

El Prezente

Studies in Sephardic Culture

vol. 7

MENORAH

Collection of Papers

vol. 3

Common Culture and Particular Identities:
Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Ottoman Balkans

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December 2013



Ben-Gurion University of the Negev



Center Moshe David Gaon
for Ladino Culture



1838

Faculty of Philosophy
University of Belgrade



Menorah

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Print: **BGU Print Unit**

Cover photo: Felix Kanitz, "Turkish Market Street (Turkische Bazarstrasse)", With the courtesy of the Archive of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (7901-II-003)

ISBN 978-965-91164-4-7

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Some Balkan Specifics of Sephardic Folksongs

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The long historical presence of the Jews in Spain is reflected by Sephardic culture. Although the influence of Islamic Arab tradition in Medieval Jewish culture in Spain was evident, the later period of Jewish culture in Spain resulted from the active interaction between the Jewish tradition and Hispanic culture. This is most obviously manifested in the secular language—Judeo-Spanish—and the Sephardic oral tradition. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain and their settlement in the various regions of the Ottoman Empire brought many changes: on the one hand, the severance of ties to Spain (especially in the Eastern Sephardic area), and on the other, a tendency to preserve the Judeo-Spanish heritage in a new and alien cultural environment. The Ottoman system of social organization (*millet*) allowed for the preservation of the cultural traditions of various ethnic and religious communities. Thus, the period of interaction with the non-Jewish environment in Spain—which forged the Judeo-Spanish cultural identity—was followed by a period of double relative isolation, both from the former (Spanish) and the new (Ottoman) environment. In this situation the dominant tendency was that of *preservation* of the Judeo-Spanish cultural identity.

The expulsion from Spain and subsequent settlement in Ottoman lands did not entail a radical disruption in Sephardic cultural identity, although it was not completely immune to cultural influences of the new environment. In the multiethnic cultural framework of the Balkans, the Sephardic tradition was first subject to the same Oriental influences as the traditions of other domestic groups. They were most obvious in material culture—architecture, design of interior living space, dress and food culture—and two aspects of non-material culture: language and music. Both language and music are associated with texts of the oral tradition, but while language and music were more open to external influences, the texts themselves were more resistant to them, especially in the case of romances. So, there are still questions as to

how the Oriental influence is manifested in the semantic layers of text, which tended to be more conservative than the music accompanying it. Another, perhaps even more difficult question is that of the influence of non-Turkish Balkan culture on Sephardic subtraditions in the Balkan area. This article addresses Greek influences in Salonika and Slavic influences in Bosnia.

* * *

When Spanish scholars began studying Sephardic folklore they established several preferences in their approach. One of them was associated with the generic system of the Sephardic tradition as not all genres were awarded the same attention. After the publication of Ramón Menéndez Pidal's "Catálogo del romancero judío-español" (1906), the main interest was directed towards the collection and study of Sephardic romances. In addition, the Sephardic romancero was viewed mainly as a branch of the pan-Hispanic romancero. Although this approach was legitimate, it had two important albeit unintended consequences. In the first place, it eclipsed the study of other genres of Sephardic folklore. Secondly, it tended to highlight the relationship of Sephardic romances with their Hispanic sources, marginalizing the possible relationship of Sephardic folksongs to *other* traditions.

This is illustrated by public attention given in Spain to the Sephardim as "guardians" of archaic Spanish heritage. On returning to Spain from his 1911 visit to the Balkans, where he collected a substantial number of Sephardic folksongs, Manuel Manrique de Lara published one of them in 1916. This was "Morirse quiere Alexandre", collected in Belgrade.¹ Why this romance? The fact that the Sephardim in Serbia and Bulgaria still remembered it was a sensational discovery as this fifteenth-century romance had disappeared from the Peninsular tradition long ago.

