and Turkish musicians who would sing Hebrew and Judeo - Spanish songs regularly mentioning the prophet Elijah. The guests were treated to sweets and after they left the close family continued their joy and entertainment through the night. The mother of the woman who had just given birth customarily stayed up all night and watched over new mother and child singing a lullaby to sweeten their life. The following song, "*Canta, Gallo, Canta*" is one example of a lullaby that would have been song on this occasion:

Canta, gallo, canta, que quiere amanecer . Canta, rusión del día, que quiere esclarecer, El gallo cantaba a la punta del pino: yo lo manteneré con asucar y vino. que quiere amanecer: si dormix, parida, con bien despertex. El niño lloraba, el parido reía y la bien parida, ella lo criaría. Aboltex, parida, de cara al varandado, verex el parido dizir: *Šeeheyanu*. Canta, gallo, canta, que quiere amanecer. Si dormix, parida, con bien despertex.	Sing, cockerel, sing for dawn is breaking. Sing, the light of day is coming through, The cockerel sings at the top of the pine tree: I will feed him with sugar and wine. Sing, cockerel, sing, for dawn is breaking: if you sleep, little mother awake in piece. The baby was crying, the father was laughing, and the little mother, she would rear him. Turn your face, little mother, to the veranda, and her the new father say: Šeeheyanu. Sing, cockerel, sing, fir dawn is breaking. If you sleep, little mother, awake in piece.

(Source: Rabbi Michael Molho, *Traditions and Customs of the Sephardic Jews of Salonica*, 1965.)

The next morning, the day of the circumcision, the father of the child would rise at dawn, take a special bath, and the rabbi would arrive early to check the physical condition of the baby to determine whether or not the circumcision could proceed. According to custom, the godparents of the first male child were the mother and father of the husband, the second boy was the father and mother of the wife. The ceremony commenced with the sexton from the husband's synagogue calling out, "Let the child come, let the mother of the child's father come." If it were the second son they would say, "Let the child come, let the mother of the child's mother come."

The duty of the godmother, who was always beautifully dressed, was to take the baby lying on a white pillow and covered with a veil to the godfather, her husband, who was known as the *Sandak*, a word that derives from the Greek and the Latin. When the child was brought in, all people in attendance shouted, “Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

The godfather was seated on a chair and he held the baby on his knees, therefore creating an operating space. At his side was an empty chair which was really, according to tradition, the seat of Elijah who was present at all circumcisions and who was there to bless the newly circumcised child.

An early rabbinic dictum coming from the eighteenth century prohibited the godmother from presenting the child to her husband by passing in front of other men. The godfather was expected to rise and meet his wife and take the baby. In accordance with Jewish tradition it is the duty of the father to circumcise his own son, as Abraham circumcised Isaac, but in reality the father passed the operating instruments to the rabbi who performed the circumcision in the fathers place.

There were various instruments for the operation. To stop the bleeding in the old days, a piece of linen with the white of an egg in it helped to coagulate the blood. Nowadays new methods are used and many remedies have been recorded. While the person operating was reciting the customary blessing with a glass of wine he would then dip his index finger in the wine and hold it for the baby to suck in order for the baby to stop crying. Once the blessing was over the partic-

ipants would hasten one and another to drink from the glass of wine. After the circumcision all the participants, often accompanied by music, would sing Hebrew or Judeo-Spanish songs and actually try to drown out any cries from the baby.

If the wife gave birth to a daughter, there would be a small banquet at which the rabbi spoke. After the meal the newborn would be brought in for a naming which was usually in the name of the mother of the husband or of the wife. Biblical names like Rachel, Sarah, Ester, Miriam, Bat-Sheva, Yochevet, Hannah, Leah, Rivkah, and Dina were given but almost as often the name could be a secular name taken from Castillian such as, Rosa, Livia, Flor, Garufilu (a Greek word for carnation), Paloumbas (bird), Facuma, Duka, and Dona. There were other names like Buena, Blanca, Prospela, Donosa, Vermosa. When the blessing for the baby girl was completed the baby was passed among all the guests who greeted her for a wish of good health and long life. This was a ceremony called a *Fadamiento*.

The new mother would stay away from sexual relations with her husband for sometime after her birth. Once this time period was over she would then go to the bath (no one would see her), wash herself carefully, and never go to the bath alone again but always accompanied by a relative or a neighbor. After several hours at the bath the wife would come home and resume life as it had been.

The naming of a girl is known as *Zeved HaBat* or *Fadas* in Ladino, and the ceremony of naming is called *Fadas* and was always held in the home when the mother had recovered (Do-

brinsky 1986, 20). As Dobrinsky explains, the child was brought in on a pillow while the parents and the grandparents of the newborn girl sing this special song (Dobrinsky 1986, 20). This song also appears in the Levy Anthology (Levy 1965-1980, 213-214).