Since then a great deal of important research has been dedicated to the archaic features of the Sephardic romancero, its Peninsular sources and its role in the reconstruction of the old romancero. Samuel G. Armistead and Joseph H. Silverman were among the first to divert attention to another research perspective, highlighting the question of the relationship of Sephardic folklore to Balkan culture:

Amén de nuestro bien justificado entusiasmo por el espléndido conservatismo medieval de la poesía tradicional sefardí, cabe la posibilidad de acercarnos

1 Manuel Manrique de Lara, "Romances españoles en los Balkanes", *Blanco y negro*, no. 1285 (1916).

a la materia desde una perspectiva radicalmente diferente y hasta el momento incógnita: Los sefardíes del Mediterráneo Oriental llevan casi 500 años viviendo entre una abigarrada variedad de etnias balcánicas: griegos, turcos, eslavos, rumanos, albaneses. ¿No habrá nada en la poesía tradicional hispano-judía que se pueda atribuir a tan largos siglos de simbiosis balcánica?²

This perspective was first explored in Sephardic language and music, in which the Oriental (Turkish) influence was obvious,³ as it is in all the different ethnic traditions in the Balkans even today.⁴ Lexical borrowings from the Turkish language, present in Serbian, Bulgarian, Greek, Judeo-Spanish, and other Balkan languages, were transferred from colloquial speech to folksongs, and although in later periods a large number were suppressed both from colloquial and literary language, many remain preserved in folksongs. A case in question, highlighted by Armistead and Silverman, are the Turkish exclamations *aman* and *džanum* (in T. *canum*), typical of Turkish folksongs, but also found in Serbian, Sephardic and other Balkan folksongs.

For all the Balkan traditions, however, the period beginning with the middle of the nineteenth century became a period of transition, although one has to keep in mind that the latter did not begin at the same time, nor did it proceed at the same pace and intensity in all areas of the Balkans. This becomes obvious when we look at three Sephardic subtraditions in the Yugoslav framework: Serbia, Bosnia, and Macedonia.

- 2 Samuel G. Armistead and Joseph H. Silverman, *En torno al romancero sefardí (Hispanismo y balcanismo de la tradición judeo-española)* con un estudio etnomusicológico por Israel J. Katz, traducción parcial de Jacob M. Hassan y Selma Margareten, Seminario Menéndez Pidal, Madrid 1982, p. 153.
- 3 When I first started my own research on Sephardic folklore in Yugoslavia in the early 1970s, I noticed that I understood the meaning of most Turkish lexical borrowings in the Judeo-Spanish language because the same words had been adopted in my native Serbian language. Therefore, the conclusions of linguists and musicologists on this issue came as no surprise.
- 4 As far as the Serbian language is concerned, it is fairly easy to note a change at the beginning of the twentieth century due to the intensified transition from Oriental to European cultural models. On reading, for example, the stories by Haim S. Davicho on the life of the Belgrade Sephardim, written in Serbian and published in the last decades of the nineteenth century, one can notice many Turkish lexical borrowings which were then in everyday use but have disappeared from the modern Serbian language. The same can be noted in works by Serbian authors contemporary with Davicho. Folklore and literature are a storehouse of archaisms which colloquial language has left behind.

By the beginning of the twentieth century most Sephardim in Serbia—men as well as women—were bilingual: they had adopted the Serbian language but had not forgotten Judeo-Spanish, although its use became ever more restricted. Sephardic writers in Serbia had by then integrated into Serbian and European literary trends, and none were writing in Judeo-Spanish. At the same time, in Bosnia, there were Sephardic writers bent on preserving and reviving Judeo-Spanish as a literary language (such as Abraham Cappon and Laura Papo) as well as linguists and historians (such as Moritz Levy and Kalmi Baruh) studying Sephardic culture and collecting Sephardic folklore. At the same time the Sephardim of Macedonia had only begun to integrate into the Slavic (Serbian/Yugoslav) linguistic environment. Due to the geographical proximity of Salonika and frequent migrations from there to Skopje, many Macedonian Sephardim knew the Greek language (unlike those in Serbia and Bosnia), and due to the late withdrawal of Turkish rule from this area, the influence of Turkish on the Macedonian dialects of Judeo-Spanish was stronger.⁵ So, while we might be able to explore Slavic/Serbian influences in the Sephardic traditions of Serbia and Bosnia, we would probably find none among the Sephardim of Macedonia.

The Sephardic traditions of Macedonia and Salonika are more interesting for the research of Greek influences, not only because Salonika was embedded in a Greek linguistic environment, but also because of the presence in this area of the Byzantine Romaniot prior to the settlement of the Spanish Jews. The Greek-speaking Romaniot would later adopt the Judeo-Spanish language, but it stands to reason that some elements of their own verbal folklore could have been integrated into the Judeo-Spanish tradition.

Regarding Balkan influences on Sephardic culture, we may assume three influences differing in degree, timing, and geography. First is the overall Turkish influence affecting all ethnic communities in the Balkans, which took place during the Ottoman period. Second is the Greek influence, both direct and indirect (mediated by the Romaniot), affecting a restricted area centered in Salonika, but spreading from there to other areas through migrations and other communication between Salonika, as the main port and trading center in this area, and the Balkan hinterland. Third is the Slavic influence restricted to the subtraditions of Serbia, Bosnia, and Bulgaria. Chronologically speaking, it appears after the first (Turkish) and second (Greek) layer

5 Some stories collected by Cynthia Crews in Skopje and Monastir are replete with Turkish lexical borrowings.

of influence. In addition, one has to keep in mind the fact that there are many folkloric elements common to the traditions of the Balkan peoples (Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, Romanians) owing to their centuries-long contact and interaction.

* * *

Regarding the *complas de las flores*, which Michael Molho attributed to the Salonikan poet Yehuda bar Leon Kali, Armistead and Silverman have shown that these *complas* are traditional in two respects: not only because they have become traditionalized among both Eastern and Western Sephardim, but also because their source is most probably the Greek oral tradition.⁶ Armistead and Silverman also indicate that songs in which personified “talking” flowers compete for the title of “flower of flowers” are common to various Balkan traditions. They conclude the following: “Sería del todo verosímil que el poeta sefardí se inspirara en alguna variante griega de esta canción pan-balcánica, procedente de la misma ciudad de Salónica”.⁷

The genesis of the *complas de las flores* involved several steps. First, the promotion of *Tubishvat* as a new holiday addressed the need to remember Jerusalem and maintain hope in the abolishment of the *galut*. Although the celebration of the New Year of vegetation did not commemorate any Jewish historical or religious event, there was an awareness that *this* exile was perceived as being analogous to the previous exiles described in Biblical sources. It fit very well into the messianic tradition of the Balkan Sephardim, strengthened by the suffering caused by various calamities and the impact of Shabetay Zevi and his followers, felt in big centers such as Salonika and Istanbul as well as in small, geographically close communities such as Skopje and Monastir (Bitola).⁸ *Tubishvat* articulated these feelings and ideas in a paraliturgical form. In

6 Armistead and Silverman, “Las Complas de las flores y la poesía popular de los Balcanes”, *En torno al romancero sefardí...*, p. 190.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 193.

8 Regarding Skopje, disruptions in the life of the Sephardic community were caused by fires, epidemics, and military conflicts waged between the Austrians and the Ottomans. In 1688, the city was taken by the Austrian army led by General G. N. Piccolomini. Although the Ottomans recaptured the city in 1690, the suffering of the Skopje population, Jews included, and the destruction of the city were enormous.

Regarding the impact of Shabetay Zevi’s messianic movement in Skopje, Dr. Moric Levi highlights the following: “From his birth in Smyrna until his imprisonment and death in Ulcinj, Shabetay Zevi traveled the whole Balkan area four times. In 1657, he visited all

the first place, the *complas* celebrated the Creator; secondly, the natural world and its cyclical renovation; thirdly, the rebirth of nature in the Homeland; fourthly, the symbolic rebirth of the Jewish nation, and most of all—the hope of deliverance from exile. The pattern for the *complas de las flores* was adopted from the Balkan oral tradition, but with important adaptations resulting from its transfer from one context (Greek: individual, secular, associated with love, with some erotic tones) to another (Jewish: collective, paraliturgical, national), involving an important semantic shift. It is also very interesting to note the evolution of *Tubishvat* as a holiday: it was introduced in the context of traditional Sephardic messianism in order to be later taken over by the Zionists as it fit in very well with their own ideology.⁹ The Zionists highlighted “trees” rather than the “flowers and fruits” of the traditional *complas*. Here we follow

places in the vicinity of Salonika, Skopje perhaps being one of them. The same might be true for his assistant, Nathan of Gaza, who passed away in Sofia. His movement exerted a strong influence in this area, recruited many followers, and could be felt even twenty years after his death. Around the same time there was another calamity that struck Skopje and its Jews. It is described in the letters of the Austrian military commander Piccollomini, who mentions 400 Jewish families who lost their homes in a fire [enveloping the city]. This event is also described in other sources that include information on the Jews ...” (Moric Levi, “Naši s juga. Jevreji u Skoplju”, *Omanut* 10-11 (1940), pp. 162-170). During two Austrian occupations of Belgrade, the latter took many Jews as hostages, some of whom were released after payment of large ransoms. One of them was Nechemia Chayun from Sarajevo, a follower of Shabetay Zevi, who after that came to Skopje, where he served as rabbi (1697-1701).