A graceful gazelle is the young maiden, lovely a paragon of beauty, the daughter of the mighty ancients, Arise for the time has come that your light, and radiance should shine; arise and exult in song Arise and bedeck yourself in the headdress of royalty, and adorn yourself in luxuriant scarlet, In expensive linen and embroidered garments, since of all young maidens, you are the most beautiful and fair, adorned and wrapped in plaits. The daughters will exalt you with a drum, harp, and dance. What is your connection, daughters, with my beloved I am my beloved's and his desire is towards me. Cinnamon, also spices, and also fine linen and emerald, Gems with gleaming, brilliant pearls, Your eyes are open and shoot darts, and from the thread of your lips are like threads of scarlet, Your teeth, are like crystal, your cheek is like a segment To a pomegranate you resemble and are as beautiful as a palm tree the loveliest of the lilies.	יַעֲלַת חֵן הָעַלְמָה, נָעִימָה כְּלִילַת יֹפִי בַּת אֵיתָנִים קוּמִי אוֹרִי כִּי בָא אוֹרֵךְ, וְזָהֳרֵךְ וְקוּמִי צַהֲלִי בִרְנָנִים קוּמִי עֲדִי צָנִיף מְלוּכָה, נָסוּכָה וְלִבָּשִׁי שָׁנִי עִם עֲדָנִים וּמְשָׁבָּצוֹת שֵׁשׁ וּרְקָמוֹת כִּי מִכָּל עֲלָמוֹת נָוִית וְיָפִית הֲדוּרָה, קְשׁוּרָה בַּעֲבוֹת חְשָׁקִי מִקְפָּנִים יאַשְׁרוּךְ כָּל בָּנוֹת בְּתֹף וְכִנּוֹר וּמְחוֹלוֹת וּמַה לָּכֶן בָּנוֹת בְּדוֹדִי, לְדוֹדִי אֲנִי וְעָלַי תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ קִנָּמֹן וְגַם בָּשֶׂם וְגַם שֵׁשׁ, וְתַרְשִׁישׁ וּפָוךְ עִם דר נוֹצְצִים אוֹר לְהָבִים וְעֵינַיִךְ זוֹרְקִים תּוֹתָח, וּמִפְתַּח שְׂפָתַיִךְ כְּמוֹ חוּט שָׁנִים שִׁנַּיִךְ, כְּבָדלַח רַקָּתֵךְ כְּמו פֶּלַח רִמּוֹן וזאת קוֹמָתֵךְ יָפְתָ, וְדָמְתָ לְתָמָר נָעִימַת שׁוֹשַׁנִּים

Matilda Coen Serano, an Israeli Ladino poet and scholar (whom I introduced in Chapter II), told me in an interview that the word *zeved* means "a part" or "a portion," and this was first

used by Lea, wife of Jacob, when she had her son Zebulun.[10] Matilda tells me that: "First, a few days after the birth, the ritual of *siete candelas (*seven candles) is performed. This ritual is mostly organized in the synagogue or in the house with the presence of a rabbi, grandparents and other relatives. In *siete candelas* the mother brings the baby in her arms and delivers her to the grandmother on a thin cushion of embroidered silk or lace. The grandmother slowly walks to the place of the ceremony, where the rabbi awaits, while guests express their good wishes and deliver gifts like rings, bracelets, earrings and necklaces, as well as almond candy. These gifts symbolize wealth, health and happiness. A tray with seven candles is presented, and the guests are invited to light them." Matilda continues: "The rabbi then blesses the baby and performs the priestly benediction. On the following Saturday, after the ritual, the father reads the Torah at the synagogue, after which he pronounces the name of his daughter and the rabbi reads a poem from S*hir Hashirim* and *Mi Sheberakh.* The mother says the *gomel* blessing."

[10] Interview with Matilda Coen Serano in Petah-Tikvah, Israel August 3, 2014.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I hope that I have succeeded in opening a window to the vast, variegated and exquisitely beautiful world of Sephardic Experience. Through the rich and varied music of its tradition which I have tried to exemplify by focusing on those songs that deal with marriage, birth and baby naming, I have tried to show the mighty stream of continuity of the Sephardic tradition, even within diversity of its specific expressions in different parts of the Sephardic world.

Through this window of continuos, continuing and contemporary connection with the Sephardic world, whose music still lives with us, I hope that I have been successful in evoking the memories of the earlier generations, now gone, for whom this music was a critical and essential component of their lives. And beyond that, I hope that on the basis of this wonderful repertoire of music I have opened a further window to the rich and millennial experience of the Sephardim which this music encapsulates. An experience that goes back to the dawn of the present millennium where the Sephardic Experience started and eventually became the dominant creative experience of all of Judaism. It is important to note that to this day, the Sephardic component of the complex systems that we call Judaism is arguably the richest, most creative and most dominant of all the various strands that have fused together into our present day Judaism.

In todays world, where the question of Jewish identity often rests in confusion, and where the religious identity and future of Judaism is often questioned, it is important to make mention of the fact that the Sephardic Experience is one of constant change and re contextualization to

changing environments. In each case, the new environments steadfastly held to its heritage but incorporated all the best qualities of novelty around it.

My work on Sephardic music has shown me again this process of heritage and incorporation, where the old blends with the new. It is my hope that future generations of our faith and our people will keep in mind this wonderful lesson from the Sephardic world.

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