- 9 With time it became a holiday associated mainly with children. Yet, it is interesting to note how it was later renewed as an element of Zionist ideology. In a booklet *Youth and Keren Kayemet Leisrael*, *Tubishvat* is highlighted as “marking the fateful tragedy of the nation removed from its land and severed from its roots”, the earth/land being “the departing point for the recuperation of the nation and the renewed fertilization of original creativity” (*Omladina i Keren Kajemet Leisrael. Temelji ideologije KKL-a. Upute za odgojni i praktični rad za KKL*, Zagreb 1936, p. 30). Interestingly enough, we find this interpretation together with a “generational divide” mentioned in the diary written by Hermann Helfgott, a Yugoslav rabbi interned in a POW camp in Germany during World War II. Helfgott describes the celebration of *Tubishvat* in the camp: “In the program ‘Trees Converse’, which was checked by censors of both sides, the issue of the older and younger generations was raised: the former who ate the fruits and recited the blessings over them, and the younger generation aspiring to plant with their own hands and to eat the produce of their own toil” (Zvi Asaria–Hermann Helfgott, *We Are Witnesses*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 2010, p. 72).

the path leading from Greek secular love songs to Sephardic paraliturgical *complas* and further to Zionist interpretations that stress the ideological aspect of the holiday—the symbolism of planting trees and actively taking the future into one’s own hands—rather than the *complas* celebrating the Creator and passively hoping for deliverance.

* * *

Armistead and Silverman have identified several Sephardic romances derived from other Greek folksongs. The formal and stylistic features of *El pozo airón* are those of the Spanish romance, but these scholars have demonstrated that it is actually derived from a Greek ballad: “El trogouði griego del *Pozo endemoniado* y su derivado sefardí, *El pozo airón*, nos proporcionan un espléndido ejemplo de cómo emigran las baladas de una tradición lingüística a otra, por vía puramente oral”.¹⁰ Another such example is *El sueño de la hija* derived from the Greek ballad *El sueño de la moza*.¹¹

El pozo airón is about seven brothers who are traveling. Plagued by thirst, they come to a well and one of them must be lowered into it to fetch water, but the rope breaks and he plunges to his death. The Sephardic text follows the Greek one up to the final monologue of the dying man. Here the Greek text features an element typical of the Balkan tradition: the metaphorical identification of death and marriage (when the deceased is a young unmarried man). Namely, the unfortunate brother stuck in the well asks his brothers not to tell their mother that he has died, but that he has married the daughter of a *brujo* and *hechizera* (an allusion to his passage to the “other” world inhabited by the dead). The Sephardic version follows the Greek source, but ignores the final metaphor. Although deeply embedded in the Balkan folkloric imagination, the latter seemingly did not appeal to the Sephardic singer. Unlike the Greek ballad which encodes death in a metaphor, the Sephardic version avoids figurative language: the dying man’s family (mother, wife, children) are to be told that they have lost their son, husband, and father. While in the Greek ballad the victim is young and single, in the Sephardic romance he is a married man, and this seems to explain why the death-wedding metaphor is missing in the Sephardic version. Another difference between the Greek and Sephardic versions is the context of performance. While the Greek ballad has no specified context of performance, the Sephardic version was performed during *Tishabeav*. The association of a song featuring death, regardless of the reasons leading to it, with *Tishabeav* was common,

10 “Baladas griegas en el romancero sefardí”, *En torno al romancero sefardí* ... p. 156.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

so *El pozo airón* only follows this tendency. However, the new context of performance might explain the change of the character of the protagonist and the introduction of the widow and orphans. In the Sephardic rendering death is not a poetic image. On the contrary, it is an event producing widows and orphans, a family tragedy remembered within the commemoration of collective tragedy.

Thus, this pan-Balkan poetic metaphor identifying death and marriage failed to pass into the Sephardic tradition. However, *El sueño de la hija* might be an example showing how another one succeeded.

The introduction of *El sueño de la hija* features a motif typical of the Hispanic tradition: the queen of France has three daughters, “la una lavrava, la otra kozia,/ la más chika d’eyas bastidor azia”. As indicated by Armistead and Silverman, this is one of those Sephardic songs whose origin was not known, but whose “hispanismo”, stressed by the introductory motif, was taken for granted. The theme of the Greek source, as indicated by Armistead and Silverman, is the interpretation of a young girl’s dream rendered through a dialogue between daughter and mother and consisting of three segments. First the daughter presents the dream, then her mother interprets it negatively (as a premonition of the daughter’s death), finally the daughter interprets it (as a premonition of her own wedding). The dream consists of three elements: a garden, a tower, and a river. The mother interprets the garden as a cemetery, the tower as her daughter’s tomb, and the river of tears mourning her daughter. The daughter interprets the garden as her wedding, the tower as her groom, two rivers coming together as their bond of love and marriage. By giving two opposite interpretations, the Greek source not only suggests how the interpretation of dreams varies, but also establishes a clear three-part lyrical structure based on contrastive parallelism. On the other hand, the Sephardic version combines the Hispanic introductory motif—setting the scene of the mother-daughter dialogue—with the dream and its interpretation. One of the three daughters falls asleep and tells her mother of her dream. The dream differs from the one in the Greek sources cited by Armistead and Silverman: “M’apar’ a la puerta, vide venir la luna yena:/ aldaridor di eya, todas las istreyas”. Only the mother interprets the dream, saying the full moon is the *konsuegra* and the stars *parienteras*. Obviously the set of three elements (garden-tower-river) associated with the *landscape* in the Greek version has been replaced by a set of two elements (moon-stars) referring to the *skyscape*. Although the choice of dream-image is different, the decoding of the dream metaphor is the same: it represents a wedding. Is the moon-star-wedding image an innovation in the Sephardic song? The metaphor identifying the sun, moon, and stars

with a wedding procession is common in the Balkan tradition. The Serbian tradition, for example, features “mythological” lyrical songs consisting almost entirely of this metaphor. A Romanian ballad combines the death-wedding metaphor with a second metaphor identifying the sun, moon, and stars as members of a wedding procession. Might we assume that the second metaphor was transferred to *El sueño de la hija* from Balkan sources? If the assumption is correct, then it shows how a metaphor common in the Balkan tradition has been successfully integrated into a Sephardic lyrical song.

* * *

Regarding Slavic influences, the specific Bosnian type of song known as the *sevdalinka* offers some insight into this issue. Unlike most other regions of the Balkans (except the Albanian one), part of the local Slavic population in Bosnia (Serbs and Croats) converted to Islam during the long Ottoman rule in this province. The “new” Muslims continued to use their local language (Serbian/Croatian), but what was specific for them was that in comparison with the majority Christian population they were more open to Turkish influence, religious, linguistic, and cultural in general. Gradually, a Slavic Muslim culture evolved in Bosnia, especially in the towns inhabited by the Muslim social elite. The *sevdalinka*, whose popularity culminated at the beginning of the twentieth century, was a result of this Slavic-Turkish cultural interaction.

It is a song distinguished by two traits: the way it is sung and its theme. While the older Bosnian songs featured melismatic ornaments, frequent alternation, repetition of lines and parts of lines, use of the exclamation *aman*, the new *sevdalinka* sought to exaggerate these traits and focus on a single theme—love.¹² It was not love in general, but a specific kind of love denoted by the Turkish words *sevdah* (from which name of these songs is derived) and *dert*. Both are used in the Serbian language, where they are translated as love suffering (*ljubavni jadi*) as well as in Bosnian Judeo-Spanish (*dolor di amor*). Love as suffering rather than happiness was to some extent a result of restrictions imposed by a number of cultural, social, or religious factors. It appeared in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society with strong patriarchal traits in which marriage was negotiated by parents and had nothing to do with love, where the separation of social classes allowed for no marital bonds between the affluent and the needy, and where inter-religious and inter-ethnic marriages were unacceptable. The greatest victims in patriarchal society were women, subject to strict restrictions

12 Vlado Milošević, *Bosanske narodne pjesme*, Banja Luka 1954, I, 14-15.

in dress, movement, and communication. The *sevdalinka*, which expressed and exaggerated love suffering, thus became a popular form within the framework of the lyrical genre of love songs.

The *sevdalinka* known in the Serbian tradition as “Separated lovers”, collected in the nineteenth century,¹³ opens with the image of a garden and two flowers representing the separated lovers. The young man writes asking his beloved how she is doing without him, and she answers that if the sky were paper, and the trees pens, and the sea ink, and if she wrote for three years she could not express her love suffering. The abundant Turkish lexical borrowings suggest that the song originated in the Bosnian Muslim environment and that it was probably derived from a Turkish source—a *mani* containing the same hyperbole.

However, the hyperbole is not originally Turkish, but Jewish. From ancient Jewish sources it spread throughout Byzantine and West European literature, both oral and written, and also to the Turkish oral tradition, from which it reached the Bosnian Muslim environment.¹⁴ At the same time, the originally Jewish hyperbole is found in the Balkan Sephardic tradition, both in Salonika and in Bosnia. However, while in Salonika it appears in *endechas* associated with *Tishabeav*, in Bosnia it appears as part of an eclectic love song reading: “... los cielos quiero por papel, / la mar quiero por tinta, / los árboles por pëndola, / para escribir mis *dertes*”.¹⁵ The influence of the *sevdalinka* on the Sephardic interpretation of this hyperbole in Bosnia is manifested in its transfer from the Jewish *Tishabeav* context to the secular context of lyrical love poetry, more specifically the concept of *dert* as articulated by the *sevdalinka*. The Bosnian Sephardic version is an analogue of the local *sevdalinka* and was probably sung the same way as the latter.

The “new” Sephardic love songs modeled after *sevdalinkas* popularized a way of singing different from that of the romances, which refrained from exaggeration in the melismatic aspect.¹⁶ However, at the beginning of the twentieth century the romances

13 Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme*, Beograd 1969, I, no. 553.

14 On versions and various interpretations of this hyperbole in European literature, see Krinka Vidaković-Petrov, “Istorija jedne retoričke formule”, *Književna istorija*, 1985, pp. 183-206.

15 Samuel Elazar, *El romancero judeo-español*, Sarajevo 1987, p. 146.

16 Samuel Kamhi, “Jezik, pjesme i poslovice bosansko-hercegovačkih Sefarada”, *Spomenica 400 godina od dolaska Jevreja u Bosnu i Hercegovinu*, Sarajevo, 1966, p. 115.

were losing ground due to the growing popularity of love songs open to various external influences. The romance as a narrative-lyrical genre preserved in the tradition could hardly resist the pressure of the purely lyrical genre of love songs. Sephardic women in Sarajevo were still singing the “old Spanish romances”, but enriching their repertoire with new Bosnian *sevdalinkas* they performed both in the local language and in Judeo-Spanish translation.¹⁷

Here is an example of a translated *sevdalinka*:

Asentada en la ventana,
lavrando estaba el bastidor,
un haber negro me vino,
que el mío amor espozó ...¹⁸

The source of this fragment is a Serbian song collected in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ While the original text is in the ten-syllable line typical of the Serbian tradition, the translation seeks to adapt to the metrical pattern of the Sephardic romance as well as to add an introductory motif typical of the latter. Further research could show to what extent the Judeo-Spanish translations of *sevdalinkas* might have been literal, although this particular example suggests that translation also involved adaptation to generic patterns encoded in the target language.

Laura Papo Bohoreta mentions *cantigas sevdalinkas* in her unpublished theater piece titled *Times of the Past*, in which she describes Sephardic life in Sarajevo of the generation preceding her own. We know that the *sevdalinkas* were popular among Sephardic women at the beginning of the century, but information on previous contacts of the Bosnian Sephardim with the Slavic oral tradition is scarce. A valuable insight into this issue is provided by an article written by the Serbian literary critic Jovan Kršić titled “David Kamhi’s ‘Cantigas srpescas’”.²⁰ It was first published in the Serbian literary journal *Pregled* [Review] and reprinted in 1934 in the Sarajevo newspaper *Jevrejski glas* [Jewish Voice]. The article is about David Kamhi (1834-

17 Samuel Elazar, “Narodna medicina sefardskih Jevreja u Bosni”, *Spomenica 400 godina od dolaska Jevreja u Bosnu i Hercegovinu, Sarajevo*, 1966, p. 161.

18 Samuel Elazar, *El romancero judeo-español*, p. 101.

19 This is a translation of a Serbian song collected in the nineteenth century which reads: “Sinoć meni kara haber dođe, / kara haber i u kara doba, / da se moja draga preprosila (Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme*, Beograd 1969, I, no. 544).

20 Jovan Kršić, “‘Cantigas srpescas’ Davida Kamhija”, *Jevrejski glas*, February 9, 1934.

1920), a tinsmith from Sarajevo, who towards the end of his life made a pilgrimage to Palestine, where he died. Kamhi's notebook came into the possession of Dr. Moric Levi, the grand rabbi of Sarajevo, who copied the Serbian folksongs and gave them to his friend Kršić. The latter wrote that "in the mid-nineteenth century", the young Kamhi, who liked to socialize and sing, wrote down his favorite songs on the spare pages of his ledger book. Some of them were in Judeo-Spanish, others in Turkish, and seventeen of them in Serbian. Kamhi's collection of Serbian folksongs suggests that in the mid-nineteenth century the male members of the Sephardic community—mostly traders, artisans, and shopkeepers in the commercial district of Sarajevo—knew not only Turkish, but also Serbian. Kamhi himself appreciated the *cantigas srpescas* enough to write them down.²¹

Samuel Elazar provides another piece of information on this issue in his article on the popular medicine of the Bosnian Sephardim. Elazar wrote about a Sephardic *ljekaruša* (medical manual) from 1820, which in addition to information on traditional medicine, contains songs in various languages—several prayers in Hebrew, a song in Judeo-Spanish and one in Serbian—all transcribed in *rashi* script.²² We also know that a certain David Pardo living in nineteenth-century Bosnia wrote down two songs he had heard on his travels: one is from Mostar (Herzegovina) and the other from Tuzla (Bosnia).²³

These three examples refer to the gender aspect regarding the issue of contacts of the Sephardim with their environment. The men, who had to communicate with the Turkish administration as well as with the local business environment, knew both Turkish and Serbian. This enabled them to familiarize themselves with Turkish and Serbian folksongs. However, the women, who rarely ventured outside the home and community grounds, knew only Judeo-Spanish. The general "opening" of the Bosnian Sephardic community (both men and women) toward their surroundings began only after the Ottomans withdrew from Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878, ceding the province to Austria-Hungary. The transfer of Bosnia into a European framework abolished the Ottoman millet system, breaking the isolation of the Sephardic community. However,

21 Most of them are included in the classic nineteenth-century collection of Serbian folksongs compiled by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić and among them are both epic and lyrical songs.

22 Samuel Elazar, "Narodna medicina sefardskih Jevreja u Bosni", *Spomenica 400 godina od dolaska Jevreja u Bosnu i Hercegovinu*, Sarajevo 1966, p. 158.

23 Krinka Vidaković-Petrov, *Kultura španskih Jevreja na jugoslovenskom tlu* [The Culture of the Spanish Jews in Yugoslavia], Sarajevo 1990 [second edition], pp. 258 and 260.

the effects of this change could be felt only two decades later. Two important elements of this process were the emancipation of Sephardic women and general assimilation to the local language (Serbian/Croatian) and the appearance of bilingualism.

This coincided with the peaking popularity of the *cantigas sevdalinkas*, which could by the beginning of the twentieth century be adopted by Sephardic women as lyrical songs expressing both “Oriental passion and yearning” and nostalgia for an epoch fading into the past. The *cantigas sevdalinkas* themselves were a sign of Sephardic integration into the Slavic Bosnian environment as Sephardic women began singing the same songs as their non-Jewish counterparts, first translated to the language—Judeo-Spanish—of their own oral tradition, and later in the original language. The notion of love denoted by *dert* was integrated into the Bosnian Sephardic tradition, resulting in the specifically Bosnian Sephardic interpretation of the above-mentioned sky-trees-sea (paper-pens-ink) hyperbole, where the final “para escribir mis *dertes*” coincides with the “writing of love suffering” in the Serbian song.

The *cantigas sevdalinkas* are an example of Turkish influence mediated by the Slavic tradition, resulting in the introduction of a specific form of love song into the lyrical genre of Bosnian Sephardic folklore.

